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# Sunrise Over Britain

## Chapter 1 - Beginnings

### Standard Disclaimer:

Severus Snape slowly woke up. Realizing he was wet, and that was an experience he hadn't had while waking up since he turned thirteen. Opening his eyes he blinked and also realized he was tied up... and in a cauldron?

Looking around he could see a staff dancing around the outside of the cauldron. A top the staff was a bloody human skull. Somewhere a drum beat wildly. He leaned to one side in time to see Filius Flitwick dancing around the cauldron. He wore only a leopard skin loincloth and he had a six inch bone through his nose.

Harry Potter and Hermione Granger walked into sight. Harry was dressed in an handsome Tuxedo and Hermione graced his arm wearing a sequined evening gown.

"POTTER!" Snarled Snape. "Get me out of here!"

Harry smiled. "I'm sorry Professor, but I can't. You see, you haven't said the magic words. Besides, tonight Hermione and I are playing a new game. I'm pretending to be a actor named Daniel and she's going to be my love lust Goddess named Emma."

"If you would just say the words Professor, I'm sure Bob and Alyx would let you out," offered Emma sweetly.

Snape snarled, then sighed. "Oh very well. The authors of this story would like you to know that they do not own the Potterverse. They further insist that I tell you that any resemblance I might have to someone named Alan Rickman is purely an accident and I am really a cruel snarky bastard that doesn't bathe often enough."

"You had to add that didn't you?" Growled Alyx.

"Hush, watch Filius," replied Bob.

Filius climbed into a cab of a large truck and backed it up to the cauldron. Flipping a switch the back started to open and fish poured into the cauldron.

"What?" asked Alyx.

"Evil Mutant Sea Bass with friggen Lasers on their heads," Bob said smugly.

Alyx looked skyward and wondered if Dorothy had these kind of problems.

\*\*\* IN CASE NO ONE CAN TELL, THIS IS AN AU FICTION AND THE SEQUEL TO SUNSET OVER BRITAIN. IF YOU HAVEN'T READ THAT STORY, PLEASE DO SO. WE STRONGLY SUGGEST IT OTHERWISE YOU WILL BE LOST AND WE WILL NOT SEND OUT A SEARCH PARTY FOR YOU.\*\*\*

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### Sunrise Over Britain

#### Chapter 1

#### Brighton Beach, England (April 28th)...

"Mama, you must eat and drink something. You need to keep your strength up," Tripuri said. When the other woman showed no signs of hearing her plea, she sighed in resignation.

Tripuri placed the bowl with the cold soup off to the side in the hope that perhaps later she could get her mother to eat. She then moved to the back of the store, away from her mother, and wept.

Shortly after the fall of Hogwarts, Voldemort's forces had come for them. They had escaped, though not without her mother being injured in the ensuing fight for freedom, and had been on the run ever since. Tripuri was a full healer, but could do little for her mother's injuries without the proper potions.

She jumped when she felt a hand touch her shoulder.

"No change?" asked Gurprit. His eyes were haunted by the sights and sounds of the last two weeks.

"No, Papa, she gets weaker everyday. If we can't find help soon, we'll lose her. She took too many hits from those men, and now she refuses to eat anything. She wants to talk to Padma and Parvati," Tripuri said, her eyes brimming with tears.

Gurprit sat heavily on a chair and his shoulders slumped in defeat.

"Did you hear any news? Or find any food?" asked Tripuri. They had been hiding in this business for four days now. During the summer months it

was a t-shirt store but it was closed for the winter months and would probably not reopen anytime soon... if ever.

"Precious little of both. I found a few cans of food that don't look as if they've been damaged too badly by fire," he told his daughter. "Rumor has it the Queen is dead and V-V-Voldemort has been declared her successor. There are rumors of fighting up north, elements of the Muggle army still loyal to the crown. Among the wizards, the rumors are even stranger."

"There's talk of foreigners arriving and taking the mark to serve the Dark Lord. And they're saying that anyone who takes the mark will be fed and cared for. The British Wireless network is gone, but some say they can still hear the stations from France and Ireland..."

"Gurprit? Is that you?" came a wavering voice.

Gurprit surged to his feet and quickly walked to his wife. "Shh, my Shaila, you must rest. You must save your strength," he urged, kneeling beside his wife.

Shaila smiled at her husband of forty years. "I know my time comes to an end, husband. I want to write a letter to send to Padma and Parvati," she said.

Gurprit shot a glance at Tripuri, who shook her head. Apparently his wife was so far gone she had forgotten that Padma and Parvati had died when Hogwarts fell. He wiped the tears from his eyes and, smiling, he reached for a piece of paper and pulled a muggle pencil from his pocket.

"Tell me what you want to say. Tripuri's owl will take the letter when it's done," he said gently, fighting back tears.

An exhaustive hour later, Gurprit offered the paper to Tripuri's owl. The small gray bird looked at him for a moment, and then he did something totally unexpected. He snatched the paper from Gurprit and exited the building through a broken window.

Father and daughter exchanged amazed looks. The owl wouldn't have accepted the letter if the girls were dead. The two watched the speck disappear into the gray sky and knew hope wasn't dead after all.

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## Reactions...

The fall of Britain came as a major shock to the world. For several days the world teetered on the edge of a world wide financial collapse, following on the heels of the fall of the British Pound. The Euro lost more than eighty percent of its value as people realized that the European Union had lost one of its most powerful economies. The Dollar and the Yen shot up in response to the loss. Fortunes were made and lost in hours as the markets fluctuated by hundreds of points.

The flood of refugees from Britain, once an uncontrollable tidal wave, inexplicably slowed, then stopped. News from the island itself had been reduced to a trickle, mostly reports of unrest and disaster. Flyovers by reconnaissance aircraft and satellites showed the cities of Manchester, London, Aberdeen and Leeds to be burning, and there was no sign of organized attempts to control the fires.

To add confusion to the mix, the naval forces now patrolling British waters were reporting a visible and unknown curtain of energy, averaging ten to fifteen miles from the coastline, and surrounding the island. Governments immediately classified the information and a complete news blackout was imposed on the naval forces. That kept news of the curtain from leaking any more than it had, but it also left the various governments with the problem of hundreds or thousands of sailors with knowledge of the strange occurrence.

The night the curtain appeared, most of Europe suffered brownouts and total loss of electricity as all of Northern Europe was treated to a massive aurora light show. The Muggle governments tried to explain the strange event as a confluence of an intense solar wind hitting one particular part of the atmosphere and causing a localized Aurora and disruption of the local power grids.

Of course the curtain wasn't totally unknown. In fact, every head of every Muggle government had been informed by its Magical counterpart that the curtain had been their doing, and that it must be ignored - the very knowledge of it suppressed.

The Magical Governments had conferred among themselves even before the line had been erected. Ireland was playing host to Harry Potter and the other Governments opted to defer to Ireland's Ministry in this regard. However, the purpose of the line was still unknown. The Irish Ministry had been scheduled to meet with Harry Potter and his advisors, but due to injuries suffered in his battle with Voldemort, he was unable to meet with them for a few more days.

One thing was certain. The Irish Ministry was telling all the other Governments that Harry Potter had sealed most of Voldemort's forces within the island of Britain. And for that reason alone, the Wizarding world breathed a sigh of relief. The worst wasn't over, not by any means. But somehow, Harry Potter had bought time for the Wizarding Governments to take action.

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## Padfoot Manor, Haven (April 30th)...

Hermione opened her eyes and stretched. She felt something move at the bottom of the bed and slowly wind its way up to her. Then it meowed.

"Good morning, Crookshanks," she whispered and reached out to scratch the ears of her furry friend.

He responded by rumbling like a small freight train and pushing against her hand. Crookshanks' climbed up higher on her until he was crouched down on her chest and she was grateful that the comforter protected her from his needle sharp claws as he kneaded it.

Hermione smiled at her familiar and lay there, idly scratching him. Next to her, Harry turned on his side. She glanced over to see if he was still asleep. His bout with the flu was past and he was back to his usual robust self, although she promised herself that she would make sure he didn't over extend himself again. Surprisingly, even Harry seemed to be interested in preventing that.

When Crookshanks meowed once more, adding a trilling little questioning noise at the end, she laughed. Her familiar was reminding her, rather nicely for a change, that scratching his head was her primary duty in life... except when it came to feeding him, of course. She scratched his head a bit longer, then moved him off her chest so she could get out of the bed.

Crookshanks, being a cat, immediately found the warmest spot left on the bed by her absence and curled up next to Harry.

Hermione threw on her robe and padded, barefoot, into the bathroom. She loved the master bathroom. It was, in her opinion, sinfully decadent, with an enormous tub to relax in, or to entertain in. That thought made her blush, but she privately admitted that she enjoyed bathing with Harry, not that they had a lot of time for it anymore.

When she finally left the bathroom, relaxed and dressed, she was pleased to see that Dobby had brought up coffee and tea for them, laying out a continental breakfast on the table near the window. She had Dobby do this several times a week so that she and Harry would have some time to themselves.

Sitting at the table, she looked out the window and sipped at her tea. She enjoyed the morning tranquility and, not for the first time, wished that all their problems would go away so that they could be alone. Outside, birds flew from tree to tree and, somewhere on the grounds, a squirrel named Nutters vanished from sight as Hedwig ghosted silently back to the Manor owlery after a night of hunting.

She could see some of the buildings of Haven in the distance. She had to marvel at what Harry had managed to build here. He had pulled in the people, marshaled their talents and put them to work. The result was a burgeoning town of nearly three thousand people.

Harry sighed on the bed and reached for her. She smiled, watching him from her chair by the window. *He'll wake up soon*, she thought. Once he began to reach for her and discovered she wasn't there, he woke up looking for her. The first couple of times he had done it, she had been startled, but it was now strangely comforting. After spending most of her life sleeping alone, she had quickly adjusted to having him in bed with her and now needed him there to sleep comfortably as much as he needed her.

Sipping her morning tea, she idly leafed through the parchments on the table. She had taken charge of keeping track of Harry's time, making sure he didn't over extend himself again. Today, he was meeting with the Irish. He also had an afternoon session scheduled with Remus and Miles.

She smiled into her cup as Harry groaned and rolled out of the bed. Crookshanks immediately moved to his warm spot. He shuffled over to where she was sitting and kissed the top of her head before heading for the bathroom. In some ways, he was very predictable. He kissed her every morning before anything else, then started his day.

A little while later he stepped from the bathroom and, with his teeth now brushed, gave her a proper kiss. Then, pouring himself a cup of coffee, he sat down. "Mmmm... a kiss that tastes like tea and jam," he commented.

Hermione rolled her eyes. "What do you expect when you kiss me like that and I'm in the middle of breakfast?" she asked archly.

"What I always expect," he replied with a grin. "You always taste good enough to eat."

He laughed softly as his innuendo caught her off guard. She blushed, and then she smacked him lightly, laughing with him. She couldn't help but marvel at how much he had changed in the last year. How different he was from that sick boy at the beginning of last summer. He now sat beside her, a powerful, confident man. She wouldn't admit it publicly, but he occasionally intimidated even her.

The events of the last weeks at Hogwarts had been a turning point for him. He had emerged out the other side more mature... a leader. His attitude was quiet, confident and his manner inspired confidence in others. She rather liked this Harry. This was the Harry she always knew he could grow into. The old, insecure Harry was still there and shone through on occasion, but he was rising to his challenges magnificently.

"Nothing on the line yet?" she asked him.

"Not a twitch, but I didn't expect one yet."

Hermione frowned. "Do you think he knows about it and has a way to bypass it?"

"Not a chance. I think I know what's happening though. Do you remember how many Death Eaters he had when he attacked Hogwarts?"

"Yes, I remember," she said quietly, trying to suppress the memory of what was one of the most frightening nights of her life. "It was around three hundred or so."

Harry reached over and took her hand in his own. Turning it over, he kissed her palm softly before placing it back on the table and smiling gently. He leaned back in his chair then and sipped his coffee. Morning coffee was a habit he was becoming accustomed to since coming to Haven. Hermione wouldn't touch the stuff, but he was quickly developing a taste for it.

"I've been thinking," he said carefully. "I've been trying to put together some numbers in my head. As much as I hate to admit this, I must have killed or severely injured at least three hundred in the Ministry that day. If we then figure in the three hundred or so who accompanied him to Hogwarts, he had to have less than a thousand marked Death Eaters.

"I figure that, in that one day, I took away one third of that number. Then he used another third to attack the castle. Figure the final third was off busy

at Azkaban or one of those new camps we've been hearing about. Now, O'Dalley says that Dolohov is here with at least one hundred and fifty Death Eaters, although I think he's wrong." At Hermione's questioning look, he smiled grimly. "Oh, Dolohov is here with a group of Death Eaters, but not as many as O'Dalley thinks... not until he recruits them, at any rate. So I don't think we've felt a twitch on the line since it went up simply because Voldemort is short on help at the moment and is keeping most of his forces close to him."

Hermione scribbled a few notes on a piece of paper and then looked up at him, frowning in thought. "If we go with your numbers, he has less than five hundred marked Death Eaters in Britain right now."

He nodded. "I think so also. And that's why he hasn't tried to breach the line yet." He sipped his coffee and reached for his schedule for the day. "Hmmm... Morning meeting with the Irish, I see. Well, it needs to be done. Now that I'm over the flu, there's no sense putting it off. What are your plans for today?"

"I'm meeting with Remus this morning. He received a shipment of old books yesterday and I want to look though what he picked up," she offered, hiding the real reason from him.

Harry nodded and then frowned. "Hermione, can you research dementors for me?"

She looked startled. Then her eyes narrowed. "We've been down this road before, Harry, even in our third year."

"I know, but I was thinking about them last night and something doesn't make sense. Did you know they only exist in the U.K. and nowhere else?" he asked.

She nodded but still looked at him blankly.

"Think, Hermione. There are ten different sub-species of dragon from all over the world. There are four sub-species of unicorns. Asian centaurs look differently than European centaurs. A North American Fairy is different from an English fairy. A Cornish Pixie looks nothing a Roman Pixie.

"So why is it that there's only one type of dementor? One type, and they are found only in the U.K.? Even a Lethifold doesn't look like them and isn't related to them. It's not normal. Why isn't there an Australian version? Or a feared South American dementor that wears a sombrero and a poncho?"

"Harry, are you suggesting that someone made the dementors?" she asked incredulously.

He nodded grimly. "I think it's a possibility. And if someone made them, they have to have a weakness we can exploit."

She nodded and added the information to her notes. Like Harry, her days were becoming increasingly hectic. She had business that she had to do for the war, and for herself, and business she took upon herself to deal with because Harry wasn't doing it. In that regard, she was protecting Harry's interests and, by proxy, her own.

"You're meeting with a head of state today. I think you should wear your Potter family robes," she murmured, looking up from her notes.

Harry frowned. He had put on jeans and a t-shirt. Granted, he had already decided that wearing a T-Shirt that read, 'I caged Voldemort, ask me how!' would be inappropriate to wear when meeting with the Minister of Magic. Reluctantly, he nodded. A moment later, Dobby appeared and laid out his dress robes on the bed.

Harry blinked in surprise then leaned closer to Hermione. "How does he do that?" he whispered.

Hermione watched the little elf and tried to fight back a giggle. "I have no clue." she replied, shaking her head.

Giving up, she laughed outright at Harry's bewildered expression. Standing, she kissed his cheek and left him to dress while she started her own day.

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## Hogwarts Castle, The Great Hall...

Voldemort sat in his great chair and drummed his fingers idly against one arm of it. He had always dreamed that controlling Hogwarts, and the rest of the U.K., would be the pinnacle of his life. The reality, however, was turning out to be quite the opposite.

Sure, he had won Hogwarts, but it was an empty shell now. Its vast wealth of knowledge and lore had been stolen out from under his nose before he could even enter the castle. Fortunately, few knew that fact, and he had been very careful to limit the Death Eaters allowed into the building to the original group who had helped capture it, along with a few trusted lieutenants.

One of the downsides of this policy was that he had to travel to Little Hangleton and Riddle Manor to meet with his other servants. He would be doing just that this evening to mark over two hundred new servants.

Voldemort looked up from his brooding when Lucius entered the hall.

Lucius had proven adept at controlling the muggle officers that led his army and they were now in control of all but a few small pockets of resistance. The blond had studied the muggles extensively and had learned their ways. As a result, he was carefully controlling the muggle army to preserve key segments of the muggle infrastructure. Lucius wanted control over the media and communications, in particular. At first Voldemort had wanted all aspects of muggle society destroyed, but Lucius had explained the value of maintaining some industries and how they could be used to control

the masses.

Lucius stopped short of his master and bowed low. He knew his master was a truly great wizard, probably the most powerful wizard alive, but it was his job to convince Voldemort to keep parts of muggle society whole and active. It was a job that was becoming increasingly difficult, since Voldemort didn't understand the scope of what Lucius was dealing with.

"Well?" the Dark Lord snapped, his eyes flashing dangerously.

"My Lord, I'm pleased to announce that another pocket of muggle resistance has fallen. With the collapse of resistance in Inverness, all other pockets should soon fall. Most were taking orders from the remnants of British Army Command that had been holding out in Inverness. Brigadier Worthington is concerned about possible insurgencies at this point, and he does have reports of growing acts of sabotage.

"We have managed to preserve large sections of the media installations, as well as power facilities. Worthington still thinks he's doing this for King and country," Lucius said with a smirk, "as he now believes that Voldemort the First is the legal king of the United Kingdom."

Voldemort allowed a small smile to tug at his taut lips, then he frowned again. "Tell me again why we are preserving so much of muggle life. Why don't we just put them to work until they die or kill them outright?"

Lucius hid his sigh. It was an ongoing debate and he needed to make his master understand the importance of the muggles. "My Lord, we've gone over this and I have to apologize to you and beg your mercy. But please, let me try to explain to you the reasons why I push for a more lenient policy towards the muggles."

Voldemort motioned with one hand for him to continue. "Explain then, Lucius. But know that my patience is wearing thin. If I didn't know better, I would say you were afraid of these muggles," he said, sneering.

"It's not fear, my Lord, it's respect for the one thing they have that we do not. Let me try to explain it this way. In Britain, we have... what? Sixty or seventy thousand wizards and witches, correct?"

Voldemort nodded grudgingly.

"That sounds like a lot, my Lord, but there are sixty million muggles in Britain. Sixty Million. They outnumber us one thousand to one. We can kill vast numbers of them, but they could swarm over us, if only they realized it. Knowing this, I am trying to keep those parts of muggle society together that can help control the masses. I have no doubt in your ability to reduce their population down to more manageable levels, especially when you understand the problem I have been dealing with, but it's going to take time. Until it's been done, however, we need to control them."

Voldemort leaned back in his chair as he struggled with the concept. "Very well, Lucius, I see your point. Do what you have to, but keep the muggles under control. In the meantime, what other news have you for me?"

"My Lord, Antonin begs to know if you can release some of the Irish he has sent you so he can return some of your other servants."

Voldemort reached for a parchment on a nearby table next to his chair. "There are some twenty Irish taking the mark tonight. Once they are marked, I will release them back to him and he can send back the twenty. Owl him and let him know about this change."

Lucius bowed and backed away. "It shall be as you command, my Lord."

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### **Padfoot Manor, Harry's personal study...**

Harry, Amelia Bones and Arthur Weasley stood when Michael O'Dalley and Brogan Mallory entered the study. The study, with its comfortable high back chairs and quiet surroundings, made an excellent place to talk.

"Minister, it is a pleasure to finally meet you," Harry said, smiling and holding out his hand.

"And I can say the same thing, Mr. Potter. An honor it is as well," replied Mallory, taking Harry's offered hand and shaking it.

Harry smiled at O'Dalley as he waved both men towards the chairs. The man had taken to spending considerable time here in Padfoot in the last week.

"Minister, I apologize for not being able to meet with you sooner..." Harry began as he sat down.

Mallory stopped him by holding up a hand. "No need to apologize, Mr. Potter. Michael here informed me of the reason behind the delay, and I'm certainly not going to be so churlish as to fault someone for being ill."

Harry nodded in relief. Politicians were notoriously strange people and he wasn't sure what he could expect from this man. After all, his greatest experience with this particular brand of wizard was his exposure to Cornelius Fudge.

"My primary reason for asking for this meeting, Mr. Potter, was to speak with you about Voldemort and what you have been doing."

"Has Michael explained about the line, sir?" asked Harry.

"He mentioned something, but to be honest, I thought he must have misheard you. Warding a whole country?"

"That's exactly what I've done, sir. There now exists a line of death extending some fifteen thousand kilometers around the island."

"A line of death?" asked Mallory incredulously.

"Precisely that, Minister. The line, which is visible, will kill anyone carrying Voldemort's mark. So you can take comfort from the fact that, while he may be bringing people into Britain and marking them, he is unable to send them out of the country."

"So it's just keyed to the dark mark?" asked Mallory.

Harry smiled thinly. "No, sir, keying to just the dark mark would have forced him to stop marking his people. The line is double keyed. If you carry the dark mark and cross the line, you die. If you don't carry the dark mark, but have a black aura, you arrive at your destination very ill and in need of a potion that only the healers of Haven know how to brew. We don't want Voldemort to send unmarked forces out of Britain. With an unmarked Death Eater arriving and feeling like he's about to die, he will seek a healer's help and we'll find him.

"As you are aware, auras really aren't a good indication of good or evil as much as they are indications of someone being susceptible to temptation. But from what I understand, anyone who has purposefully hurt another will darken his or her aura. Most of the Unforgiveables require an intent to cause harm, and we will rely on that intent to darken the auras of people.

"Our healers will have a good supply of the potion on hand. I suggest a joint task force to handle these people, Minister. One healer from Haven, along with a British Ministry Auror, will accompany two of your Aurors. I also suggest that the sick individual be given a truth serum before being given the antidote."

O'Dalley rapidly scribbled notes while Harry spoke. Mallory considered Harry plan as objectively as possible, but he couldn't help feeling elated. Harry had already eliminated the primary concern he had had.

"It's a cruel solution, Mr. Potter, to interrogate before you cure," offered Mallory, curious about the young man's response.

Harry nodded thoughtfully. "Yes, sir, it is. But this is war, and we are sometimes forced to take actions that we would not normally take in more civilized times. Our enemy is a cruel enemy. He offers no terms or quarter. I am merely replying in kind to his own methods."

"Mr. Potter," Mallory started, very pleased by what he'd heard. Harry might be young, but he was definitely fighting a man's war.

"Please, Minister, call me Harry," he interrupted quietly.

Mallory's grin broadened into a wide smile. "Very well then, Harry. I think we can do this. I'll alert the other Ministries, but I think it's a workable deal. What I'd like to do, however, is go public with some of the details about the ward you've put in place. My people are understandably nervous, being so close to Voldemort and Britain."

Harry shook his head. "No, I think we should hold off on that for a few more days. Right now there hasn't been a single breach of the line. I think it would be to our advantage to wait until Voldemort discovers what it does before announcing it to the world. However, I do realize the position this put you in. So I'll make a counter offer you might find appealing. If you wait in announcing the existence of the line, I will personally stand by your side at the press conference when the announcement is made."

Mallory's eyes lit up hearing Harry's offer. Such opportunities were rare, and here was the Boy-Who-Locked-Voldemort-In-Britain offering to participate in a joint news conference! "Your solution is acceptable, Harry," he replied, trying to gush. "Now, turning to the business of the British Ministry in Exile, specifically the efforts to maintain the secrecy of our world..."

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### **Irish Ministry of Magic, Office of Owl postings...**

The small gray owl flew through the open window and made its way straight to a special desk that had been set up two days ago.

The clerk looked up in concern. The bird looked exhausted. "'ello girl. Let me just get your letter and send it on its way and then we'll take care of you. You can rest before you have to leave again."

The small owl hooted exhaustedly and offered up the letter.

The clerk removed the letter from the bird, set it aside, and then walked the worn out owl to a perch where it could rest. He then selected another bird from a special group set up for this very purpose.

He scanned the unsealed letter briefly, frowning, then gave it to the new owl. "Priority routing to Haven," he told the bird before tossing it aloft. The bird circled once, twice, then flew out the open window.

With the letter on its way, he turned to the exhausted owl and began administering the care it needed to recover.

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### **Padfoot Manor, Hermione's personal study...**

Hermione sat in front of her desk looking over some notes she'd taken. When Harry first showed her the room and told her it was for her own, personal use, she wasn't overly impressed. It had a desk and a few bookshelves and that was about it. He had then told her to talk to Dobby about decorating the room to be what she wanted. Hearing that, she attacked the room with energy. Between Dobby, a few of the other elves and Hermione's transfigurations, her study was now a very comfortable place for her to sit and read, or hold quiet conversations.

"You wanted to see me, Hermione?" asked Remus from the doorway.

"Yes, I did. Thanks for coming, Remus. I find myself in a difficult position and I'm unsure what to do about it," she replied, waving her former professor to a seat.

"Oh? Well, if you tell me what the problem is, I may be able to offer some advice."

"Harry's shown me some of the reports you've sent him. I know this isn't really my business, but is he really spending that much money every week to keep Haven going?"

He raised one eyebrow. "Actually, Hermione, I think the costs are going to go up for a while longer."

She frowned and nibbled on her lower lip for a moment. "Blast! I just don't know what to do."

"What is the problem?" he asked, concerned.

She looked at Remus for a long moment, measuring him. "Alright, this is one of those 'do it and I'm damned, don't do it and I'm damned' things. I might as well plunge right in. Look, I know I'm just Harry's girlfriend, but I'm concerned about how much money he's spending. I know I don't have a right to be, but he doesn't seem to care. Someone has to look out for his interests." When Remus began to laugh, she frowned at him and crossed her arms.

Getting control of himself, he wiped away the tears of mirth and looked at her intently. "I expected to have this conversation with you sooner or later, Hermione. I remember James talking about a similar one he'd had with Lily in their seventh year, before he had asked her to marry him. Forgetting the fact that Harry is one of the wealthiest wizards on the planet, the Potter men have always had one particular... failing, if you will. Money. Harry, like his father and grandfather, would give his fortune away if it weren't for the women in the family.

"From what I recall, Harry's grandparents were the same way. The Potter men seem to have a knack for increasing the family fortune without really trying. I offer you the money he received from the Goblins for warning them about the upcoming troubles as an example. Anyway, as I was saying, the Potter men increase the fortune without really thinking about, and the Potter women make sure the fortune is there for the family.

"I realize you may be embarrassed, but I don't think of you as being some sort of gold digger. If anything, you're protecting your investment so that your children will be taken care of." He chuckled when she blushed at the mention of children.

Hermione leaned back in her chair in relief. "So, what's the solution, Remus? How do we do everything we need to do and make sure Harry doesn't bankrupt himself in the process?"

"I can tell you a little of what I've done so far, but I'm open to more suggestions. For one thing, I have negotiated several loans to Amelia so that the Ministry in exile is funded. The loans are long-term loans with very favorable terms for Harry, but the Ministry will not be in any position to begin paying him back until we've returned to Britain.

"I know that it's going to be important that Haven get up and running on its own two feet soon, so I've been on the lookout for opportunities that we can bring to Haven that will allow the residents to stand tall, get jobs... earn their keep, if you will, and bring some income in for Harry as well. Mind you, now that the bulk of the construction is completed in Haven, Harry could finance the running of the town for thirty years before he'd even notice the money being spent. But I do agree with you. We need to work on getting our residents productive and on their feet. It will be good for their morale."

Hermione nodded thoughtfully. "I think I understand now. I'll keep my eye open for opportunities as well. I'm sure there's an idea out there just waiting for us to stumble upon. But about Harry... you're saying this is something his father and grandfather also did?"

"Don't misunderstand me. Harry isn't doing this because his parents did. In Harry's case, he simply has no idea of how to handle his fortune. He's trying to learn, but between that and everything else, which do you think he'll let slide?"

She grimaced. "Yes, he would consider this unimportant, despite the good he's done with it."

He nodded, and then looked up as Dan and Emma filed into the room.

"Thank you for your time, Remus," Hermione said. "It was a most illuminating discussion. I'll keep an eye out for what we talked about."

Remus stood and smiled at Dan and Emma as they filed into the room. Hermione gave them each several hours of instruction in Arithmancy and Runes every morning, and in the evenings Harry gave them instruction in charms and defense. They went to the school for potion and transfiguration instruction, but Harry had been insistent that he teach them defense and, since so many charms were useful in that topic, he combined the two.

Hermione smiled up at her parents, her father in particular. Ever since Harry had powered up their cores he had spent hours learning spells and practicing. Emma was by far more advanced in theory, but Dan had the practical down pat.

"Hermione, watch this!" Dan exclaimed, brandishing his wand with a flourish. "Sive lepus" he chanted and pointed his wand at Hermione's desk.

There was a popping sound and a white rabbit appeared on the desk. Hermione looked up at her father and smiled. Inwardly she wondered why



Harry had taught her father such a useless spell. Another popping sound was heard and another rabbit appeared, then another and another, and another. Hermione's eyes widened as she realized that Harry had given her father an open looped spell that would cycle forever and she fumbled for her wand, now buried under the bunny covered desk.

Emma sat in her chair tittering and Dan was laughing at the look on Hermione's face. Unable to find her wand, she snatched up her staff. "Finite Incantatum!"

The popping noises ceased, but the bunnies remained. She banished the bunnies, then turned to see both her parents holding onto each other and laughing loudly. Placing her staff where it was easily reached, she also holstered her wand and faced her jocular pupils.

"Well, I see Harry's been busy again. I think I'll have a few words with him," Hermione said in a huff.

"Oh, pumpkin, don't be mad at Harry. He's trying really hard to keep our interest but he's in an awkward situation. We're both much older than he is, and he sees us as your parents. For every spell we successfully master under him, he teaches us another fun spell. He thinks learning is easier if there is some fun involved," offered Dan with a grin.

Hermione looked at the pair suspiciously. "So he's teaching you useful and fun spells? What sort of fun spells?" she asked.

Dan and Emma looked at each other for a moment. "Well, the fairy lights was a fun spell," offered Emma, "and so was the room coloring spell."

"And there was the all-nighter. That one was quite enjoyable," Dan said with a smirk.

Emma blushed and laughed nervously.

She gaped at her parents, shocked. With a groan, she buried her head in her hands.

"Hermione?" asked Emma in alarm.

She stared at her mother, then turned to her father, her face flaming. "Would you excuse us, Dad? I need to talk to Mum and teach her a few spells that I don't think you'd be interested in. Remus is around, why don't you go look him up?"

Dan looked at his daughter and knew she was upset about something. This was quite a role reversal for the two of them. With a puzzled look, he stood and left the room without comment.

Hermione watched him leave, and then turned to her mother, muttering. "I am so going to kill that boyfriend of mine! No person should have to give their parents the talk!"

She ignored Emma's gasp as she tried to figure out how to proceed.

"Mum, there are a lot of sex spells that witches and wizards can use to enhance the experience. Unfortunately, most of them also have side effects which increase potency and fertility, sometimes to the point of overpowering muggle birth control methods..."

Emma blushed a bit, but cut in before her daughter could continue. "Dear, Harry also taught your father several contraceptive charms. Actually, it was one of the first things he taught your father. He wasn't able to teach me the charms women use since he didn't know them."

Hermione breathed a sigh of relief and straightened in her chair. "I can teach you those, Mum. They aren't hard."

Emma nodded, but her eyes bored in on Hermione. "I've talked to Minerva and she explained that with the gift that Harry gave us, I could have children as late as my eighties. Does the thought that you might someday have a brother or sister bother you? Your father and I talked to Danni about this. I had a very rough delivery with you and that's why we never tried for another child, but Danni assures us that there would be no danger if we wanted to try again."

Hermione's brow furrowed and her eyes dropped to her hands on the desk. "I suppose it does Mum. All my life I've had you and Dad to myself. I don't know why, but the idea of sharing you bothers me a little."

"We feel the same way about having to share you with Harry. And that's on top of the fact that Dan and I both love that young man to pieces. I am not saying we're trying for more children, but I do think you need to face that possibility, especially after this war is over," Emma said quietly.

Hermione smiled weakly, then shook herself. "Right then, let's start with the basic seven day contraceptive charm and work our way up to the six month charm."

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## Haven School of Witchcraft and Wizardry...

Minerva McGonagall smiled as she took her seat. The last few weeks had been hard on everyone and her rough, stern demeanor had taken a beating, as she had to deal with children desperate for news about their families. She smiled more often now and was surprised to discover that sometimes a smile was even more encouraging to a student having a transfiguration problem than her usual stern frown.

Everywhere she looked she could see Harry and Hermione's influence in the overall design of the school. There were no house tables and no head table in the Grand Hall. The dormitories were broken down by year, rather than house.

The library was huge! Even after all the books were put away, there were dozens of empty shelves left over. Tall windows lined the library letting in plenty of sunlight and Hermione had introduced what she called a "study station". Basically it was a desk surrounded on three sides by partitions where students could work peacefully without disturbing those next to them.

She had shown the representatives of the Irish Ministry Department of Education and Certification around the school three days ago and they were most impressed. The school was a mix of ultra modern and the medieval decor of Hogwarts. Minerva was very pleased when they issued all of her staff certificates based on their experience. The posts of Defense and Potions were still filled by substitute teachers, but the Ministry people said they would send her a list of candidates to look over.

The Grand Hall didn't have a skylight charm like the Great Hall of Hogwarts, but the House elves had placed many of the portraits in the Hall and Professor Flitwick had charmed the large windows on one side of the hall to display scenes from around the world. Today the windows showed a moonlit beach. Instead of the larger house tables, they had filled the Hall with smaller tables, seating ten people per table. Every day the teachers would pick another table to sit at, this way the teachers could connect with their students better. It was one of the biggest changes and she heartily approved of it.

Minerva was about to start on her soup when she heard a cry come a nearby table.

"Parvati!"

Padma Patil clutched a letter in one hand and looked around frantically for her twin. Minerva spotted a green banded owl taking off from the table Padma had been sitting at. The green band signified that it was one of the Irish Ministry owls set aside to deliver inbound mail to Haven.

Filius Flitwick and Minerva converged on the upset Ravenclaw from two different directions.

"Please, Professor, we have to do something. They are still alive!" Padma said, weeping against the Headmistress.

She let go of the letter and it fluttered to the floor. Filius retrieved it just as Parvati run into the Grand Hall. She had sensed her twin's confusion and fear and had come running.

Minerva looked at Filius, an eyebrow raised in question.

He scanned the letter, frowned, and then read it out loud.

*My darling daughters,*

*It seems like it's been forever since we heard of the fall of the school and the loss of everyone there. Your father, Tripuri and I have tried to be brave in the face of the news, but it hasn't been easy. Now my time comes to an end and I will soon be with my little girls. I only wish I did not have to leave your father and sister behind.*

*I'll be with you again soon, my darlings.*

*Mum*

Parvati looked at Filius in horror and she unconsciously reached out for her sister. Minerva gripped both girls by the shoulder, forcing them to look at her.

"Girls, you must calm down. We will do everything we can to help. Now both of you follow me. Filius, you have the school until I return."

Minerva took the letter from Filius before she exited the hall, setting a brisk pace. The Patil twins nearly had to run to keep up with her. Being much taller than the twins, Minerva's pace kept them from talking to and worrying each other. She led them straight to the operations center, a building neither girl had visited before. Entering the building, she led them down a long stairway that ended in a corridor. Then she knocked at a door and waited before entering.

"Come!"

Miles Pickerton looked up and gave a pleased smile when he saw Minerva enter the room. His smile drooped a little when the two girls followed her, but his curiosity was immediately piqued. "Minerva?"

"Miles, I'd like to introduce to you Padma and Parvati Patil. They just received a letter from their parents," said Minerva, handing Miles the letter.

"Ladies, meet Miles Pickerton. He's the man who's going to try to make things better for you both."

He frowned as he read the letter. He then stepped out of the room for a moment. When he returned, he had several people with him. "Are we sure this letter is authentic?" he asked.

Padma nodded vigorously.

"That's my dad's handwriting," offered Parvati.

Miles handed the letter over to one of the people he had brought into the room with him.

"Delivered by owl this morning?" asked the man. Miles nodded in agreement.

"The mother is obviously sick or injured. We'll need a healer on the team," said the man, and then handed the letter to the woman standing next to him.

The woman didn't even glance at it. She did, however, cast a spell on it. "Brighton Beach," she murmured. "I can't narrow it down any further than that."

"It's a start," said Miles. "Why don't we send an extraction team to Brighton? From there, they can use an owl trace. The question is, do they portkey the targets directly back or not?"

"That's up to the healer," said the first man, shrugging.

Miles sat back for a moment before turning back to the Patil twins. The two girls had watched the conversation, hope clearly evident in their expressions. He smiled softly at them. "Ladies, I know you're both worried and very scared. You're going to have to be brave now. At dusk, we'll send out an extraction team. If all goes well, a couple hours after that, you and your family will be laughing about this and planning a celebration. Now, if you'll follow Minerva, she will take you back to the school. She'll bring you back when your parents arrive. Given the content of the letter, they'll probably portkey directly to the hospital," he said, aiming the last comment specifically at Minerva, who nodded in understanding.

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## Padfoot Manor...

Harry got up from his chair and stretched. The Irish Minister and Amelia had left nearly two hours ago and he finally felt the pull of hunger. He was supposed to meet with Remus and Hermione after lunch. *Too much sitting lately and bed rest*, he thought to himself. *Starting tomorrow I'll begin swimming again.*

He left his study and was heading to the dining room when he stopped in amazement. Standing on the landing of one of the lesser used stairways he looked out over the backyard of the Manor house and saw Dobby and house elves. Hundreds of house elves... clothed house elves!

Frowning, he shook his head and continued down the stairs.

Entering the dining room, he ignored the frown he got from Hermione, and the curious looks from the others, as he walked to the window and looked out at the strange group of elves.

"Remus," he said intently, "I know we have count of the number of humans in Haven, but has anyone counted the non-humans?"

Remus looked at Harry standing by the window and shook his head. "I don't think so. Why? Other than myself and some house elves, there can't be that many of us."

Harry shot him a murderous glance.

When Remus simply raised an eyebrow, he turned to look out the window again, but only briefly. "Stubborn old wolf," he muttered, loud enough for the older man to hear. With his Lycanthropy, Remus considered himself a dark creature and non-human. They had argued about it numerous times.

Remus chuckled quietly and Harry conjured a small chair next to one of the dining room chairs, then he sat down and called Dobby.

A moment later Dobby appeared, facing Harry. He was wearing khaki short pants and a khaki shirt, just like the other elves on the lawn. He snapped off a salute, which Harry was forced to return.

Behind him, Dan and Emma snickered and even Hermione giggled.

"Dobby, I'd like to talk to you. Please sit down," Harry said, motioning to the small chair he had conjured.

Dobby's eyes grew wider, if such a thing was possible, and he slid into the chair Harry had indicated. "Is Dobby in trouble, Master Harry?" he asked in a small voice.

Harry smiled gently at the little elf. "No, Dobby. Even if you had done something wrong, friends forgive friends, they don't punish them," he replied. "I am curious about something though. Why are there several hundred elves out on my lawn dressed in uniform?"

Dobby's ears drooped and he hunched down on his chair. "These be house elves with no homes, Master Harry. They be hearing from Hogwarts Elves and come here looking for work and families. They are too many for all the families in Haven. So we decide to bond to Haven, like the Hogwarts Elves bond to the school. They cooks and cleans and helps where they can."

"That's not that bad, Dobby. And I'm not angry with you. But tell me, how many elves are there?"

"One hundred score, Master Harry."

Harry leaned back on his chair, shocked. "One hundred score? We have two thousand house elves?" he asked, addressing no one in particular.

He stood then and began to pace the room. Dobby watched from his chair, his huge eyes tracking Harry's movements constantly.

"Two thousand elves," Harry murmured. "Think about it, Remus! Even if we can only get a few to agree to help us, we could build a spy network that would be unparalleled."

He spun to face Dobby then, his eyes blazing with energy. "Do you think you can convince some of your friends to help us by finding out what's happening in Britain?"

Dobby nodded and leapt from his seat. "Dobby knows many elves who want to help go home, Master Harry. Shall I go ask them?"

Harry nodded and the little elf saluted him again. He glanced at Dan before returning the salute. When Dobby disappeared, he turned to the others, noting their shocked expressions. "Draco, I think," he murmured.

Hermione shook her head. "Draco? For what? And did you just do what I think you did? Recruit house elves to spy for you?"

Harry sat in his chair and began putting food onto his plate. "Yes, I just recruited house elves to spy and I think Draco would be the perfect person to organize it."

"But Harry, that's dangerous!" she protested, ignoring the looks her parents were giving her.

Harry stood and scowled at her. "I know it's dangerous, and I know it's very likely that some of them may get hurt or killed doing this. But this is war, Hermione. I've sent dozens of people back into Britain every night to rescue people. Fred was injured on one of those trips. Seven others have also been injured. Sooner or later, someone will die.

"But, Harry..."

"What are you going to say when you discover I'll be crossing the line as well? Mark my words, I may not be doing it tonight, or tomorrow, but as sure as the sun rises in the east, I'll be crossing that line and doing my part in this fight," he said angrily

"It's not the same thing! They are elves, oppressed elves, and you want them to sacrifice themselves?" she asked heatedly.

"It's war," he snapped back. "I'll use every method, person and tool at my disposal, including myself, to win. Do you think Voldemort is going to say, 'Oh, don't do that to the poor elves?' Of course he isn't. You need to grow up, Hermione! This isn't another one of your idealistic crusades, like SPEW!"

She flinched, but he ignored the small movement and continued. "I'm making decisions and telling people what to do and I hate it! But everyone seems to expect it of me. Do you think I like doing it?"

Hermione reeled back as if he'd struck her.

Harry looked at her for a moment longer, then spun on his heel and left the room.

She moved to follow him, but her father gripped her by the arm and shook his head. "I'll go," he said simply.

Remus looked at her, his eyes boring into hers. "I'm surprised at you, Hermione. I thought you, of all people, knew what he was going through." His tone left little doubt about his disappointment and his anger.

When she blanched, Emma laid a hand on her shoulder and shook her head at Remus.

He eyed Emma for a moment, then crossed his arms and looked away from both of them.

Emma looked at her daughter. "Have you told him how frightened you've been, Hermione?" she asked gently.

She looked down at the table, shaking her head mutely.

"How can you expect him to understand if you hide your fear from him, dear?"

"I want to, Mum, but he's got so much to worry about," she replied in a whisper.

Remus leaned across the table as realization of what had happened hit him. Hermione was reacting out of fear; fear for Harry, and for others.

"Hermione, Harry loves you. The only time I've seen a love as strong was watching James and Lily together. You know he'd do anything to help you. But Harry, for all his good qualities, can be quite dense sometimes. You can't hint around with him. You know you have to come out and say what you're feeling," he offered.

She nodded and her expression grew pained as she considered what she had just done. "Do you think I should apologize to him?" she asked in a meek voice.

Remus shrugged. "If I know Harry, he'll be happy to hold you in his arms and say nothing for hours on end."

"I'll talk to him after dinner tonight," she offered with a weak smile.

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## Outside the Manor...

Dan caught up with Harry outside the manor house. He was furiously polishing his Firebolt, even though he hadn't ridden the broom in months.

"She loves you, you know," Dan said quietly.

Harry stopped polishing and looked across the field. "I know she does, and sometimes I think she doesn't understand what I have to do," he said with a heavy sigh.

"Oh, she understands, son. Believe me, she does. But she's frightened. And because she's frightened, she sometimes says things without thinking them through first. It's a very human flaw, Harry."

Dan moved to sit on a nearby bench. He leaned forward and looked at Harry closely. "I remember when Hermione was six, she developed an interest in meteorology. Within a week she had plowed through every weather book in the library, and then convinced us to buy a few for her. She could explain all the types of clouds, and tell when the weather was turning good or bad just by knowing the barometric pressure and if it was rising or falling. And yet, for all that knowledge, she would still run to our bed in the middle of the night when a thunderstorm passed by.

"She's a very smart woman and she loves you deeply, but this war frightens her and Hermione has always had problems with fear," he said, and then his expression grew thoughtful. "She's brave with things like backing you up against Voldemort because that's a life and death, here and now type of situation. But when you talk about things in the abstract, like using elves to spy, or going over to Britain yourself, it frightens her. Believe me when I say that she knows exactly how you feel when you have to send someone into harms way. She's explained it often enough to us."

Harry bowed his head. "I owe her an apology, don't I?" he asked.

"No, not really. But you do owe her, and yourself, time to talk and several hours or even days of relaxation. You two have been at the heart of this war since the evacuation and you need some time for yourselves," Dan offered.

Harry nodded gratefully at the older man. Their roles were confusing at times, but they were building a friendship anyway, despite that confusion.

"I'll talk to her after dinner," he offered with a weak smile.

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## Brighton Beach, England...

Newspapers fluttered up the street as the wind swept through the nearly empty town. There were few signs of the local townspeople who made their living on the tourist trade. The tourists wouldn't be coming this year and no one knew if they'd ever come again. For most Britons, this had been a time of deep shock.

Most people were huddling in their homes, still hoping that a miracle would happen and they'd wake up to find that the army had put down the unrest, and that the morning post was being delivered, along with petrol and food to the local stores. Some tried living out of their own larders, but in such populated areas, people had adopted the habit of not storing large quantities of food. Why should they? The supermarket was only a short drive away.

For the people of Brighton, the reality of the situation came four days after the bomb. Someone had crashed a van through the front of Morrisons. The store had been closed since the power failed, two days after the bomb. The first group of people to showed up at the store had been small, perhaps ten people. An hour later, a hundred were swarming over the store, looting it for anything they could carry home and eat. On several occasions during that day, shots rang out and bodies were left bleeding in the aisles and in the parking lot. As evening fell, someone, perhaps upset over missing out on the free food, had set fire to the building.

The building had stopped smoking only days ago.

It was dark and deadly quiet when the five man extraction team apparated into the alley behind the former supermarket. The team leader moved to the entranceway of the alley and looked around carefully, while his second in command checked a high quality foe glass.

The team had been training and performing missions similar to this one since early April, when the government placed many of the Aurors and their families on the run. The team had five members, four fully trained ex-Ministry Aurors and a field healer, always called Doc.

The leader looked out across the broad boulevard. There was a glow on the horizon as a town up the coast burned. At his signal, another man readied the small owl they had brought with them.

With a flick of his wrist, the owl was sent aloft. The bird had a short message written by Padma for her mother. The owl circled for a moment, then took off in a south easterly direction. They waited until the owl was out of sight, then the team member lifted his wand and whispered, "Owl point me."

The wand lifted from his hand and slowly moved to face the direction the owl had traveled in. Above the wand, small glowing numbers read two point five, then two point six. The leader nodded. Two point six kilometers and the owl was still going. Casting illusion charms on themselves, the team prepared to move out, following the owl. Hopefully they wouldn't have to go too far.

In a closed T-Shirt business just over four kilometers away, a small non-descript owl flew in through a broken window and landed in front of Tripuri. Both she and her father recoiled in shock and fear at the sight of the owl, then Tripuri removed the message with a shaking hand.

Breaking the seal and unrolling the parchment she was relieved to see the lettering glow slightly, making it easy to read in the darkness. She read the letter once, then again, and hope bloomed where it had once withered and died. Fighting back tears, she read aloud to her father.

*Stay where you are. Help is coming. Insist that the help that arrives gives you the proper password: "There is a Haven for all of us." If all goes to plan, we will see you tonight. Love,*

Gurprit listened to his daughter and nearly fell to his knees. "Alive?" he whispered. Then he looked over at the still form of his wife, who lay on the floor. Turning to Tripuri, he gripped her by both shoulders. "Watch the street, and don't forget the password. I will talk to your mother."

Tripuri nodded and moved cautiously to the front of the store, staying in the shadows as much as possible. Gurprit moved to sit next to his wife.

"Shaila... my little Shaila, you must open your eyes," he crooned to her. Slowly the woman opened her eyes and smiled gently at her husband.

"Gurprit, I was having the most wonderful dream..." she whispered.

Gurprit took her hand. "I know, my love, but now you must be strong and fight for me. Help is coming! We've heard from Padma and Parvati. They are alive," he whispered back. He turned her hand over and kissed her palm, trying hard but failing to prevent the tears from falling.

"Alive?" she asked in confusion.

"Yes, they are sending help. Tonight! You must hang on, my Shaila. For the girls. For me," he said, pleading with her.

"But I'm so tired, my Gurie... can't I just sleep for a while?"

An icy knot of fear filled Gurprit and he prayed that help would arrive soon. "No, love. You can sleep later tonight, after you've talked to Padma and Parvati."

He could see her struggling to stay awake and made a quick decision. He began to sing softly to her. Her eyes came to rest on him. She always loved his voice. A small smile played about her lips and she watched as he sang. Gurprit knew he could hold her attention as long as he sang and he would sing all night if need be.

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## **Padfoot Manor...**

Harry was looking up at the night sky through the bedroom window when Hermione finally entered. The two had avoided each other during the day, but now they would have to confront each other and the gulf they had created.

She moved to stand next to him, but he surprised her by turning to her and pulling her into his embrace. They held each other for a long while, taking comfort from the presence of the other.

"I'm sorry, Hermione," he whispered.

"No, I should be more understanding, Harry," she replied quietly.

"I know you're frightened. And I don't know what I can do to ease that for you. Your father suggests that you and I get away for a day, or even for a few hours. I don't know about you, but getting away, even if it's just for few hours, sounds like a good idea," he said, his voice hopeful.

She nodded against him, tightening her grip.

"Please understand, Hermione. We're at war. There will be times when you and I will be in danger. I know you can handle that, you're one of the bravest people I know. But like it or not, people are looking to me to lead our side. Even Amelia is asking my advice on things like the government in exile. And sometimes I'll have to send people into danger and they might not come back. I don't like it, I don't want the job, but they all seem to think I'm in charge," he said softly, then he led her over to two chairs and sat her down in one.

Hermione looked at him, her expression serious. "You are in charge, Harry. Everyone is here because of you and they look to you for guidance."

His expression grew pained. "Then please understand that, though I don't like it, sometimes it will be necessary for me to send people into danger. Like tonight, when we're safe and comfortable."

Her eyes narrowed as she looked at him. "What's happening tonight?" she asked tensely.

"Miles told me about this earlier tonight. He normally stops by to tell me about the operations he's running each night. Tonight, a team will be attempting to rescue the Patils," he said grimly.

Hermione's gaze sharpened. She was closer to Padma than to Parvati, despite rooming with Parvati for nearly six years. The Patil twins and Lavender had been clinging to each other for support since the bomb. Lavender's family had died in the blast and the Patils had thought their family was gone as well.

"An owl arrived today with a message from their mother. In it, she implied that she was dying and that her oldest daughter and husband were nearby."

"Poor Padma and Parvati," breathed Hermione.

Harry nodded. "The extraction team couldn't get a precise fix, so they had to apparate to the area and then use an owl trace. Miles came to me for approval to make the extraction."

She inhaled sharply, hearing that. The use of the owl trace would be like lighting a beacon for Voldemort and his forces. The only hope was that his detection and capture squads would be busy elsewhere. She realized that Harry had deliberately approved a dangerous mission, putting the Patils and the extraction team in danger. He was clearly unhappy and uncomfortable with the decision. Her gaze softened as she realized that Harry would never be comfortable with sending someone into harms way. But he would do it anyway, because he must.

“Padma and Parvati must be going insane by now. Can we go to the receiving center? They should have friends nearby,” she asked softly.

“It might be a long wait, but I was going to suggest just that,” he replied with a small smile. Then the smile faded. “They won’t be coming to the receiving center. Considering the tone of the letter, it was decided they would go straight to the hospital.”

Moments later, Hermione was grabbing warm cloaks for the walk to the Hospital while Harry informed Dobby where they were going.

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## **Riddle Manor, Little Hangleton...**

Voldemort looked out over the ranks of assembled Death Eaters. They were just climbing to their feet, some of them weeping, most clutching at their arms. The mass marking of so many people was tiring and Voldemort slumped down on the chair Lucius had set up for him.

Another group of Death Eaters stepped up and began to pass out the robes and masks needed to complete their entry into his service. One by one, the newly marked Death Eaters were presented with a muggle, who they had to kill, although some were occasionally encouraged to rape the prettier ones first. Once done, the new recruits were brought before Voldemort, where they bowed down in respect and allegiance. Those few who refused to kill were immediately killed themselves.

After all, one did not refuse to serve the Dark Lord, not after being marked as his own.

As the induction ceremony wound down, Lucius stepped up next to Voldemort’s chair. He understood how tired his master was, so he ran the ceremony once the marking was complete.

Bowing before Voldemort, he turned to the crowd and cast the Sonorous spell on himself.

“I need the twenty recruits who have volunteered to return to Ireland up here now!” he barked, his voice rolling over the group and echoing against the hills.

Nineteen men slowly made their way up to the raised platform, their fear obvious. Lucius performed a quick head count. “Where’s the missing man?” he snarled.

“He’s dead. Didn’t pass the last test,” said one in thick Irish accent.

Lucius grunted in acknowledgement, then handed the men a long rope. “Take this, every man grab on. It’s a portkey that will take you to our Irish base. When you arrive, tell Antonin that he is to send twenty men back immediately.”

The group gathered around to take a grip on the length of rope. When everyone had a hold of it, Lucius tapped the rope and the group of nineteen men vanished from sight.

Lucius turned to see Voldemort nodding approvingly. In his mind, he turned to the next task he had to accomplish for his master this evening. He stepped up to the platform and was about to consult the list of cell leaders to assign the new Death Eaters to when a shout interrupted him.

Whirling around, he saw that the men he had just sent off by portkey had reappeared! The nineteen men looked shocked and surprised. Then all nineteen exploded in a soundless blast of blood, bone and flesh. Dozens of new Death Eaters ducked for cover, trying to avoid the gore raining down upon them.

Lucius paled and looked fearfully at Voldemort, whose finest robes were awash in blood and bits of brain.

Voldemort’s expression darkened and he stood, enraged. In the midst of the slowly thinning puddle where the Death Eaters stood, the air took on a shimmering quality as it began to lighten.

The shimmering started to move faster as it grew lighter and slowly a form coalesced in the center of the whirling vortex. Voldemort reeled back into his chair, shock, as he recognized the figure

“Potter!” he snarled.

The image of Harry Potter glanced around with a smirk. “Hey there! I do hope someone is here to pass the message along to the half blood bastard known as Voldemort. If not, he’ll find out sooner or later,” it said with a shrug. This was clearly a recorded message.

“Anyway, I expect right about now you’re probably knee deep in pureblood guts and other bloody bits. I hope you enjoyed the show.” Harry said conversationally, then he appeared to sit down. “Now comes the bad news, which I want to you pass to old snake face. Tell the scaly, lipless bastard that I’m revoking his passport. Yep, I’m locking you in, Tom Marvolo Riddle. The international Wizarding community has decided that you are far too ugly to be allowed to travel outside of Britain and Scotland, and so are your band of merry morons.

“Oh, and don’t get to comfortable, Tommy. As soon as I’m allowed, I’ll be coming for you,” said the image, then it faded from sight.

Lucius cringed and turned to look at Voldemort.

The evil wizard stood in a murderous rage. His eyes flamed balefully and, glancing at Lucius, his nostrils flared. "Continue with the service, Lucius. I will return home," he said in a steely tone, then he apparated away with a crack that deafened everyone with fifty feet of the platform.

Lucius sighed in relief and tried to steady his shaking hands before he turned to continue the service as instructed.

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## Haven Hospital...

Harry and Hermione walked peacefully from the manor. It was a short walk to the hospital and now, thanks to the numerous house elves, the road between the town and the Manor house was clearly marked, even at night. Harry placed an arm around Hermione's waist and the two walked slowly up the road. He leaned on his staff a bit. It had been a long day and his leg was slowing him down some.

A few times along the way he'd stop to kiss her. The evening was cool and comfortable, and there was no need for conversation between them. Hermione could easily convince herself that they were off to a neighbor's house for a spot of tea, rather than going to comfort friends who might be in for the worst night of their lives.

Halfway to the hospital Harry stumbled, then he whirled so he was facing east. He lifted his staff high above his head and Hermione staggered back from him as power rolled off him in waves. The crystal end cap of his staff burst into brilliant light, throwing back the night.

She watched as he stood immobile for about two minutes, then the light faded and he quickly brought his staff down and leaned against it. He was breathing heavily as if he had just finished a marathon.

"Harry?"

"Sorry," he panted. "The line has finally been breached. I had to send a message."

She looked at him curiously, though he could clearly see the questions in her eyes.

"I told him that he's been denied a passport and international travel rights due to his extreme ugliness. Old Tommy boy, having no sense of humor whatsoever, is currently having a temper tantrum over the issue. If we're lucky, he'll kill a few of his minions," Harry replied.

She gasped, then giggled. "You didn't! Did you?"

He nodded, and then turned back towards the road. "Come on, sweetheart, let's get to the hospital."

Hermione couldn't help but notice how much Harry was leaning on his cane after his display of power. Fortunately for the two of them, the hospital was just a short walk up the road.

Harry led Hermione into the small emergency room waiting area, where they spotted Padma, Parvati and Lavender waiting together. Minerva and Professor Flitwick sat a few chairs away and looked to be marking homework.

Hermione made a beeline for the three girls, while Harry went to the nearest chair and sank down with a sigh of relief. He stretched out his leg and bent down to knead the knotted muscles. A healer stepped out of a backroom to see who had entered.

He came over to Harry. "Is there a problem with your leg?"

Harry looked up at the healer. "It will be all right. I've been over extending myself again," he said with some degree of exasperation.

"Lord Potter?" gasped the healer.

Harry looked embarrassed. "Yes, but it's just Harry, please."

"Can I help you with that?" asked the healer, gesturing to his leg.

"Not really, no. As I said, it will be all right. I'm here waiting with my friends," he replied, motioning to Hermione and the others.

"Ah, the extraction team. Very well, my Lord. If you need something, please don't hesitate to ask."

He nodded and the healer went back to a nursing station.

Harry levered himself to his feet and hobbled over to where Padma and Parvati sat. All four girls smiled up at him as he lowered himself into a chair.

"Harry," began Parvati, "this past year at school... well, we... that is, I believed..."

Harry held up a hand to stop the Gryffindor. "Please don't say it, Parvati. There was no way for you to really know what was going on, and there was no convincing way I could tell you the truth without revealing things I couldn't reveal. Right now let's concentrate on reuniting you with your family, alright?"



Parvati looked at Hermione for a moment, then she smiled impishly. "Hermione, forgive me this once." Then Parvati leaned over to Harry and, before he could say or do a thing, she grabbed him and kissed him as hard as she could. When she leaned back in her seat, she looked at Hermione. "You're one lucky witch," she said with a sigh.

Hermione's smile was all teeth and she resisted the temptation to scratch Parvati's eyes out. Harry looked shocked. Minerva coughed from her seat and gave her Gryffindors a stern glance.

Harry hadn't responded to Parvati's kiss, of course. He shook his head slightly and smiled at Hermione, who then relaxed somewhat.

A small chime echoed through the room.

The healer at the nursing station looked up and several others entered from a back room. They went to stand just outside a roped off receiving area.

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## Brighton Beach, England...

Tripuri saw the group of shadows move closer. She had spotted them as they began to work their way up the street. She held her wand in one badly shaking hand. They moved from one covered position to another, which made Tripuri even more nervous. She was a healer, not a fighter! *How do Padma and Parvati know these men*, she wondered. She froze as one of them paused in front of the store and then knelt by the locked door.

The man fiddled with the door for a moment, then she squeaked and backed up slightly as the man pushed it open.

"W-W-What's the password?" she said in a tremulous voice.

"There is a Haven for all of us," hissed the man. "Now, put that wand away before you accidentally cast something!"

The man pushed the door open wider and motioned to the rest of the group. Three of them came in and took up positions near the front of the store, scanning the street. The man who had opened the door led another over to speak to Tripuri.

"Patil? Which one are you?"

"T-T-Tripuri," she stammered.

The man nodded. "Yes, the healer. And your mother, she's ill?"

"Yes! Yes! She has several bad spell wounds and I couldn't heal her."

The two men exchanged a glance, then one nodded to the other. The second man grabbed Tripuri gently by the arm. "Take me to her. I am a healer and I have potions with me."

Tripuri nearly sobbed in relief as she pulled the healer into the back room.

The team leader watched them go for a moment, and then joined his second in command, crouching down and watching the street.

"We'll be ready to move as soon as the Doc says we can, but I'll try to move it along. Keep watch and holler if company comes to call."

The man nodded and the team leader moved to the back of the building. Inside the small storeroom, he found an incongruous sight. The two healers hovering over a small, dark skinned woman with lightly graying hair. A small, dark skinned man was singing to her in a soft tone.

"Doc? Time?" he hissed.

The healer looked up at him. "I need to stabilize her. She's very weak. Five minutes at least."

The leader started to nod when he heard a low whistle. "I don't think we have five minutes, Doc. Do what you can, but get them out of here soonest! We have company coming."

Nodding the healer pulled a prepared syringe out of his bag and plunged it into Shaila's thigh. "It's an energy potion laced with dragon's blood. It will give her energy, but we'll have to watch her when she comes down from it," he murmured to Tripuri. Then he pulled out a small rope and he passed the end to her.

"Portkey. Everyone take hold,"

From the front of the store came a shout, then the sound of multiple spells being cast, including several explosive hexes.

The healer saw that everyone had a hold of the rope. He grabbed Shaila's hand and activated the portkey. There was a loud whistle to alert the rest of the team that he was leaving and then they were gone.

Out in the front room, bedlam ensued. Two capture squads had apparated onto the street. The flare of magic from Doc's wand was sufficient to point out exactly where they were hiding. In moments, the two groups of Death Eaters fanned out and opened fire on the storefront.

The team leader was just coming from the storeroom when the front of the building exploded and his number three man went down hard. He dived over a counter and rolled until he was close enough to pull his man out of the line of fire. With that done, he joined in with his own people, firing back at the Death Eaters.

They say time dilates or compresses, depending on circumstance. For the men of the extraction team, time seemed to slow, becoming an unending battle of curse and counter curse. It seemed as if hours had passed before they heard the sharp whistle coming from the back room. In truth, it had been little more than sixty seconds.

The team leader wasted no time. He pulled a short silver whistle from under his shirt and gave three short blasts on it. Then he pulled his injured man close to him and watched as the rest of the team portkeyed away before activating his own.

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## Haven Hospital...

Harry watched with interest as the Patils arrived. He approached the roped off area and stood to one side, watching as a healer and two medi-witches moved Mrs. Patil to a floating stretcher, while another healer pumped her full of potions via syringe. The team medic dispassionately explained what she had done in field. It struck Harry as some sort of choreographed ballet as they smoothly moved the patient from the receiving area and out through the doors.

Gurprit and Tripuri moved to follow, but were intercepted by Padma and Parvati, both of whom were weeping with joy. The remaining healer motioned for the four of them to go to the seats where they could rest. He told them that he'd check them out and get them something to eat in a moment. Then another chime echoed through the room and the healer looked up in surprise and worry.

He moved over to stand near Harry. "Something must have happened to the extraction team," he muttered.

Before Harry could reply, two men appeared in the area. One seemed fine, but the other was obviously suffering from curse damage as he leaned over to vomit. A second later two more men appeared, one holding the other.

The team leader struggled to lower his man gently to the floor.

"Oh, Merlin," breathed the healer, and then he rushed forward to examine the man. "I need help here," he yelled a moment later, hoping to attract some of his colleagues as he began pulling bandages and potions off a nearby cart.

"Tell me what to do," urged Harry, dropping his staff to one side.

The healer glanced at him, then thrust a bandage into his hands. "Place this on that leg wound and press down as hard as you can. He's got multiple major bleeders that we have to stop."

Harry grabbed the bandage, placed it over the man's leg and pushed down hard. The bandaged instantly turned red with blood. The healer worked frantically on his patient, stemming the flow of blood from a neck wound, then working on a chest wound. A moment later, two medi-witches burst through the doors from the back and came to his aid. One of them gently pushed Harry out of the way.

Another witch conjured a stretcher and they moved him into the back room. Harry stood, watching them move out of sight, and then he looked down to see his hands covered in blood. His pants were soaked through.

He looked bewildered and unsure, staring at his hands. Hermione had been concentrating on the Patils and hadn't paid much attention to the second arrival until they were already moving back to the treatment rooms. She turned to see Harry staring at his blood covered hands and she gasped.

Minerva glanced up and frowned at Harry. She put aside her marking and joined him, casting cleansing charms on him as she approached. Seeing his pale complexion, she put one arm around him, led him to a chair and sat down beside him.

He kept glancing at the doors, then to his hands, as if he expected them to be covered in blood again.

"Harry," she said gently, "are you alright?"

His brow furrowed in confusion and shook his head. "I'm not sure, Professor. I don't know what I should be feeling right now."

He looked up as the doors opened again and the leader of the extraction team walked out, his expression grim. His eyes flared in recognition as he saw Harry and he walked over join him and Minerva.

"I want to thank you, my lord. You tried to help Willie, but he was just too badly injured," the man said quietly.

Harry jerked and his hands shook.

The man placed a hand on Harry's shoulder. "Willie knew the risks, sir. We all do. We take the risks because it's the right thing to do. Look," he said, pointing to the Patils. "It was the right thing to do and Willie would have wanted to go out doing the right thing."

Harry understood. The man had died fighting for what he believed in. Fighting for the right to be free and to live the way he wanted. There could be no more noble a sacrifice. His loss was great, but his life and his death held a deep meaning for Harry.

D-D-Did Willie have a family?"

"Aye, that he did. But don't you worry about them. We take care of our own."

"What is your name, sir?" asked Harry. The man exuded a confidence that he found appealing.

"Caleb Newman, sir."

"Thank you, Caleb. Please let me know if Willie's family needs anything... and I mean anything. You and your team did us proud tonight."

Caleb stood a little taller and he nodded. Excusing himself, he joined his remaining teammates.

Harry smiled weakly at Minerva, then summoned his staff and limped over to Hermione.

She looked at him and chewed slightly at her lower lip. He shook his head to her unasked question. Her expression matched his own. They leaned against each other then, drawing comfort, one from the other. When he finally released her, he wore a smile that didn't quite reach his eyes. Giving her hand one last squeeze, he walked towards the Patil family.

Padma and Parvati were standing close to their father and their older sister. Lavender stood to one side, looking at them wistfully. He stepped up to the four, nodding to the twins. The man looked over at Harry curiously.

"Papa," said Padma, "this is Harry Potter. He's the one responsible for getting all of us out of Britain and bringing us back together."

Gurprit looked surprised then he grinned broadly and grabbed Harry's hand, shaking it. Harry nodded and smiled at the older man, but he couldn't help but notice that Lavender was hovering along the edge of the group.

Everyone was babbling as questions were hurled back and forth. When Harry managed to catch Gurprit's eye, he motioned him off to the side. He led the older man over to the nursing station. The healer took one look at the expression on Harry's face and decided to find something else to do.

Harry motioned for the older man to sit, then smiled reassuringly at him. "Mr. Patil, first off, I don't want to alarm you, as you and your family are more than welcome here in Haven, but I would like to talk to you about another situation. One that you might be able to help me with."

"Oh?" asked Gurprit warily.

"Yes, sir. While you and your family were missing, your daughters, and their friend, Lavender Brown, relied on each other for comfort and support. Your daughters treated Lavender as if she was another sister, and she treated them the same. Unfortunately, Lavender's family lived in Amesbury."

Gurprit's eyes widened in understanding. "I know Lavender, Mr. Potter. She's a good girl..."

He stopped when a healer stepped into the room and looked expectantly at him. Harry smiled and motioned for him to go speak to the healer.

"Mr. Patil, your wife is resting comfortably and is out of danger. We will be keeping her here in the hospital for several more days. You and your family will be able to see her in a few minutes, but only for a short time," said the healer with a broad smile.

Tripuri and the twins ran to their father, hugging him in relief. Gurprit looked at Harry for a moment, winked at him, and then turned to smile gently at Lavender.

"Lavender? Come, my daughter. We will go see Shaila together," he said, holding out his hand.

Lavender looked dumbstruck. When Parvati embraced her, she broke down and wept on her shoulder. Another set of arms appeared as Gurprit embrace them both.

Harry watched the newly enlarged family for a moment. Then, for the first time since the rescue, his smile reached his eyes. He was turning to join Hermione when Lavender stopped him. She embraced him, kissed his cheek and whispered her gratitude before rushing back to her family.

When he faced Hermione, Minerva and Filius, they were all grinning at him. Hermione moved to his side and kissed his cheek.

"Well done, Harry," exclaimed Filius. Minerva nodded approvingly.

"We're apparating back to the Manor, Harry. I know how badly your leg's hurting," Hermione told him.

He didn't argue. "Good night, Professors," he said, and then vanished, taking Hermione with him.

Filius blinked and looked at Minerva. "I thought there were anti-apparation wards at the hospital?" he asked.

"There are, Filius, but he's Harry," she said, shrugging

"Oh. Well that explains it," said the little professor with a chuckle.

Harry apparated them both to their bedroom and he went into the bathroom for hot soak. Hermione watched him with a worried expression. She fully expected him to be very upset once they got to home and were alone.

After his bath, he came out and borrowed her Book Bag of Requirement to find something to read. He then sat at the table they normally ate breakfast on, paging through the book.

“Harry?”

“Hmm?”

“Are you all right? You seem... different... after tonight,” she said hesitantly.

Harry closed the book and looked out the window and over the darkened lawn for a while without saying anything. She was about to stand up and go to him when he began to speak.

“All my life my hands have been bathed in someone else’s blood. All my life, Hermione. My Parents, Cedric, Sirius, Aurors and Order Members whose names I don’t even know. Tonight... tonight my hands were covered with the blood of that extraction team member, and you know what? I finally realized that I wasn’t the one bathing my hands in blood. No, it’s Voldemort. Oh, I played a role in what happened to Willie tonight and must be burdened with some of the guilt, but the bulk of it belongs to Voldemort.”

He stood then and walked to the window. Gazing out into the darkness, he shook his head. “No, most of this is Voldemort’s fault...and his Death Eaters.”

“What will you do?” she asked, fearful of his answer. She had expected tears, anger or rage, anything but this strange calm.

Harry turned to face her and she was struck by his appearance. This wasn’t Harry, a sixth year wizard and sometime Quidditch player. This was Harry, leader of Haven. He smiled gently at her.

“I’ll honor Willie and those like him. I’ll make sure that the sacrifice he made tonight wasn’t made in vain and that his family is cared for. And because of him, I’ll redouble my efforts to win. I owe it to him and all those like him.”

“How can you be so calm? A man practically died in your arms tonight.” Hermione asked.

“I’m calm because I’m blessed with a strong woman who gives me strength. To the outside world, I have to appear to be made of stone... firm and unyielding. You know differently. I don’t have to pretend to be something I’m not for you,” he replied softly.

Hermione walked up behind him and wrapped her arms around him. “I know you, Harry Potter. I may not know all about you, but I intend to learn. This much I do know, however. It’s time for you to stop being firm and unyielding.”

Harry’s tears had started as soon as she’d wrapped her arms around him. But even through his tears, he managed to smile at her comments. She knew him better than she thought.

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Authors Notes:

How can we have notes when it's a new story?

*Bobmin*  
*FanficAuthors.net*

# Sunrise Over Britain

## Chapter 2 - Orphans and a Hermione Moment

### Standard Disclaimer:

"What have you got planned this time Bob?" asked Alyx.

"You'll just have to wait and see won't you?" replied Bob smugly.

A distinguished British guy walked out onto the stage eating BBQ spare ribs and pushing a cage with Severus Snape in it.

"Is that Jeconais? The author of This Means War, Hope and White Knight, Gray Queen?" whispered Alyx in awe.

"Yep. He's British, but he likes American style BBQ, so he can't be all that bad."

Jaconais carefully positioned the cage in the center of the stage, then he backed away from it. He stepped to a nearby counter where he started to put ten foot poles on the counter. Below the counter a sign read "ten foot poles, one pound, or twenty euros."

"The authors of this story, Bob and Alyx have reminded me to once again tell you good for nothing brats that they do not own the Harry Potter Universe. If they did, Alyx would see I really look like Alan Rickman and ditch that guy Bob."

"I will get you for that you know," Bob snarled at Alyx.

"Yes Dear," replied Alyx.

Harry Potter opened a door releasing the horde hormonally challenged Alan Rickman fans who immediately started to tear the cage apart.

Hermione, on the other end of the stage opened the door allowing hundreds of Snape Haters to enter the stage.

Jeconais looked to be a brisk business selling the poles.

"You really are twisted you know," Alyx said flatly.

"I know, but you love me anyway," Bob replied.

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## Sunrise Over Britain

### Chapter 2

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### Keeping the Secret (evening, April 29th)...

When the intercom buzzed, the President leaned over and pressed a switch. "Yes?"

"Mr. President, Secretary Paletto is here for your weekly briefing."

"Very well, send him in," replied the President of the United States.

The door opened admitting Louis Jefferson Paletto, Secretary of the Department of Magic. The short, portly man walked into the room smiling at the President.

The President waved him to a chair in front of desk.

"Mr. Secretary, I hope you have some good news for me. The press has been beating me up over the government's inactivity in regard to the British situation."

Paletto handed the President a letter. Opening it, the President started to frown as he read.

"The text of that letter is being simultaneously released to every media outlet and Head of State even as you read it. Her Majesty's Government in exile has appealed for the help of the magical governments, worldwide. In agreement to our aiding their effort, they are asking every muggle government to observe their sovereignty. This is an internal matter, and they will view any interference by military forces landing on their territory as an act of war," Paletto told the President.

As for the press," he continued, smiling thinly. "We are aware of the problem you and others have been experiencing, Sir. We're dealing with it just as we did during World War II."

When the President looked up at him, a little wild about the eyes, Paletto's smile broadened. "Yes, few people know that Hitler was under control of Grindelwald, a very powerful Dark Wizard. Back then we used memory charms to keep our world secret. Today, however, we have more advanced methods on which to rely. Suffice to say that several key CIA mind control experiments were actually run by the Department of Magic and were far more successful than originally reported. Your problems will simmer down shortly."

The President looked outraged for a moment. "You're controlling the press? The people of this country can't be..."

"Oh, come on, Mr. President. Every political organization in the world manipulates the press to one degree or another. We're merely employing certain techniques so that people will see the reports and find them too hard to believe. It's not something we do often, but both our worlds are at stake here.

"If your world comes to learn about mine, mark my words, Mr. President, there will be a witch hunt. The Salem Witch Trials, the Inquisition, the years of persecution are not easily overlooked and there is a strong element in our society which firmly believes that if the secret can't be maintained, then your society should be pacified. You've seen what one crazed Wizard can do, with support, to an entire country. What could we, as a society, do to yours if we all agreed with that viewpoint?"

"I don't agree with their viewpoint, Sir. On the other hand, I will do all I can to maintain the secrecy. Let me show why," Paletto said darkly, pulling his wand and flicking it once.

The Television flared to life and the President frowned. The scene showed a beach somewhere.

"What you are about to see is a recording made by a member of the 23rd Infiltrator Division, one of our military elite units. There, see the boats in the distance?" Paletto asked, pointing at the specks closing on the beach.

"That is a special action team of the French DGSE or Direction Generale de la Securite Exterieur. Despite our warnings, this ten-man team was sent to England yesterday morning. It gives new meaning to the term 'French Intelligence'."

The twin zodiac boats landed and the men in the scene leapt from them, fanning out to provide a maximum field of fire. From a wooded area, two figures floated out of the treeline and glided over to the prone men. These men, experts in combat tactics, seemed to collapse in upon themselves as the effects of the invisible dementors took hold on them. One by one the men were kissed.

"The men cannot see what attacks them Mr. President. The only reason you see them is due to the magical camera used to capture this footage. And even if those men could have seen them, their weapons would have been useless against such creatures. In another moment, the vampires will come out to feed upon the empty husks as the dementors consume the souls of these men. Voldemort has taken to pairing up his Dementors with Vampires. That way, both creatures can feed."

The President recoiled and leaned over his trash pail, emptying the contents of his stomach in the executive container.

"I apologize for sharing this with you, Mr. President, but your armies cannot see these enemies and, therefore, cannot fight them. We can. As for the French," Paletto gave an eloquent shrug. "The Head of the DGSE committed suicide this morning, and the President of France has agreed cooperate. He seemed quite eager to listen in order to prevent word leaking out that he's been bribing immigrant families so that he may entertain himself with their underage daughters.

"As you can see, Sir, we have the means to hurt each other terribly. Personally, I shudder to think of what would happen if it came to that. I think it's in our interests to work together. Perhaps, after this crisis has passed, we can set up a conference to explore the possibilities of merging our worlds," offered Paletto with a smile.

The President of the United States wiped his mouth and nodded weakly at the Secretary for the Department of Magic. He had seen some gruesome images in his tenure as President, but he knew that he would be having nightmares tonight.

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### **Padfoot Manor, Harry's private study (April 30th)...**

Harry looked up and waved to the men filing into his study. He had scrapped his entire schedule this morning and pulled others out of their morning activities to have this meeting.

Last night's activities at the hospital had disturbed him and he wanted to offer an option that perhaps had been overlooked. Draco, Miles and Caleb took a seat in front of Harry's desk and waited for him to begin.

Harry conjured a small chair to the side of his desk. "Dobby?" he called.

Dobby appeared and snapped off a salute to Harry. Draco snickered as Harry returned the salute then asked Dobby to be seated. Dobby looked around at the others and sat nervously while other house elves popped, in serving coffee and tea.

"It had been my original intent to have just Miles and Draco here today. But you impressed me yesterday, Caleb, and I thought it might be good to have your input," Harry said.

The man colored slightly at Harry's praise.

"Draco, I want you to meet Caleb Newman. He's the leader of an extraction team. In fact, he's the leader of the team that got the Patil family out last night."

Draco's eyes lit up. "I heard about that mission. Nasty business," he murmured.

Harry's eyes took on a far away look, "Yes, it was." He then shook himself and continued. "Tell me, Caleb, what was the biggest problem you faced last night?"

Caleb stretched out a bit. He was a tall, lanky man with very long legs. He was still tired from last night, so he gratefully accepted the offered cup of

coffee the house elf handed him. "Well, sir, there were several problems, actually. First, we couldn't get a precise fix on the family. Second, the use of the owl trace to locate them brought the capture squads down on us..."

"Yes..." interrupted Harry. "The trace charms triggered their detectors and they were able to home in on you. I have an idea about that, but first let me give you a little background story.

"In my second year, there was a plot against my life orchestrated by Lucius Malfoy. Had it been successful, Voldemort would have returned to corporeal form a full two years before he did."

Harry stood and placed a friendly hand on Dobby's shoulder. "Fortunately for me, a house elf with more conscience than loyalty discovered the plot and tried to protect me by preventing me from returning to Hogwarts. He levitated a cake my Aunt had made and crashed it into the head of the wife of my Uncle's boss."

Dobby winced and smiled nervously, but Harry just tightened his grip a bit on him.

"This elf was capable of tricking the Ministry into thinking I had cast the spell and subsequently earned me a warning from the Office of Underage Magic. You are probably asking yourselves why this is relevant. Well, it turns out that we have quite a number of unattached house elves here.

"According to Dobby, Haven now boasts nearly two thousand of them, and he says that many are willing to help bring our fight to Voldemort. My original intent was to employ them in the area of gathering information and put Draco in charge of organizing that effort. But now I think that role could be expanded..."

Harry paused and thought for a second. "Consider, if you will, fifty elves deploying every night to new locations around Britain and distracting the enemy and their ability to detect a team's magic because of all the elf magic being used."

Caleb leaned back and looked at Miles. The two men smiled broadly at each other.

"We could run their capture squads into the ground and still perform our missions," Miles said with a grin.

"Dobby? Was it hard for you to make your magic seem like wizards magic?" Harry asked softly.

"Oh, no, Master Harry. It is easy for elves to do. We needs to do such so we can get into vaults and other things controlled by blood or family magic," Dobby replied earnestly.

Harry's grin broadened and it was matched by Miles and Caleb. Even Draco looked intrigued by the possibilities.

"Dobby, could you pick an elf you trust who would be willing to work with Draco to help him organize this?" Harry asked the little elf.

Dobby nodded. Harry wouldn't ask Dobby himself to deal directly with Draco. Despite Dobby learning that Draco and Narcissa had been forced by Lucius to abuse him, it wouldn't have been right to throw them together.

"Well, there you have it gentlemen, the makings of both an espionage unit and diversionary tactics. Draco will work to turn the elves into a force we can use. In the meantime, Miles, I'd like you to gather some people to explore all possible methods to ensure that we cut down on the chances of repeating last night's events."

The three men talked for a few minutes more before Draco, Miles and Caleb filed out of his study. With that out of the way, Harry could now turn his attention to the book Remus had given him at breakfast. Remus was adamant that he read it as soon as possible.

Opening the cover, he found a small parchment that explained the translation spell needed to convert the book's Gaelic to English. Remus had tried hard not to convey his excitement about this book, and to be honest, Harry was very interested in it. But he wasn't sure just how the journal of a man who'd lived so long ago would help.

Casting the translation spell, he flipped the book open to the section Remus had marked for him.

*...and then came the day I dreaded most of all. Eocho mac Tairdelbaig, my beloved master, had been ill for the past week. Word came that Eocho had summoned me to his side and, with fear in my heart, I approached the room that held the deathbed of my mentor and friend.*

*"Come closer, Cathal."*

*I approached the bed upon which Eocho lay and gasped upon beholding the withered visage of my friend.*

*"Master!" I cried. "You must rest and eat, you must get well."*

*I started to back away, but his hand did grasp my own and he held me in a grip like iron.*

*"Nay. My time is ended, Cathal. Tis a perilous time for the Brotherhood and I charge thee to find us newbrothers. But do not weep if thee fail this task. The old Gods are falling away and the cursed cross sweeps the land with its unholy power. Go, thou will, to Derreenataggart, to impose our essence upon the sacred stones.*

*"I have spoken with the Gods and they have shown me that our Brotherhood will live again. Go to Derreenataggart when I am no more. Implant a Guardian to guide the rebirth."*

*And with those words my master, my friend for three score and seven years, gave to me his power and passed from this realm forevermore. I*



*kissed his forehead, and then pulled up the shroud as his husk shriveled and flaked to dust before my eyes. Then I went out to announce his passing to my brethren.*

*The passing of Eocho hurt our brotherhood more than anyone would have guessed. With the dire news, many turned from our ways and embraced the newbeliefs. With Eocho gone, the role of Maglios was placed upon my already burdened shoulders. It was not a role I was well suited for, nor a role I craved. I am more suited as the scholar and record keeper than the leader and father to my brothers and sisters.*

*In my grief I fear I made a fatal mistake. I left my brothers to follow Eocho's last command. Alone I did travel to Derreenataggart, and alone did I implant a guardian within the stones using the power Eocho gave unto me. Little did I know that during my absence, my beloved brotherhood would fracture and falter.*

*Harken unto these words, gentle reader still unborn! Herein I place the Rite of Summoning to awaken the Guardian and, with his awaking, the rebirth of Brotherhood. Travel unto Derreenataggart. Be thou ten and two souls, pure of spirit and have no avarice or malice in thy hearts. Awaken the Guardian as day changes and no moon lights the night...*

Harry raised an eyebrow as he continued to read, then both eyebrows. Finally he sat up straight and started jotting down notes. This was crazy! No one would go for it... would they? But if it could help the way they claimed it could? Harry frowned when he considered what he'd have to do to pitch this to everyone. If this place still existed.

"Dobby?" he called.

Dobby appeared a moment later and snapped off a salute. Harry sighed and returned it. "Dobby, please see if Michael O'Dalley is somewhere in Haven. If so, ask him to join me, and then ask Remus and Hermione to join us. Oh, and we might as well have lunch served here. Bring us something light, please?"

Dobby nodded and vanished with a pop.

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## **Haven Operations Center...**

Miles looked up from the pile of paperwork on his desk when the door opened and Caleb Newman walked in. Caleb was one of Miles more promising team leaders, a taciturn man, but with a confidence in his abilities and those of his team. He gracefully lowered himself into one of the seats in the office frowning at Miles.

"Problems?" asked Miles.

"I've been looking over the candidate roster, trying to find a replacement for Willie. I'm not very impressed with our candidates, Miles."

Miles shrugged. "I know, but we take what we have and mold them into something useable. They can't all be Harry Potters, you know."

Caleb fingered his wand holster nervously. "Do you know him well, Miles? I get strange impressions from him. I'm not sure what I'm supposed to think about him, but I definitely get mixed signals off him."

Miles leaned back in his chair. "Cal, I trained Harry and two of his friends in Occlumency and Legilimency last summer. I also helped him with his dueling. When I met Harry, he was not yet sixteen years old and he had seen things that would give you nightmares for the rest of your life. I think that many tend to forget that Harry Potter, for all his experience, is still a teenager with all the clumsiness and awkwardness of that age.

"The second time I saw him, he rescued me from the holding pens at Azkaban. To find me, he blew through anti-apparation wards like they were tissue paper. Then he did something to the dementors. I don't know what he did, but he left them keening and screeching as if he had hurt them badly. What an ungodly sound! He pulled me up and tandem apparated us both to London from Azkaban and he wasn't even tired!

"Harry Potter dismantled the Ministry single handedly, then faced Voldemort at the same distance that you are from me. He's a young man who never had the chance to really be a kid. But he is still a kid, still learning and still developing his own sense of values and self worth. He's very smart about some things and totally ignorant about others. He's easily embarrassed but he's slow to anger. He's a good kid and, while he may still be learning to screw his head on straight, he's going in the right direction."

Miles trailed off, thinking hard.

Caleb looked a little surprised, and then he grinned. He had known Miles for many years, in fact Miles had been one of his teachers at the academy, and it had been a long time since he had seen Miles so worked up about something. For Miles to give such a glowing recommendation, Harry had to be alright.

"If he were a cadet of mine, he'd already be a squad leader and earmarked for more responsibility, Miles. But now I understand why I get mixed readings from him. He's still working on who and what he's all about."

Miles nodded thoughtfully. That last phrase summed Harry up very well. When a knock came on his door, he scowled. "Come!"

The door opened to admit a frightened looking old woman holding a parchment.

"Martha? What is wrong?" Miles asked in alarm. Martha was the head of the records group. They maintained the records for everything that

happened in the operations center and Miles couldn't think of a single reason why the woman would be upset.

"Oh, Mr. Pickerton, I was looking over some of the older records, trying to figure out how to file them and I ran across a list made by Mr. Lupin, Lord Potter's seneschal. I checked the list, mainly out of curiosity..."

Miles frowned. There had been many lists like this. "And? Obviously you found something that has disturbed you."

"One entry on the list, dated shortly after Christmas. It was never transferred to the master list, sir."

Miles sighed. "Alright, Martha, we've overlooked people before. Give me the name of the person and their last known whereabouts and we'll see if we can track them down."

Martha shook her head in denial, her eyes finally started to fill with tears. "No, sir, it's not one person. Mother Wilma's Home... the Wizarding orphanage," she said, waving the parchment she clutched.

Miles paled and surged to his feet, snatching the parchment from Martha's hand. Caleb stood also. "I'll go alert the other teams, Miles. This is probably going to be an all hands effort."

"Hold on a second, Caleb... We don't even know if the orphanage survived," Miles said worriedly. "I'll have to talk to Harry about this one. This is a big mistake and he has to know about it."

Miles turned to Martha. "Thank you for bringing this to my attention. We'll attend to it immediately."

Martha nodded weakly and scurried from the office.

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### **Haven School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, 5th year girls dorm...**

Ginny sat on her bed and pouted a little to herself. Of the Outcasts, only she and Luna were still in the school. Even though Neville stopped by every chance he could, she was lonely, missing him and her family. Professor McGonagall had quickly realized that Luna and herself were in an unusual situation, assuming roles that would become crucial to the war with Voldemort and, due to that, had granted them a greater degree of freedom than normal. For example, the two girls spent their weekends at the Manor, rather than in the school.

The events leading up to and including the evacuation of Hogwarts had become the stuff of legend among the people of Haven. The Outcasts role in the evacuation, to the general embarrassment of them all, had been exaggerated to the level of heroes and heroines. When they complained to Harry about it, his only response was to roll his eyes, shrug and say, "Welcome to my hell."

Adjusting to their new roles wasn't easy, and Harry's comments hadn't helped. Most of the Outcasts were able to bury themselves in their studies, but Luna and Ginny were, for the most part, surrounded by awestruck students and would be suitors of both genders.

Luna's response was to issue dire warnings to people bothering her about the massive, one footed, hopping Nerfherder.

Ginny, on the other hand, dove into her homework with a vengeance, and assumed the role of matriarch for the Weasley clan. It was largely her efforts that pulled her remaining family together, finally healing and sealing the breach between Arthur and his sons.

Now Ginny was addressing the only outstanding family issue and it was one that Arthur had offered to do, but she had insisted was her job. She was busy crafting a letter to send to her brother, Charlie, in Romania. This was not an easy letter for her to write and she had attempted several drafts before she decided to keep the information to a minimum. There was no easy way to say that one brother was dead, and their mother was missing and probably dead as well.

Cleaning up the many useless drafts, she banished the remains and sealed her letter before placing it in an outgoing box. All mail from Haven was routed to the Irish Ministry, where it would be sent via international delivery owls. Only Harry and Amelia had the ability to send owl posts directly.

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### **Padfoot Manor, Harry's private study...**

Harry looked up from Cathal's journal when the door opened admitting Remus, Michael O'Dalley and Hermione. He waved them to seats and waited as they settled.

"I'm sorry for interrupting your schedules but, at Remus' insistence, I've been reading the journal he received," Harry said, and then he turned to O'Dalley. "Michael, would you do me a favor and see if you can track down a name for me?"

O'Dalley straightened in his chair and pulled out a small notebook and a muggle pen. "What name would that be, my Lord?"

Harry winced at the honorific but continued, trying to ignore it. "Derreenataggart. It's apparently the name of a place here in Ireland and may be an ancient Druid sacred site. Perhaps even a stone circle," he replied, then handed the Irish Auror a parchment with the name spelled out on it.

O'Dalley accepted the parchment and folded it up before placing it in a pocket. "Is there anything else you need from me, my Lord?"

Perhaps. If you can find out where that place is, or even if it still exists, I would appreciate it. If it exists, can you find out what permission we'd need to obtain in order to perform a rite there? I am not saying we will, but I'd like to get the information, if possible."

O'Dalley stood from his seat. "I'll go put our Department of Mysteries people on this right away."

He was nearly to the door with Harry stopped him. "Michael, one more thing. Voldemort breached the line last night... multiple times. I suspect he was probing it to discover its nature. Since the secret is out of the bag, could you ask Minister Mallory to schedule his news conference for this coming weekend, perhaps at Stonewall Lane? Hermione and I would like to take a few hours for ourselves to relax and trip to Stonewall Lane would be a nice diversion. It would probably be best to get it out of the way in the evening."

"Of course, my Lord," O'Dalley said before turning to the door and exiting the room.

Harry turned back to the two others in the room. "Hermione, have you had the chance to read Cathal's journal yet? I know Remus made a copy for each of us."

"I read some of the sections that Remus marked out, but I haven't had the opportunity to read the entire book as yet," she replied.

"Remus? You've finished the journal, yes?"

Remus nodded.

"I've not finished it either, but I have read Cathal's description of the passing of Eocho and the Rite of Summoning, as well as what he lists as the benefits. I was struck by his despair. I found it ironic that he was lamenting over the loss of the old ways and the old Gods, while cursing the spread of Christianity. I know my father never belonged to the Christian faith, most pure bloods don't. And while the Dursleys never took me to church, it was impossible to grow up with them without being exposed to their faith. Cathal's point of view casts an interesting light on what some take for granted these days."

Hermione looked at Harry and frowned for a moment, then made a mental note to talk to him further about this at another time.

"Yes, I noticed the same thing," Remus replied. "But what do you think about the whole concept?"

"I'm very intrigued. It offers us whole new avenues of research. If we decide to risk it."

"Decide to risk it?" Remus protested. "I would think we would jump at the opportunity!"

Harry held up a hand, trying to sooth Remus. "Easy, Moony. I'm not suggesting we ignore the opportunity. But we need to examine it carefully before we leap. I've been looking up Druidic rites and there are some common threads in all of them that I'm not sure can be circumvented easily."

Remus arched an eyebrow at Harry's admission of extra research, but Hermione jumped in at that point for him. "Oh? What have you found?"

Harry flushed and looked at the desk for a moment. "Druid rites are performed naked, Hermione. All of us. I'm not sure we can even get away with a warming charm, let alone an obscuring charm. And then there is his comment about 'the unworthy will be forcefully rejected', which I take to mean anything from being told to go away to possibly ending up on the surface of the moon."

"So what are you suggesting we do?" asked Hermione curiously.

"I don't think we have any choice. We have to call everyone together and explain what we hope to accomplish, warn them about the requirements, as well as Cathal's warnings, and let them decide for themselves. We need twelve people, so I say we ask our coven members first and go from there. I'm not very comfortable with the whole nudity concept myself," replied Harry softly.

Hermione frowned thoughtfully. While she had been raised to be less conscious about body nudity and had visited clothing optional beaches with her parents, she wasn't a practicing nudist and she was a fairly modest person herself. She also knew that the source of Harry's discomfort came from the heavy scarring that crisscrossed his back. On more than a few occasions while he slept, she had wept thinking about a young Harry living in that abusive environment.

"Who are you going to approach first?" Remus asked curiously.

"I would think that would be obvious," replied Harry in a serious tone. "All of the Outcasts, Hermione's parents, Tonks and yourself, Remus. That's twelve. I think..."

Harry looked up and stopped when the door opened and Miles stepped in.

"I'm sorry to disturb you, my Lord, but we have a problem," he said softly. Harry looked sharply at the older man and tensed. Miles had never called him that... ever! He waved the man into the office.

Miles looked decidedly uncomfortable.

"Merlin, Miles! Whatever's wrong can't be that bad. Pull up a chair and let's find out what the problem is! And if you call me 'my Lord' again, I'll use you for my sparring partner," Harry exclaimed, trying to lighten the suddenly tense mood.

Miles sat and smiled warily. "We were going through our records, filing stuff mainly, and our Head of Records came upon a list made by Remus, who at the time was keeping the list of people you wanted evacuated. When we combined all the lists together right after Richfield made Minister, Remus' list didn't completely make it to the master evacuation list."

Harry tensed and scowled. "Who did we forget, Miles?"

"It isn't a single person, my Lord, it's many. We left Mother Wilma's orphanage off the main evacuation list."

Remus sagged in his seat and Hermione gasped.

Harry closed his eyes for a long moment, every inch of his body screaming with tension. When he opened his eyes, his gaze pinned Miles to his chair. "I take it you're planning an extraction tonight?"

Miles looked even more uncomfortable. "No, actually we're aren't, my Lord. When we first learned of the mistake, I took it upon myself to authorize a daylight apparate to the Orphanage to see if anyone was still there. Since it was a covert pop in and pop out mission, I felt the risk was acceptable. Unfortunately, the Orphanage was deserted. We can't plan a rescue if we don't know where they are."

Harry's complexion paled and he looked sick. Hermione stood and walked around his desk, placing a hand on his shoulder. He leaned his head against her hand for a long moment. As he did, the silence in the office felt heavy and oppressive.

"All right, Miles," he said, raising his head and staring at the man. "Let's backtrack for a moment. How many orphans did Mother Wilma's hold at the time of the evacuation?"

"We're not sure, my Lord, but our best guess is a minimum of a dozen children, perhaps as many as twenty."

Harry shivered, then pressed on. "Fine, let's say twenty. Assuming they managed to stay together, they could be in one of the holding camps or somewhere still in the vicinity of the Orphanage. Where was Mother Wilma's?"

"A town called Welshpool, in Wales, my lord," Miles replied.

"Is it a big town?"

"Not really, about six thousand residents."

Harry frowned and drummed his fingers on the desk. Then, squinting in thought, he summoned a large magical atlas of Britain. The book flew off the shelf and landed neatly in his hand. He placed it on the desk and thumbed through the book for a moment before finding the map he was looking for.

Pushing away from his desk, he grabbed his staff and held it vertical in front of him. His eyes filled with an eerie light that pulsed in time to the crystal on his staff. There was a long silence and Remus, Miles and Hermione exchanged worried looks.

"There is a church, I see a woman, a powerful witch, and a lot of children. Ten, no, twelve children, several are sick. Behind the church is a small graveyard. She's recently buried one child... and a man. A street sign reads Chelsea Lane. They are hiding... still in the town... but the situation is getting desperate," Harry murmured. As he spoke a tear slid down his cheek.

"Scrying?" whispered Miles.

Remus shook his head.

"Harry calls it Mage sight. He's not really seeing people as much as he's sensing magical auras and energies. It's not very accurate when he doesn't know the person. If he does know the person, he can pinpoint them to the inch," Hermione whispered back, then she chewed on her lower lip.

"He used a form of this when he apparated directly to you at Azkaban, Miles," Remus added. "He can sense your aura and pick up apparation coordinates. If he doesn't know the people he's looking for, he can only sense groupings and make guesses, as Hermione said. For example, what he's seeing now... are they the kids we're looking for? Maybe, or they could be a group of unrelated, but magical children. He doesn't know. He just knows that there is a group of magical children and an adult witch there."

Miles nodded in understanding and went back to watching Harry.

Eventually the light faded from Harry's eyes and he laid his staff to one side. Looked over at the map and pointed to the general area. "Miles?" he asked.

Miles stood and looked at the area. One corner of the map was blank so that it would show the apparation coordinates when he touched it with his wand. Miles tapped the region and copied down the coordinates, then grinned.

"We'll find them, Harry, now that we have a place to start looking."

"Good. Bring them home, Miles," Harry said softly. He shivered thinking how afraid and alone those children must feel.

"We will, my Lord," Miles said sharply, before heading for the door.

Harry wiped his face with a hand as he slowly closed the book. Hermione and Remus looked at him with concern.

He sighed heavily and looked at the others. "So... do we broach this Rite of Summoning business with our friends today, or wait until Michael comes back and lets us know if this place even exists?"

Remus glanced at Hermione in surprise.

“Harry? How can you talk about the rite now? What about the orphans?” she asked worriedly.

He glanced at the papers in front of him and thought for a moment. “Don’t think I’m not affected, Hermione, because I am. My guts are so twisted up inside and I feel the urge to hit something. I want to scream, but what would that solve? It wasn’t Miles’ fault, so screaming at him wouldn’t solve the issue, although it might make me feel better for a few minutes. It wasn’t Remus’ fault either. He added the name to his list. Someone, somewhere, when they made the master list, skipped a single line and an orphanage of children got left behind in a war zone. Not just that, they’ve lost two of their group, a child and an adult. It was a human mistake.”

He stood and walked to a bookshelf to put away the atlas. Placing the book on the shelf he turned to face them. His stance was tall and proud, and his eyes flickered with an inner light.

“Not a day goes by that someone, somewhere, doesn’t die as a result of Voldemort and his crazed lust for power. Some of them I know and mourn personally, like Willie from last night. I’ll never know the names of others, and their stories will go untold. That doesn’t mean I don’t mourn their loss, however. We all do, in our own way. Voldemort is racking up a bill; my parents, Sirius, Cedric and Ron, Peter Pettigrew, before Voldemort turned him into a monster, Willie, who I didn’t know and never will, and for a child whose name I’ll probably never learn...All of his victims. I swear I will see justice done,” Harry said fervently.

Hermione and Remus gasped as a cold wind blew through the room and Harry appeared to be lit by blue flames. Then the light and wind faded.

“Harry! You just invoked a magical oath,” Remus exclaimed.

He looked at Remus for a moment, and then shrugged. “It doesn’t matter, Remus. Voldemort knows he and I will face each other again. Besides, I had already dedicated myself to fighting him. A binding magical oath isn’t going to change a thing.”

“He’s right Remus,” offered Hermione. “He’s already dedicated to fighting Voldemort. The binding feeling that an oath imposes isn’t any stronger than what he already feels.”

Harry sat back in his chair, smiling. “So, getting back to this Rite of Summoning. I’m open to suggestions. I’m about ready to say, ‘Hey guys, there’s this ceremony we can perform that will boost our abilities in ways we can’t even imagine! And, oh yeah, we have to be starkers when we do it.’”

Hermione giggled, but Remus looked thoughtful.

“You know, Harry, that may be exactly the way to approach the whole issue. I can’t say I want to parade naked in front of my former students, but I know the issue of being naked won’t bother Tonks at all. Bless her soul, but that girl is a bit of exhibitionist.”

“I don’t think my parents will be too put out by it either. They’ve taken me to several clothing optional beaches on holiday. And while I stayed clothed, my parents enjoyed the natural aspects of it,” Hermione said thoughtfully.

“So what we seem to be saying is that most of the problem will probably come from our friends. I have to admit I am not very happy with it,” Harry said, sighing. “On the other hand, I don’t see a way around it.”

Consulting the calendar on his desk, Harry looked up at his friends. “The night of the new moon will be May tenth. That’s just over ten days from today. I think we should plan on dropping this on everyone tomorrow evening. That way they have time to work out the issues. If Michael can locate the place and get us permission, we’ll go ahead with the Ritual on the tenth...”

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## **Haven Operation center...**

Finished with the briefing for the night’s mission, Miles looked up from the podium to see Draco Malfoy standing near the door. Next to him was the small house elf Draco had introduced to him earlier.

He’d had a long conversation this morning with Draco, but he was still unsure of the young man. His family had a bad reputation and Miles knew his name change was merely a legal fiction. On the other hand, Draco did have the support and confidence of Harry and that meant a lot in Miles’ book.

When Draco learned about the Orphanage mission he had asked if he could help with some of the house elves. Dobby had introduced Draco to a house elf named Toby. Toby would be Draco’s contact among the elves and assist him in organizing the elves. Draco had wanted to see if they could help with the tonight’s mission. So, with Toby’s help, he had quickly organized fifty elves.

Draco watched Caleb Newman check the gear on his teams. Tonight there were two five-man teams going out to rescue the kids from Mother Wilma’s - eight ex-Aurors and two field healers. Once the equipment checks were complete, Caleb gave a signal and all ten vanished from sight with a pop.

Draco nodded to Toby and he snapped his fingers. The room filled with elves, all watching Draco and Toby closely.

“Does everyone know what they’re supposed to do?” asked Draco.

As one the elves nodded at him, wide-eyed and anxious. Draco nodded to Toby, “Very well, send them out.”

“First groups, go!” shouted the little elf. A group of ten elves vanished and Toby watched a large wall clock. The clock ticked away the seconds,

then minutes. Exactly three minutes later, the little elf cried again, "Seconds group, go!"

Draco smiled. It was a simple and elegant deception plan. Each group had been given watches and a list of places they were to jump to. They would arrive at a location and cooperate to send out a massive magical signature, and then they would wait for six minutes before moving to another location to do it again. What it meant was that, all over Britain, at three-minute intervals, magic would flare up, hopefully confusing and confounding Voldemorts detection and capture squads. After each team had completed their list of jump points, they would return to Haven. With a list of twenty different locations per team, magic would be flaring all over the island for the next hour and, hopefully, cover anything the extrication teams needed to do.

Draco moved to stand next to Miles, who had been watching the elves with a bemused expression.

"Now it comes down to waiting," Miles muttered.

"Is it always like this?"

"How do you mean?"

"The feeling of impending doom, the gnawing in the belly..." Draco said softly, then trailed off, looking at the older man.

"Every damn night they go out," Miles replied.

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### **Haven, at the Johansens...**

Sven sat at the kitchen table, puffing on his pipe and watching his wife and daughter fondly. He was proud of his daughters. Inga and Helga had volunteered to help at the preschool. Olga kept busy around the house and organizing the women for their weekly get together. Olga kept a list in her head of who was single and who wasn't and made it her business to make sure that the single people had dance partners at the weekly gathering.

Sven sighed and looked out the window. He had a meeting with Lord Potter's seneschal tomorrow. It would be their second meeting in which he would be asking, again, if it would be possible for him to plow the large lot of land adjoining the street his house was on and plant some crops. Sven hated this period of inactivity and hated having nothing to do.

"Inga, the roast is nearly done and then I can put the strudel in. Are you done cutting up the potatoes?" Olga asked.

"Almost, Mama, but I don't see why Helga was allowed to go get Fred and George and show them where our house is while I have to cut potatoes," Inga said in a small voice.

"And who made her sister scream in the shower when the hot water was shut off?" Olga asked in exasperation. At the sound of Inga's startled cry, she spun around quickly.

Inga dropped the knife she was using on the potatoes. The knife had slipped and sliced open her hand, nearly to the bone. She whimpered in pain as it bled heavily.

"Papa! Get a towel, now," Mama Johansen ordered and Papa ran to the linen closet returning a moment later.

Olga grabbed the towel and wrapped Inga's hand in it securely.

Inga tried not to cry out, as the cut turned the white towel red instantly.

"Come, we take you to the hospital, they fix you up." Olga declared. "Papa, you stay, wait for Helga and don't nibble on the strudel!"

Papa eyed the strudel and sighed again. Sometimes life, like wives, wasn't fair.

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### **Welshpool, Wales...**

Caleb's team apparated directly to a small alleyway that ran parallel to Chelsea Lane. From his vantage point he could see the road curving to the north. It appeared deserted, but looks could be deceiving. Most people hid in their homes during the day and came out at night to forage for food and other items they needed.

He could barely make out the church in the darkness. It was an imposing building and probably quite comforting and quaint looking during the daylight hours. He signaled and three of his team moved out ahead of him, while Doc moved up to watch over his shoulder.

Moving by twos and threes, the team advanced on the church. Caleb was the first to reach the door.

He pushed the door open. When it made a loud creaking sound, he froze. The point of a wand was firmly pressed against his head.

"Move one more inch and I will kill you where you stand," hissed a female voice.

Caleb shifted slightly and wondered if tonight would be his turn. He thought briefly of his wife and two girls safely back in Haven, then he made an obscure hand gesture that wasn't visible to his captor but his teammates could see it. Three of the team fell back away from their positions covering the doorway.

"Stand up slowly. I want to see both of your hands," the voice said.

Caleb felt the wand press in tighter and he swallowed nervously. "Easy, Miss. I'll do what you say," he replied, trying to sound calm.

"Whatever you're looking for, you won't find it in here."

"We're looking for the children," Caleb replied, then realized his mistake. The wand point ground against his skull harder.

"Over my dead body," hissed the woman.

"We're here to help, damnit!"

"I bet. I've seen the rape gangs in the stre..."

The woman cut off and swallowed loudly as two of Caleb's men pressed their own wands to her back. Caleb turned and gently removed the wand from her hand. Tears formed in her eyes.

"Please, take me. I'll even cooperate. But leave the children alone. They're just babies..." she moaned.

Caleb blinked at her. "We're here to help you, not hurt you. Now where are the children?"

Hope flickered in the woman's eyes and she took in their outfits. Each man wore military style black fatigues. On one arm was a patch baring the Union Jack, on the other was a patch baring a pair of crossed wands over a Celtic cross. She took in their demeanor and her exhaustion hit as the adrenalin flushed from her system.

"Help us?" she asked confused.

Doc stepped up and offered her a small vial. "Drink this, it's a small bit of Pepper-Up potion. It will help for a little while."

She took the potion and examined it in the low light. Removing the cork, she sniffed it carefully, and then gulped it down. This whole situation was so confusing! Who were these strange men?

Caleb led the woman over to one of the pews and helped her sit down. "What's your name?" he asked her gently.

She blinked at him for a moment, trying to process his question before replying. "Melinda, Melinda McKinny... are you really here to help us?"

Caleb smiled and nodded at the woman who was clearly beyond the limits of her endurance. "Where are the children, Miss McKinny?"

"Basement, little Linda is sick with fever. I've treated her with muggle medicines, but they are so primitive," she said, starting to babble.

Caleb knelt in front of the woman. "Melinda, listen to me. I need you to help us. In a little while we're all going to someplace safe, but the children trust you, and don't know us. I need you to tell them to come with us. If possible, we can have everyone out of here and warm and fed within the hour. Can you do that?"

Melinda nodded numbly.

Caleb stood and offered her his hand. When she took it, he helped her stand. She staggered a few steps away from him. Then, seeming to find more strength from somewhere, she straightened and led him and his men to the basement of the church.

Caleb blinked and looked at the crowded and filthy cellar in which a dozen children were sitting. All of them turned to Melinda, their eyes filled with fear. One of the older girls started to cry softly and a boy, maybe ten years old, wrapped his arms around her and glared at Caleb with hate filled eyes.

"Children... These men are here to help us. Please don't be afraid. Cally, take a hold of Linda and make sure you don't let go. Timothy, Mark, watch the little ones."

Melinda turned to Caleb and looked at him as if to say 'Well?'

"Doc?"

The field healer moved forward to examine each child briefly. He stopped at one girl who held a toddler in her arms. The toddler was feverish and shivering. He took her from the girl and administered a small potion, then he turned to Caleb.

"There are a lot of problems here, Sir, but nothing the healers can't fix. This one," he gestured to the little girl he held in his arms protectively, "needs help the most. I think we should leave immediately."

Caleb nodded and turned to two of his men. "Distribute the portkeys, then signal team two that we're leaving the area."

One man nodded and moved out, pinning a small Celtic cross to the chest of each child. Once attached, he tapped the cross with his wand and the child vanished.

Melinda arched an eyebrow at Caleb. "Portkey," he murmured. "We're taking them straight to Haven Hospital. You too."

Melinda struggled to keep pace with what was happening but her mind was refusing to help her. Haven? She had never heard of it.

Outside the church a member of Caleb's team lifted a muggle flare gun and fired a blue star shell.

The residents of Welshpool huddled in their homes and wondered, fearfully, what the purpose behind the flare that lit their night sky was. Within thirty seconds of the flare appearing, all of the Haven personal were gone.

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## Haven Hospital...

Melinda stood swaying as the Pepper-Up potion wore off and the exhaustion that had been threatening for days finally overtook her. She looked around with dazed, bruised looking eyes and tried to process what she was seeing.

Healers rushed around, tending to the children and shouting orders to the medi-witches for nutrient mixtures and restoratives, fever-reducers and hydration potion. The children were tended where they stood, though the sickest, little Linda, was moved into another room. She wanted to follow, but her legs refused her mind's command to do so.

She jumped when a hand touched her arm lightly.

"Miss McKinny?" Caleb Newman called, still touching her arm. "Are you all right?"

She tried to smile, to ease the concern on Auror Newman's face. "Yes, I'm fine. Just a little dazed, I think," she said softly.

"I understand. Don't worry. The hospital is top notch. You and the children will be fixed up, good as new. You'll be safe here in Haven."

"Thank you, sir... for everything. I don't think I could have kept the children safe much longer..." Her voice faded away and she swayed dangerously.

"Here, let's get you seated until a healer can look you over," Newman said, leading her to a chair and helping her sit down.

"Caleb!" a voice called over the din.

Newman looked up and saw Miles Pickerton weaving his way through the crowd towards him. Looking back at the exhausted woman, he smiled. "I need to give my report about the rescue. Stay here. The healers will be with you as soon as they can."

When she nodded, he turned away. Pickerton usually waited for Caleb to come to him with his report, but this mission had been a priority, and Miles felt personally responsible for its outcome, good or bad.

Melinda looked down at her feet, too tired to do anything but struggle to keep her eyes open. She hadn't slept in two days; hadn't eaten in more days than she could remember. Food had been scarce and everything she had managed to scavenge went to the children. Clean water had become a real concern during their last days in the old church. Sickness had begun to set in among the children and she had been unwilling to use magic to try to relieve their suffering. She'd managed to pick up a few muggle cold remedies from a store that had been looted, but she was unsure of their use. The instructions on the packaging had been simple enough, but she'd had no experience with muggle drugs and their effects.

The use of a few, simple spells would have gone a long way in keeping the children healthy, but her husband, Michael, had warned her not to use her wand the last time he had left them. He had told her that Voldemort's forces were tracking the use of magic, and he had watched, helpless, as a group of Death Eaters had killed an entire family, five souls, who were doing nothing more than using a slicing hex to open tins of food.

He had been searching for a way out of England as soon as it had become obvious that Voldemort had taken control. They could have left earlier of course, but the staff at Mother Wilma's had fled, leaving the children behind. Melinda wouldn't leave them to fend for themselves, and Michael, an Auror, had refused to leave her.

But he hadn't returned for six days. Then, three days ago, while she was out scavenging for food, she had found him. Every time she closed her eyes, she still saw her husband's broken, battered body lying in a dirty ally next to a muggle restaurant. Beside him she had found a bag with a bit of food and two small bottles of apple juice that he'd managed to collect.

When the tears started, she brushed them away angrily. Michael was dead and there was nothing she could do about it.

"Exhaustion," a crisp voice said. "We're seeing a lot of that in this group."

Melinda jerked around in her chair and watched, bemused, as a medi-witch walked towards her, holding a wand. She had gray hair, caring eyes, and a no-nonsense approach to patient care that Melinda appreciated.

"Dehydration and in need of food as well, I see," the woman said, smiling kindly. "You've had a time of it, haven't you, my dear? Well, we'll get you fixed up, don't you worry." Reaching into the pockets of her robe, she pulled out two syringes and two bottles. "We'll just get these into you and you'll be right as rain."

"A hydration potion, a Pepper-Up potion and a nutrient mixture. I don't recognize the second syringe, though," Melinda said, watching the older



woman work.

“Are you a medi-witch or healer, perhaps?”

“Healer.”

“Ah! Well, don't be concerned over not recognizing the second syringe, my dear. This is something we've come up with here at Haven Hospital. It's a simple immune booster potion, but we've found that it works quicker if injected.”

“Immune booster?” Melinda asked, puzzled. “Is there something wrong with my immune system?”

“It's a little worn down, dear, and you've been surrounded by children for some time, some of whom are sick. Bless them, they're usually the first to catch a cold, and not particular in who they pass it to.”

Melinda huffed a laugh as the medi-witch injected the immune booster and stood up.

“The children should be released shortly, then you can all leave,” the kindly witch said, patting Melinda on the leg. “You just sit here and rest.”

When she bustled away, Melinda frowned. As the Pepper-Up worked its way through her system once more, her foggy mind began to clear. She had seen the children to safety, but wasn't sure what to do next. As a Healer, she could tend to their injuries, but she and Michael had never had children of their own.

*They'll need a home. Someplace they can feel safe in. And food, they'll need food. And most of them need more clothes...* Her thoughts trailed off as the magnitude of what still needed to be done for the children sank in. As panic began to well up within her, she shoved it aside. If she could find Auror Newman, he might help her.

She gazed around the room, looking for him. Across from her sat two women. The younger of the two had a nasty cut on her hand, currently being healed by the same medi-witch who'd seen to her own treatment. The older woman watched, her eyes wide, as the cut was sealed and the skin around it cleaned.

Looking towards the door they'd taken a little Linda through, Melinda saw that she had been treated and was coming towards her looking confused. The other children approached her with varying expressions of wonder, exhaustion, bewilderment and relief. Once she had gathered them around her, making sure they were seated and as comfortable as possible, she looked around once more.

Thirty feet or so down the hall, she finally spotted Auror Newman. He was leaning towards a rather distinguished looking gray haired man, obviously trying not to be overheard by those who passed close to them. As she watched, a frown playing over her features, he turned in her direction and pointed. The gray haired man looked at her, nodded and began to walk towards her, Newman in tow.

Before they could reach her, a tall, balding, redhead slipped between two healers, raised his arm and called out. “Miles! I've been looking for you.”

Auror Newman and the gray haired man stopped and waited. Once the red haired man had joined them, there was a brief, whispered conversation. Then, as one, all three turned to face her.

The man she assumed to be Miles smiled at her and closed the remaining distance between them. “Miss McKinny?” he asked.

“Mrs. McKinny, yes,” Melinda replied, standing. “And you must be Miles.” When he frowned, she flickered her eyes to the redhead, who shrugged and straightened his glasses.

The man sighed. “Yes, I'm Miles Pickerton, Minister of Defense here in Haven.”

“Minister of...what? I thought the Ministry had fallen?” she asked, puzzled.

“The building, yes. But the Ministry's been reformed here in Haven under Minister Bones.”

“I see,” she replied, thinking she was really much too tired to be dealing with politics. “So, is there something I can do for you, Minister?”

“It's more in the manner of what we can do for you, Mrs. McKinny,” the redhead said quietly.

When her gaze swung to him, Miles cleared his throat. “This is Arthur Weasley, ma'am. He's the Minister for Magical Relations.”

“I see,” she repeated, although she really didn't. She didn't like politics, and currently had the headache to prove it.

“Yes, well, we've been discussing what to do with you and your children,” Arthur told her.

“My children? Oh, you mean the kids from Mother Wilma's.”

“Yes. We've set up the community kitchen, you see.” At her blank look, he tried again. “We weren't really expecting you, you understand. And as there are a great number of you, we needed to find some place to put you, at least until something better can be found. We'll provide you all with cots and blankets, and you can sleep in the community kitchen.” Arthur just managed not to grimace, but barely. He was bungling this, and he knew it. Something about the woman's direct, green-eyed gaze had his tongue tied in knots.

“The community kitchen?” she asked. “Well, I suppose it's safer than the church...”

What's this? The kitchen? Out of the question!" a voice called out, sounding appalled.

Melinda peeked around Auror Newman and saw the woman sitting across from her stand up and bustle towards them.

Miles grimaced, then turned with a smile. "Mrs. Johansen, so nice to see you."

The woman waved her hand, as though brushing that away. "You cannot put these children in the community kitchen, Minister or no! Men, you all are the same! These babies need a home, love, and good food! Community kitchen? Hrumph!"

"It was only a temporary solution, Mrs. Johansen," Miles replied, backing away from the short, round woman.

"It is no solution," she told him, tipping her head back to meet his eyes. When he looked away from her, she turned towards the children. "Ah, what beautiful babies. There will be no kitchen for you, my darlings. No! You come with me now. Mama will take care of you all. Come." She clapped her hands together twice, picked up two of the youngest children and, with the others following closely, bustled down the hall and out of the hospital.

The younger woman, her cut healed, shrugged when everyone turned towards her.

"Mama loves children," she told them simply, almost apologetically. "And while you may have had other ideas, now that she has them, you won't take them from her without a fight."

"That's all right, Inga," Miles said tiredly. "If the three she's raised are any example, she's just what those children need right now."

Inga blushed prettily, dipped her head quickly, acknowledging the compliment, and then hurried after her mother.

Into the silence that followed, Arthur turned to Miles and smiled broadly. "I think that went rather well, don't you?"

Miles rolled his eyes. "All right, now that the children have been taken care of, we need to send a message to Harry, Caleb. Mrs. McKinny, it was nice to meet you."

As the two men walked away, Arthur cleared his throat. "If you'll follow me, Mrs. McKinny? I'll help you get settled. There's an empty cottage nearby you can use. It would have been too small with all the children, but it should do you fine."

"Thank you, Minister."

"Oh, no, we're not that formal around here. My name is Arthur."

"Arthur, then. Thank you. I'm Melinda." When he simply stood and looked her, she raised an eyebrow. "I believe you mentioned something about a cottage, Arthur?"

"What? Oh, yes, the cottage." He blushed furiously. "If you'll just follow me?" At her nod, he led her from the hospital feeling like a bumbling teenager.

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## Padfoot Manor...

Harry sat at the desk in his study reading Cathal's journal. At least that was what he tried to tell himself he was doing. He had retreated to his study after dinner and tried to keep himself busy. It wasn't working. He was too worried about the mission to rescue the children from Mother Wilma's home.

The knowledge that the orphans had been left behind by accident angered him greatly, but as he had explained earlier, yelling about it wouldn't solve the problem.

At a nearby table, Hermione sat quietly with Emma and Dan, talking about magical theory.

He glanced up at the clock. The mission had been scheduled to leave at twenty hundred and it was now twenty thirty. If all went well, they should have portkeyed to the hospital a few minutes ago.

Harry stood and paced in front of his window. He could see the hospital in the distance, but that was of no help. He thought about heading over there to see if there was news, but he didn't. He remembered the conversation he'd had with Miles this morning.

*"If I might make a suggestion, Harry?" asked Miles.*

*"Of course you can. You know I value your advice," replied Harry.*

*"What you've done this morning is exactly what a leader is supposed to do. You've pointed out several uses for the elves and assigned people to get the job done. Now the trick is for you to avoid the SOTSS."*

*"SOTSS?"*

*"Yes. I call it 'Sitting On The Shoulder Syndrome' or SOTSS for short. It's when a leader gets so involved that he tries to run every aspect of an operation, when he can't possibly do so. Pick your people and let them run with the jobs you give them. They will respect you for it, and deliver*

*What you ask of them," Miles said quietly.*

"SOTSS. It's harder than it sounds." Harry sighed and stared out the window at the building lit up in the distance. He stood close enough that his breath fogged the window pane.

There was a popping noise behind him. He spun around quickly to see an unknown elf snap off a salute. He blinked, surprise, and then returned the salute.

"Dispatch from Commander Pickerton and Leftenant Black, Sir!" snapped the elf, offered him a piece of parchment.

Harry shot a poisonous glance at Dan, who snickered, before he took the message from the elf. Scanning it briefly, he scribbled a reply on the back of the message before giving it back to the elf. "Return this to... er... Commander Pickerton," Harry said, privately wondering if Miles gave himself that rank or if it had been the elf's doing.

"Sir!" said the elf, and then he promptly vanished.

Harry turned back to the window, leaned his head against the cool glass and closed his eyes. He whispered silent thanks as he felt the tension draining from his body.

"Harry?" asked Hermione.

"They got them all out safe. Everyone's back, everyone's safe," he said quietly.

Hermione glanced at her parents who smiled broadly at the news. She stood, quickly walked to Harry and wrapped her arms around him from behind. He turned in her embrace and wrapped his own arms around her. He could handle going into danger, but sending others was a feeling he hated and he knew it was something he would have to get used to.

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### **Padfoot Manor Kitchen early morning (May 1st)...**

Hermione padded into the kitchen of the Manor house in search of a cup of soothing tea to help her go back to sleep. Harry's conversation with her and Remus about the Rite of Summoning had stirred some deep feeling in her. She had always assumed that when she fell in love with a man, she'd pick someone who shared her faith. It wasn't a case of Harry not sharing her faith as much as it was a case of him simply not knowing enough about any faith, let alone hers. And that left her with a bit of a moral dilemma.

She could tell Harry about her own faith and perhaps bring him into the fold, or she could expose him to tenets of many faiths and let him decide. The thought that he might not pick any faith never really crossed her mind. Nor did the concept of giving him up over something like religion. But it was an important issue to her and one that she needed to explore with him. His moral viewpoint was decidedly honorable and Christian in nature, even if he didn't think of himself as a Christian.

She stopped and shook her head. It never ceased to amaze her what thoughts popped up in her mind when she was tired. She rarely allowed her mind to wander. Her mind was, in her opinion, her greatest asset, despite Harry's comments about her body. She moved into the kitchen and paused when she heard a sound coming from behind one of the counters.

Hermione walked around the counter and was shocked to see Winky the house elf sitting on the floor, weeping softly. She knelt next to the elf and placed a hand on her shoulder. Winky jumped and spun around to face her. As soon as she saw who it was, the little elf began to back away.

"Winky? Are you alright? Why are you crying? Has someone made you unhappy?" asked Hermione in a worried tone.

"Winky sorry for disturbing Mistress," Winky said, her eyes huge. Enormous tears dropped from her eyes, leaving small puddles on the floor.

"Winky, don't be afraid of me, please. I want to help you."

"Mistress can't help Winky. Winky is doomed elf."

"Doomed? How are you doomed? Has someone threatened you?" Hermione asked, beginning to get angry.

"No, Mistress. Other elves tell Winky the truth about being employed by Master Harry. Winky is unowned and will go insane!" wailed the little elf.

Hermione's anger flared at hearing the news. She knew that now that Winky had been told, she stood a real chance of insanity. Hermione made a decision that some would call spur of the moment, others would call insane. But those who truly knew her would call it a 'Hermione moment'.

"Winky, stop that. If Master Harry won't accept your bond then I'll accept it myself!"

Without realizing it, Hermione had, in one blinding moment of compassion, derailed SPEW now and forever.

Winky looked up at Hermione in shock. "Mistress would do this for Winky?"

Hermione nodded, trying to reassure the little elf. She felt a subtle connection and Winky looked up at her, smiling shyly.

"Sit, Mistress! Winky get you your tea!" The little elf stood up suddenly, her expression joyous.

Hermione let the little elf seat her at a nearby table as the magnitude of what she had just done began to sink in. Later, after a hurried cup of tea, she practically flew up the stairs to their bedroom. She climbed onto the bed and poked Harry in the shoulder.

“Harry!”

“Mmmph,” he said, rolling over.

“Harry! I can’t believe what I’ve done! Oh, how could I?”

Harry rolled over to face her and opened one eye. “Hermione, it’s not time for potions class yet. Let me sleep.”

She shook him when his eyes closed again. “Harry, it’s important!” she said.

He cracked his eye open again. “Honestly, Hermione, I did not look at Susan in her bikini last summer.”

Hermione blinked, then her expression changed. With a single heave, she pushed Harry out of the bed. He fell with a loud thump, tangled in the blankets. Ten seconds passed, a half minute, then finally Harry poked his head over the edge of the bed.

“Hermione? Why am I on the floor?”

“You fell out of bed, Harry. But that’s not important! You won’t believe what I’ve just done,” she said. Her eyes starting to tear up.

Harry stood and pulled the blankets up with him. Throwing them on the bed, he followed them down, wondering if he could get back to sleep. “All right, what happened?” he asked.

“I let Winky bond with me!” Hermione said, then her tears started.

He wrapped his arms around her and fought to control the mad giggles that threatened to escape. *There goes SPEW*, he thought, cackling mentally.

“Hermione, slavery is a state of mind. Let Winky work for you, be her friend. She’ll help you and, in the long run, you’ll understand elves better because of it,” he whispered in her ear.

She pulled away enough to look into his eyes and she could see the laughter bubbling up behind his gaze. Her lips twitched and then she laughed weakly.

Harry held her close and they eventually drifted off to sleep.

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## The Dragon Preserve, Romania...

Charlie Weasley helped himself to some of the buffet breakfast in the community kitchen maintained by the preserve. As a bachelor, eating in the kitchen was a luxury he rarely missed out on. It was a much quieter and more subdued group of handlers these days. They came from all over the world to work and study at the preserve, but there had been a more than a few from England.

Charlie sighed and wished for word, any word, from his family. He had not heard from his mother or father for three weeks and the fear was gnawing at him. He looked up in surprise when the large international delivery owl swooped down and landed in front of him, offering him a sealed parchment. He was surprised to see the letter had come from a letter drop at the Irish Ministry of Magic.

With trembling hands, he broke the seal and began to read.

*Dear Charlie,  
If you’ve been listening to the news then I know you must be worried sick about us all. So let me tell you, here at the start of this letter, that Dad, Bill, Fred, George and I are safe and no longer in England. Ronald is missing and we’re pretty sure he is dead; killed by Acromantulas while he was attacking another student.*

*Mum is also missing and no one has heard from her. She dropped out of sight right around the time of the change of government. I’m afraid the break between her and Dad was quite bitter and, as a result, we lost contact with her.*

*As I said at the start of this letter, we’re safe, but we’re hurting and need you, dear Charlie. This has been a terrible year for our family, for our country, and right now we need you. We’re in Ireland. I won’t say where, but if you come to Cork and contact either Dad or me via owl, we’ll come to get you. Come as soon as you can, Charlie. Our family needs you! Quit your job, take time off, do whatever you have to, but come home Charlie. We need you.*

*Love Always,  
Ginny.*

Charlie felt a hand on his shoulder and he looked up to see his boss, Matt Logan, looking down at him with sympathy in his eyes.

“Letter from home, eh?”

"Yes, sir," Charlie replied.

"I'll put you in for a leave of absence, Charlie. Nearly every one of our British handlers has done the same thing. I'm surprised you held out as long as you did."

Charlie ducked his head to hide the fact that his eyes were tearing up.

"Go pack. And don't forget to let us know how you're doing from time to time," Matt said gently.

Charlie nodded numbly, then stood and walked out of the building, heading for his quarters.

An hour later, Charlie was packed, his belonging in a rucksack slung over his shoulder, and he was apparating northeast, hitting the international apparation checkpoints as he went.

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### **Hogwarts Castle...**

Lucius entered the Great Hall and stepped carefully on the slippery surface. In the last day Voldemort had attempted to send nearly twenty of his followers to various locations around the world. He had ordered men to apparate to Paris, Rome, Milan, Barcelona, and Dublin, even to Moscow, all with the same effect. He tried Portkeying men to Cairo, New Delhi, New York and Hong Kong. He had even tried tapping into the International Floo Network. Shortly after the men vanished, they'd reappear and explode in a soundless display of gore. The Great Hall was proof of that as two Death Eaters supervised a group of muggle women struggling to clean up the mess.

"Lucius! Send word to Antonin via owl. Tell him to continue sending men to me, but save some for himself. We won't be able to mark the men he keeps for now and we seem to be unable to send any marked men off the island. Also, tell him to step up his efforts to find Harry Potter!" Voldemort said with a snarl.

Lucius bowed his head in acknowledgement, but he was beginning to get a bit worried. Privately he admitted that it seemed Harry Potter had accomplished the impossible. And he was forced to marvel at the power it must have taken. Imagine! Warding an entire country!

"I will owl Antonin immediately, my Lord," Lucius replied.

Voldemort peered up at Lucius for a minute. "Well, Lucius, you wouldn't be here if you didn't have something to report. Speak!"

"My Lord, the guards inform me that the spy, Snape, has asked for you. When I spoke to him, he told me that he has run into a problem with the ritual he had been researching. To be honest, my Lord, potion making was never my best subject, so I am unable to judge the validity of this excuse. I do think you should talk to him since you are a master of the subject."

Voldemort sat back in his chair, looking thoughtful. "Very well. I will see the spy when I have the chance."

Lucius bowed and retreated to the door.

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### **Ballincollig, County Cork, Ireland...**

Albus Dumbledore was confused. For several days the muggle television in his rented room had broadcast what they called the 'British Crisis', and then the news had dried up. The news continued for another day or two, reporting mostly on speculation and wild stories. Even Dumbledore laughed when one reporter announced that satellite photos had shown dinosaurs in Hyde Park.

He wasn't sure what a satellite was, but he was sure that it couldn't be working properly if it was seeing dinosaurs. The sudden loss of interest by the Muggle media puzzled him until he realized that the Magical Governments must be controlling the media like they did during the last Muggle world war.

He had visited Stonewall Lane once to go to Gringotts and then to pick up some supplies. His room now contained several detectors keyed to the magical signature of Harry Potter, as well as a few keyed to Hermione Granger. He had one detector that was extremely limited in range, but that detector, unlike the others, would provide apparation coordinates.

The detectors were crude. They would basically point in a direction and that was it. He didn't have the time, or the supplies, to make anything more sophisticated. He hoped he'd be able to use the crude detectors until he got close enough to use the one which gave him coordinates.

Several times over the last few days his local detector chimed, letting him know that another witch or wizard was in the area, but the signal never lasted long. Albus figured it was just part of the local Wizarding population.

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### **A New Home...**

Mama! Mama, where are you?" Helga cried, as the front door of the house slammed shut. Dodging around children and sleeping bags, she ran into the kitchen, Inga hot on her heels.

"Helga, what's gotten into you, girl? We do not slam doors," Olga Johansen scolded. "And Inga, you should know better than to run in the house."

"But mama, you must come see," Inga said, as Helga grabbed her mother's arm and pulled.

"See what?"

The front door slammed shut once more and Olga rolled her eyes.

"Mama, where are you?" Sven called out, making a beeline for the kitchen. "You must come see."

Upon entering the kitchen, he skidded to a halt and grinned, seeing Helga trying to tug her mother towards the front door as Inga danced from foot to foot.

"Come now," he said, grabbing Olga's other arm and helping Helga drag her to the door. "I spoke with Mr. Lupin today and you must come see."

"See what?" Olga burst out. "And what about the babies? I can't leave them here alone!"

"Yes. I mean no, no we won't. Come children! All of you follow me now," Sven said, the excitement obvious in his voice.

Throwing the door open, Papa Johansen dragged his wife from the house, his newly enlarged family following behind, many looking bewildered. They walked just outside the town of Haven as Papa continued to rave. As they rounded a small bend and the trees gave way, they spotted a large group of what looked to be children putting blue shutters on a newly built three-story farmhouse.

"Children?" Olga asked, horrified. "They make children build houses?" She jerked out of her husband's grasp and glared at him. "Sven Johansen, how could you?"

"Not children," Inga said, laughing merrily. "You know Papa would not allow that. They're house elves, Mama!"

"House elves? The creatures Johan told us about, from Hogwarts?"

"Yes, Olga," Sven said. "The very creatures. As I said, I spoke with Mr. Lupin today and he told me about this house. Since we've taken in the children, Mr. Lupin has ordered this house build, on Mr. Potter's orders if I understand correctly. The house, it is already furnished. He, Mr. Potter that is, wants to make sure we have all we need to care for the children, you see."

Olga's eyes widened and she looked first at her husband, then at the lovely new house. "Oh, Sven, how wonderful!" She spun quickly then and clapped her hands twice. "Children, our family has a new home. There will be no more sleeping on the floor, no more sleeping bags." As the kids stared at the new house with wide eyes, she bustled about giving out hugs and kisses indiscriminately.

Sven took the hand of one young girl and led the way to their new home. Inga and Helga followed suit, each taking the hand of a child and chasing after their father.

"Oh, how wonderful," Olga repeated, her eyes damp. When a small hand crept into hers, she looked down and smiled at the young boy. "Come, my dear Robert. Let us go home." When he smiled up at her, his eyes bright, she laughed. "Now children, don't forget to thank the nice house elves..."

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### **Author's Notes:**

First, Bob and I are sorry about the delay in this chapter. Bob is having some problems with Word, and I've been sick. Now, on to the questions.

True, the Outcasts aren't spending as much time together as they did at Hogwarts. But then again, they all have jobs to do now. They will come together again over time

Is Snape going to die? Patience, Grasshopper, all will be revealed in time!

This is going to be a two-part story. We're not sure we have the energy for a trilogy!

Remus was serious about the amount of money Harry has. If you think you're shocked, you should have seen poor Hermione! Bob almost gave her mouth-to-mouth...lecher that he is! Besides, Kinsfire beat him too it! (For those of you who don't understand that joke, go read Kinsfire's stories and join his Yahoo group)

Don't worry about Hermione and the house elves. As you can see by this chapter, she's about to learn a great deal about them and the bond between elf and mistress!

How much time do we spend writing? I'm not sure. We write several hours a day, but we've never timed it.

Mrs. Weasley is now Ms. Prewett, and you'll find out more about Molly's whereabouts in the next chapter.

Just to clear this up before folks start the "But, but, but..." routine. Dumbledore left Britain before Harry's barrier went up. Would he have been able to cross it? Interesting question...and one we're not going to answer :p

A reviewer asked: "Do you just kill random people, or is there certain people who die for like, a reason?" Answer: We don't kill randomly. We kill people for, like, a reason. But let's be serious here. This is war, and thousands have died, or will die, before it's over. However, when we mention someone by name, and then kill them, we have a reason for it. Maybe we don't like them, maybe they were annoying us, maybe we just got tired of writing about them, or maybe they left us a bad review. In any case, there's always a reason for our madness... :D

The press conference will happen in chapter three.

Freezing in Provo, are you? It's 16 degrees here in Northern Idaho and dropping rapidly!

No, we're not published writers. And though we've thought about writing an original story, we keep getting attacked by Harry Potter plot bunnies. I swear the damn things are rabid.

I asked Bob about the Pet Peeves, but he growled at me. I'm not sure if that means you'll be getting more or not. I'm usually pretty good at translating his grunts and growls, but that one was beyond me :D Actually, he's run out of Peeves and doesn't want to repeat himself. He's asked me to tell you that he's willing to consider candidate Peeves over on our Yahoo group, but you'll have to include an example of what it is you're Peeved about.

Bob says there will be no shedding of tears over your willies! ~Blinks~ Robert, that was disgusting! I can't believe you made me type that! ~Huffs~

England, Scotland, Wales = Britain. Yes, we've got it. Now, could someone please remove the boot from my arse? It makes it rather painful to sit down. ~Winces~ And yes, we know the good folks of Wales are probably not pleased with us. However, as we've not heard from them, we pretend that they are, so there :p

Voldemort's lost the war already? Damn, maybe we should just stop writing :p Okay, so it's no secret that Voldemort's going to lose, but don't you want to know HOW?

A review said: "I just hope you do not derail as the story progresses." Well, now you all know whom to tar and feather if we do! Derail? Come one, what are we? Amtrak?

Do we intend to deal with the other magical creatures left behind in Britain? No. As Harry is quickly discovering, you can't save everyone.

We have one reviewer requesting a cliffy. Ya'll can look over the reviews to find who that is and yell at him when we give you one.

Voldemort is a bit more willing to put up with Lucius' lack of subservient behavior now that he's lost Wormtail and so many other servants. After all, what's a Dark Lord without servants? But he'll only let it go so far before he reminds Lucius of just who's in charge.

Yes, you can download the files if you want. We won't be converting them to PDF files, but you can save them as HTML and read them offline.

Well, that's it, folks. The next chapter of Sunrise should be out shortly. Again, we're sorry about the delay. We hope you enjoyed chapter two!

~Bob and Alyx~

*Bobmin*  
*FanficAuthors.net*



# Sunrise Over Britain

## Chapter 3 - Weasleys Woes

### Standard Disclaimer:

The curtain opened to reveal an empty stage with a white backdrop. From the left wing entered Hermione Granger, Harry Potter and Severus Snape. Snape was being forced, at wand point to the center of the stage.

Harry poked the Snape in the head with his wand.

"Say the words Snape," Harry hissed angrily.

"That's *Professor* Snape, Harry," Hermione said seriously. Harry shot her a glare, then nodded reluctantly.

"Say the words, *Professor* Snape," Harry said to appease his primary source of nookie in this story.

Severus Snape, Potions master, Spy and all around winner of Witch Weeklys Git of the Year for the past eight years running, grimaced.

"The people writing this story... ahem they think they are authors, but I know they are simple Rowling wannabes. Anyway the losers typing this stuff insist that I tell you they make no claim to any sort of ownership to Harry Potter or the characters created by JK Rowling. There, now I've said it. Can I go now?" asked Snape in a whiny voice.

"No. Kneel!" snarled Hermione.

Snape blinked in surprise and fell to his knees. From the right wing two people walked onto the stage and walked over to Harry, Hermione and Snape.

Harry and Hermione exchanged a startled glance and quickly covered their ears as Alanis Morrissette opened her mouth and roared. Snape's head exploded in a fountain of gore, blood and bone.

God giggled and started to skip around the stage while Metatron looked down at the mess that was his outfit.

"OH Really! Was that necessary? He whined to God.

Hermione snickered and waved her wand cleaning Metatron's clothing. He shot her a grateful look and followed God off the stage.

"Did you notice that metatron looked a lot like snape?" asked Bob.

"I'm not going to answer that question," grumbled Alyx.

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### Sunrise over Britain

#### Chapter 3

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#### Haven, Ireland (May 1st, mid morning)...

Melinda McKinny's eyes popped open as the banging on the front door of the cottage finally penetrated. She glanced at the window and groaned. Morning had apparently arrived and she wasn't well pleased by that fact. Her head felt as though it had been stuffed with cotton and her eyes felt as though someone had dumped a beach's worth of sand in them.

Rolling out of bed, she grimaced when she realized she'd fallen asleep in her clothes. Not that she'd had much choice, she reminded herself. It wasn't as if she'd packed for a holiday. Trying to tame her unruly hair, she shuffled towards the front door with the vague thought of searing the ears of whoever decided it was time for her to wake up.

Grasping the knob and jerking the door open, she opened her mouth to begin her rant, but paused. Before her stood a short, round woman who looked somewhat familiar. With a frown, she raised one questioning eyebrow and croaked, "Yes?"

"You're awake! Poor dear, you really should get more rest," the woman before her exclaimed, her eyes bright.

"Ahh, well..."

"I'm not sure if you remember me. You were rather dazed last night, but that doesn't matter. Sleep will help clear the cobwebs. Now, my name is Olga Johansen..."

"You're the woman who took in the children," Melinda blurted as the memories from the night before snapped into focus.

Olga beamed. "Yes! Poor babies! But don't you worry. They're settling in nicely, they are. We were a little crowded last night, but we managed. And now that nice Mr. Lupin has had a house built for us all. Oh, such a beautiful house!"

"No, mama. Harry Potter had the house built," a young woman Melinda hadn't noticed before said.

Looking around Olga, Melinda spotted the girl...and her twin...standing a few feet behind their mother. Their arms were loaded with what looked to be clothing. And now that she was awake enough to notice such details, she realized that Mrs. Johansen's arms were also full.

Seeing the direction of her gaze, Olga introduced her two daughters. "We know you didn't have time to think about such things last night, but we're here to help you get settled in. We've brought you some clothing I think may do for now, and some food. You need to eat, girl. Much to skinny," Olga proclaimed, gently pushing her way into the cottage. "Helga, Inga, put those clothes in the bedroom for Mrs. McKinny to go through later. You dear," she continued, turning to face Melinda with a smile, "can show me where to put the food and such. Oh, what a lovely cottage!"

As Mrs. Johansen continued to prattle on, Melinda shook her head, a bit dazed. She was dumbfounded by this woman's generosity. And if she was also a little pushy, who was she to complain? Running a hand through her disheveled hair, she followed Olga into the kitchen. When she was pushed into a chair and told to rest, she didn't resist.

"How are the children?" she asked, as the older woman paused to take a breath.

"Oh, such sweet babies! It will take some time, yes? The poor dears have had it rough, as have you, girl. But do not be worrying. Haven is a safe place, and the children are loved and cared for. Oh, Sven and I love children..."

Melinda could only shake her head as the woman continued to speak about the children and how happy she was to have them with her. With the food stuffs put away, Olga began pulling pots and pans out of another bag and putting them away. Once done, she began to fix breakfast, explaining that Melinda had missed the meal served at the community kitchen and what a shame that was, since she obviously need several good meals to fatten her up.

Melinda leaned back in her chair and did the only thing she could. She began to grin, then to chuckle.

Hearing the sound, Olga turned and beamed at her. "Ah, there it is! I knew laughter lurked in you somewhere, girl. No one so young can be that serious all the time. Oh, good! Helga, Inga, help me with the breakfast. Mrs. McKinny needs a good meal to start the day."

"It's Melinda, and I don't know how to thank you, all of you." Melinda smiled at the Johansen women and watched as all three flushed in pleasure.

"Then you must call me Olga. And there is no need for thanks. We are a community now. We take care of our own, yes? But tell me, if you are Mrs. McKinny, where is your Mr. McKinny?" Olga frowned when she saw the flash of pain in Melinda's eyes. "Ah, I see. Inga, Helga? Go on home now and find out if Papa has started planting the land Mr. Potter has given him."

"Yes, mama," the twins replied.

Only after the front door had closed did Olga go to Melinda. Sitting beside the younger woman, she took her hands and gave them a gentle squeeze. "You are grieving for your husband, yes?"

When Melinda nodded jerkily, her eyes beginning to fill with tears, Olga own eyes blurred. "Oh, my girl," she exclaimed softly, her heart aching for her loss. Gathering her close, she rocked Melinda slowly, letting her cry. "It is best to mourn those who have been taken from us. They deserve that much from us, and so much more. Poor dear."

"I found him," Melinda said, her voice muffled against Olga's shoulder and her body shuddering at the memory. "He'd been out trying to find food and water for the children. The Death Eaters must have caught him. He was lying in a filthy ally, the food he'd managed to collect beside him. Oh, Gods! I had to bury my husband!" She tightened her grip around the older woman's sturdy frame and let the anguish wash over her.

As the girl sobbed out her heartache, Olga could only imagine her grief and horror. Sven was by no means a perfect man, but he was a perfect husband, or near enough. She could not imagine life without him.

Many long minutes had passed before Melinda was able to pull herself together enough to release Olga and sit back. She smiled weakly when the older woman produced a handkerchief and gave it to her. "Thank you," she whispered, her voice gone hoarse.

"You needed this, yes? Denying our emotions only makes us feel worse. The horror of what you have gone through will be with you for a long time, my girl. But you need to speak of such things, share them with others. Many here have stories like yours and can help you, if you'll let them. In time, you will come to celebrate his life, rather than mourn his death, yes? Life is like this. Your husband was a good and brave man. Keep his memory close to your heart, my dear, but never forget that you are still alive, as he would have wanted, and that you have much to offer those around you, hmm?" She patted Melinda's hand and smiled.

"Now, a meal to fuel the body and mind! And some tea, yes?" Olga stood, brushed the hair back from Melinda's face and kissed her forehead. "Life will get better, girl. Just give it a chance. Oh, do you like eggs? Scrambled eggs with toast will be filling..."

As Mrs. Johansen bustled back to the stove to begin the meal, Melinda took a deep breath and realized she felt a bit lighter. Perhaps Olga had the right of it. Speaking about Michael had helped.

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### **Padfoot Manor, Lunchtime (May 1st)...**

Harry looked at Remus, Tonks, Dan and Emma and smiled. He had sent Hermione on an errand earlier and expected her to be out of the Manor house for several hours.

"Dan, Emma...", Harry began hesitantly. "I'd like to talk to you both about Hermione."

Emma placed a restraining hand on Dan and studied Harry for a moment. "What would you like to talk about, dear?"

Harry looked down at the table for a moment. Why was this suddenly so damn hard to do?

"We... that is I..." Harry began, then he stopped and glared at Remus and Tonks, who were both chuckling at his discomfort.

He drew himself up to his full height and faced his girlfriend's parents, ignoring the chuckling duo. "I love your daughter and I mean to ask her to marry me. I know we're well past the age of a man asking for permission, but I would like your blessing and your help," he said in a rush.

Dan looked at Harry, a bit disappointed. Then, reaching into his pocket, he pulled out a ten pound note and handed it to Emma, who accepted it smugly.

"Harry dear, I don't understand why you need our help. It's up to you to ask Hermione. I dare say my husband and I approve whole heartedly, but it's still your job to ask her," Emma said with a smile.

"Oh, I know, Mrs. Granger," Harry replied, suddenly very nervous again. "My problem isn't with asking her, it's with picking out the ring. You see, I had hoped my parent's rings might have been put in my vault, so I asked the Goblins to remove all possible wedding and engagement rings from the vaults, check them for curses and send them to me."

Harry held up a hefty little bag. "This contains nearly fifty engagement rings, some of which look to be hundreds of years old...maybe older. Unfortunately, my parents rings weren't included."

"No, they wouldn't be. James and Lils were buried with their rings, Harry. I'm sorry. No one thought that someday you might want them," Remus offered softly.

"It's alright, Remus. I wanted to have the option open to me, and having their rings would have been a nice keepsake, but they should have kept them. It's fitting," he said softly.

With a mental shake, Harry opened the draw string and up ended the bag of rings onto the table. Then he looked at Emma. "What I need is help figuring out which one I should offer her. Or which ones would she like to choose from. Should I offer her one, or give her a choice?"

Dan's eyes widened as he looked over the pile of rings. Some contained modest stones in classical settings, others were monstrous, garish settings with stones as big as ice cubes.

Dan and Remus were in favor of Harry picking one ring and offering it to Hermione. Harry was undecided about the issue, but thought a choice was important, and both Tonks and Emma agreed with him. Between them, Harry winnowed the choice of rings down to the ten rings Emma said she liked. She and Tonks then conferred for a bit longer before agreeing on the selection. Harry nodded in relief, then placed the ten rings into a special bag. The others he gave to Dobby, who would see they got returned to his vault in Gringotts.

He placed the rings in his pocket for later and stood to leave when a thought occurred to him. "Remus, when this mess is over and we can go home, I want you to show me where my parents are buried. I think it's well past the time when I should be allowed to meet them."

"I'm sorry, Harry. I should have taken you last summer," Remus replied.

Harry smiled at him. "No, it's alright Remus. We had a lot to worry about and my parents would have understood. Besides, I like to think they're watching you and Tonks both. Happy and pleased... Sirius too." He then slipped quietly from the room.

Remus blinked in surprise and Tonks started to sniffle. Even Emma looked misty eyed.

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Haven School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, Library...

Hermione looked up at what she was quickly coming to consider her library. The architects had done a wonderful job in making it. It was warm and inviting while still maintaining an air as a place of learning and reading.

She was looking up Dementors and their history. Harry was right about one thing. Something wasn't quite right about Dementors. They just appeared on the scene some two thousand or more years ago. There was no record of them prior to that.

Flipping open a book, she began taking notes. The first reference to Dementors came from an account written by Tacitus, the Roman historian who witnessed the uprising of Britain's first female hero, Boudicca, in sixty A.D..

...Meanwhile, without any evident cause, the statue of Victory at Camulodunum fell prostrate and turned its back to the enemy, as though it fled before them. Women excited to frenzy prophesied impending destruction; ravings in a strange tongue, it was said, were heard in their Senate-house; their theatre resounded with wailings, and in the estuary of the Tamesa had been seen the appearance of an overthrown town; even the ocean had worn the aspect of blood, and, when the tide ebbed, there had been left the likenesses of human forms, marvels interpreted by the Britons, as hopeful, by the veterans, as alarming. But as Suetonius was far away, they implored aid from the procurator, Catus Decianus. All he did was to send two hundred men, and no more, without regular arms, and there was in the place but a small military force. Trusting to the protection of the temple, hindered too by secret accomplices in the revolt, who embarrassed their plans, they had constructed neither fosse nor rampart; nor had they removed their old men and women, leaving their youth alone to face the foe. Surprised, as it were, in the midst of peace, they were surrounded by an immense host of the barbarians. All else was plundered or fired in the onslaught; the temple where the soldiers had assembled, was stormed

after a two days' siege. During the siege, Boudicca did curse those within calling down the wrath of her pagan gods. The victorious enemy met Petilius Cerialis, commander of the ninth legion, as he was coming to the rescue, routed his troops, and destroyed all his infantry by means of a strange cloaked pestilence that brought men low in their prime. Cerialis escaped with some cavalry...

Hermione paused and looked up from her notes, her expression thoughtful. Boudicca was an Icenic queen and Druid priestess. That meant, if Hermione had done her research properly, that she was a witch of considerable power. Her daughters had been raped and she had been scourged by the Romans, despite being allied to them and, as a result, had raised an army in rebellion against Rome. If Boudicca had cursed the Romans defending the town, then it was possible that she had somehow created the dementors, using magic known to the druids of the time.

The Patronus charm came hundreds of years later after, the Wizarding world learned enough about the dementors. Druid magic was lost not long after Boudicca's rebellion was put down, as Christianity followed on the heels of the Roman invasion.

Hermione turned back to her notes and reached for another book from the pile she had built around herself.

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International Apparation Point, Calais, France...

Charlie appeared in the small building used by the French Ministry of Magic as an apparation control point for international travel. Wizards entering or leaving the country were required by law to stop and check with customs before continuing on with their journey.

Charlie reached for his British passport and handed them to the clerk.

"Bon jour," said the bored clerk flipping through the passport.

"Hello"

The clerk looked up at Charlie. "Destination?" he asked sharply in response to Charlie's accent.

Charlie sighed. "I'm not sure. I have family still in England, but most are in Ireland."

"Monsieur, if you go on to England, you may not be allowed to leave again. We have reports of Wizards and Witches being sent to camps. We cannot be held responsible for you if you run into trouble, nor will anyone come to your assistance."

Charlie nodded, then looked shocked as the clerk pulled him aside.

"Monsieur, if you must do this, then do not use magic. We know the Dark Lord's men are tracking people who use their magic. Avoid popular spots like Hogsmeade, Diagon Alley and the key apparation points. If you find your family, take them and get out right away."

The man then pressed a small key into his hand. "This is an emergency portkey back to the apparation point here in Calais. I have to tell you that no one that we've given these to has managed to use it as yet. I, myself, have seen twenty Britons looking for family and none have returned once they left this place."

Charlie accepted the key gratefully. "I have to try, they are my family."

"Yes, I understand, my friend. All I can tell you is to be careful. It is not safe," replied the clerk.

Something about the man's attitude made Charlie uneasy. He could have apparated directly to the Burrow, but opted for a two hop jump instead. Normally, in better times, it would have been a two hop jump anyway, first to Dover and the international customs point there, then to the Burrow. Charlie decided to make a detour. He would go to Hythe first, then on to the Burrow. He had once dated a muggle girl who lived in Hythe, so apparating there would not cause a problem.

He took his passport back from the clerk and shouldered his rucksack again. With a nod to the clerk, Charlie vanished with a loud pop.

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Haven Operations Center, Planning Office...

Miles looked up and smiled as Caleb entered the office, followed a moment later by Draco and Toby.

"Gentlemen!" Miles said, waving them to seats. Toby looked at Miles in surprise when he spotted a chair tailored to his size.

Miles waved a slip of parchment in front of the three of them. "First off, Kudos to both the human and elf teams last night for making the mission a success. Both Harry and Amelia are very pleased with the results and ask that you thank your teammates accordingly."

He stood then and faced them. "However, one success doesn't mean we know what we're doing. Starting tomorrow, I want to see the extraction teams and the elf teams begin practicing in joint exercises. I want the two groups to work flawlessly together!"

Miles placed both hands on his desk and leaned across it, grinning. "We got very lucky last night, very lucky indeed, and pulled off a miracle. Personally, I like it when our bosses think we can perform miracles, but we all know that only comes from training and more training. Am I clear about this?"

Caleb, Draco and Toby nodded. Caleb was used to Miles' gruff manner and he had nothing against training. Draco and Toby, on the other hand, were entirely different issues.

"Black!" barked Miles.

"Sir?" squeaked Draco, who had been visualizing a wonderful fantasy that involved Harry and a red hot poker for getting him into this mess.

"In the mornings you will work with me to train your Elves. You'll work alongside them. In the afternoons, you'll attend classes here at the center in intelligence methods and operation planning.

"Let me make myself clear, gentlemen. In a few weeks time I expect our forces will increase as the other Magical Governments start sending their troops to help us. Amelia is already working out those details with the other governments. When they arrive, I want us to shine. Is that understood?"

Caleb, Draco and Toby nodded once more.

Miles sat down again and leaned back in his chair. He had patted them on the back, then told them they would have to work harder. They were up to the challenge. He was sure of it.

"Excellent. Now let's start by critiquing last night's mission. Caleb? Why don't you go first?"

Caleb leaned forward. "Well, we need more passive equipment. Things that perform magical functions, but won't trigger the detectors. The kids were hiding out in a church and, because we couldn't see inside, I opened the door and nearly got my head blown off by Mrs. McKinny's wand. If we had something that showed where the people were in the building, it would have saved us the problem."

Miles nodded and took notes. Going over the missions like this often led to discovering the need for new equipment. He looked up from his notes to see that Draco was also taking notes as Caleb spoke. Miles nodded approvingly.

---

The Town of Hythe...

Charlie appeared in a secluded area of a park. Most of the town was hidden from view and he didn't waste any time. He reached into his pocket and threw the key the clerk had given him to the ground.

He watched the small key lying in the dirt and listened anxiously for the sound of apparating Wizards. Something about the key and the clerk who'd given it to him struck him oddly. He wasn't sure what it was, only that it was wrong. He stepped a few feet away from the key and took up position behind a tree.

He tensed and crouched with his wand out when the key made a buzzing sound for a moment and then vanished, leaving only its imprint in the dirt. He relaxed slowly as he realized the key must have been a time delayed portkey, perhaps with a stunning spell thrown into the mix. He seriously doubted that it would have returned him to France.

Stepping out from behind the tree, he visualized a spot in Ottery St. Catchpole. Given the conditions he was seeing, even from here, apparating directly home seemed like a bad idea.

He vanished with a small pop.

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Haven, Ireland...

Buckling her sandals, Melinda stood and ran her hands over the soft sun dress she'd chosen from the clothing the Johansen's had brought her. It fit well, though the sandals were a bit large. She glanced in the small mirror next to the dresser in her bedroom, shrugged at her reflection and figured the clothing would do. Then she grinned, raised her arms and twirled around. It felt glorious to finally be clean!

Her talk with Olga, a good meal and a long, hot shower had done wonders for her mood. As did the knowledge that the children were safe, well cared for and loved.

When the knock came at the door of the cottage, a small frown played over her face. She wasn't expecting anyone. Then again, she hadn't been expecting Olga and her daughters either, and that had worked out well.

Leaving the bedroom and moving through the small living room, she once again reached for the knob and opened the door. Her brows rose in surprise at the sight before her.

Arthur Weasley smiled down at her and shifted the bags he held in his arms. "Good afternoon, Mrs. McKinny."

"It's Melinda," she replied absently, unsure why a Ministry employee was standing on her doorstep. "Can I help you, Mr. Weasley?"

"Right, Melinda. I'll remember. I'm Arthur," he said, smiling.

Arthur," she repeated, smiling back. When he continued to stare at her, saying nothing, she fidgeted. "Is there something I can do for you, Arthur?"

He jerked once and flushed. "Oh, right. Yes. Umm, I've brought you some clothing. And food. Yes, mustn't forget that. The cottage was furnished, but with all that happened last night, we'd forgotten that you'd need clothing and such," he rambled.

"That's very kind of you, sir," she began.

"Arthur."

"That's very kind of you, Arthur, but Mrs. Johansen has already brought me those things." When his shoulders drooped, she rushed on. "Thank you for thinking of me. And I'm sure everything will come in handy. Many of the clothes Olga brought don't fit, you see." Realizing she was beginning to babble, she closed her mouth and took a step back. "Would you like to come in?"

"Come in? Oh, no, that wouldn't be proper, would it?" he asked, he facing flushing once more.

"Proper?" she asked blankly.

"Yes. After all, you're a woman living alone and...well..." He shrugged, trailing off.

"Right," she said, frowning. "Well, I'm sure you're busy and I don't want to hold you up any longer." She broke off as peels of laughter rang out from down the street.

Turning, she smiled, seeing two sets of twins, one blond, and the other red haired, walking down the street towards them. The red heads, both boys, were conjuring bubbles and filling them with butterflies, while the blonds, the Johansen twins, laughed in delight.

Arthur's eyes widened at the sight of his children's approach. He shifted nervously, hitched the bags up once more and nearly bowled her over as he entered the cottage. "Tea would be lovely," he blurted.

She stumbled back and nearly laughed when he dropped his bags and tried to steady her. "Tea?" she asked, a bit breathless by the change in his demeanor.

"Yes, thank you," he said, holding her arm in one hand and closing the door quickly with the other.

"All right, tea it is." She stood, waiting for him to release her arm.

Arthur smiled at her and waited. When she didn't move, he grew concerned. "Are you alright?"

"I'm fine," she told him.

"Do you not want tea?" he asked.

"Tea would be lovely."

"Yes, it would." He waited, growing puzzled when she didn't move. "Are you sure you're alright?"

"Perfectly. I'm simply waiting for you to release me," she told him, trying not to grin.

"Oh! Right. Sorry about that." He jerked his hand away from her so fast he nearly stumbled backwards.

She couldn't help it. She laughed. When he blushed furiously, she laughed harder. "I'm sorry, Arthur. I meant to put you at ease and here I am laughing. Forgive me. Let me put the tea on and we can talk."

"Talk, yes. Good." He raked a hand through his thinning hair and sighed heavily. Why was this so hard?

"Relax. I don't bite," she told him, walking towards the kitchen.

Bite? He never thought she would. Not really. Though now that she mentioned it, the thought of her biting him sent his mind spinning. *Stop it, he ordered himself as he picked up the bags he'd dropped and followed her into the kitchen. You're not a teenager anymore. Stop acting like one!*

Half an hour later, seated at the kitchen table sipping tea, Arthur was winding up his explanation about Haven and how it had come to be. "You and the children will be safe here, Melinda. The Johansen's will take good care of them and, if you're willing, perhaps we could find something for you to do."

"I was going to ask you about that. I'm a fully trained Healer, but I volunteered at the orphanage, as we lived next door. I worked for a small company that supplied potions and ingredients to apothecary shops."

"Then you can brew potions?" he asked.

"Yes. I gained my Healing mastery in Spain, and potions was a required subject."

"I see. Well, the hospital will be lucky to have you! They're short on brewers, you see." He cocked his head then, gazing at her for a moment.

"Melinda, I don't mean to pry but..." He paused, unsure how to ask his next question.

"No, please. What is it?"

"You said 'we lived next door'. Do you mean you and your husband?"

"Yes. Michael and I were renting the house next to the orphanage."

"As I said, I don't mean to pry, but Mr. Pickerton will need to know. Should we be looking for your husband?"

"No," she told him, closing her eyes briefly. "He was killed. A few days before Auror Newman and his team found the children and me."

"I see. I'm sorry, Melinda. I didn't mean to cause you pain," he said softly, his voice full of regret...and understanding.

"It's alright. I spoke to Olga about it this morning and it seemed to help. He's gone, and I need to learn to accept it."

"Accept? Yes, I suppose so. But it doesn't mean we forget."

She looked at him then. Really looked. His eyes were darkened by sorrow and... was that grief? "You've lost someone as well." It wasn't a question.

"Yes. My son... my wife... it's complicated," he murmured, looking through her and thinking of Ron and Molly. He'd divorced her, disowned his son. He closed his eyes, feeling guilt wash over him. Perhaps if he'd only tried harder... His eyes flickered open, surprised when she touched his hand gently.

"I'm sorry," she told him.

"We all have wounds, Melinda. No one escaped unscathed."

As silence descended on the cottage, each was lost to the past. The spell was broken only when the sound of laughing children poured in through the open kitchen window.

Arthur stood abruptly and smiled. "Well, you should be set now. I'll speak with the healers today. You should be hearing from them soon."

"Thank you," she said, standing and walking with him to the door. "For everything, I mean."

"You're welcome. If you need anything, come to the Manor and ask. Remus Lupin should be able to help you. Or you can call on me."

"I will. Good day, Arthur."

He opened the door and glanced out quickly, looking for his sons. When he didn't see them, he stepped out. Turning a bit, he smiled back at her, said a hasty farewell and walked quickly down the street, intent on returning to Padfoot.

Melinda watched him for a moment, shook her head at his sudden odd behavior and shrugged. Closing the door, she leaned against it and sighed. *Odd man*, she thought. *Attractive, in a ruffled sort of way, means well, but odd.*

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Dover, International Arrival Point...

Four Death Eaters stood facing the arrival point, wands held ready when the small chime sounded.

"Another incoming arrival," chuckled one to the general amusement of the others.

There was a popping sound and a tall dark haired man appeared.

"*Stupefy!*" shouted three Death Eaters, hitting the man before he had time to react.

The man went down hard and the fourth Death Eater searched him, relieving him of his wand and other valuables.

"Check his name to see if he's on the list of recruits being sent. Barcelona was supposed to be sending us ten men today."

When a second pinging sound was heard, three of the men pivoted to cover a roped off area.

"Incoming present from Claude," chuckled one.

"Busy day today. The boss likes that." offered another.

They all blinked as a key appeared in the center of the roped off area. The Death Eater standing in the doorway frowned and walked over to it. He stooped down and picked it up, examining it carefully.

"It's one of Claude's portkeys alright. Alert the capture squads. We have a runner, from the look of it. He must of apparated nearby and then discarded the key. If he had arrived inland, he would have triggered the stunner."

"Do we have a signature off the key?" asked another.

No, it wasn't in the runner's possession long enough for it to register."

"What about Claude? Has he been burned?"

"I don't think so. No, this runner is on our side of the water now. The capture squads will find him. They always go for their wands. When they do, we find them," said the leader.

"Hey! I heard one of them complaining last night about the detectors acting up."

"Enough of that," barked the leader. "Let's process this guy and get him up to camp one."

---

Padfoot Manor...

Harry, Remus and Hermione sat in the main library waiting for their friends to file in.

It had been an irritating day for Harry. He had spent most of it trying to figure out how to broach the subject of the Brotherhood with everyone and had yet to come up with any good ideas.

He looked up from the book he was nervously flipping through as people began to file into the library and take seats. Along with the Outcasts, Hermione's parents and Remus and Tonks, he had also invited Arthur, Minerva and Narcissa as advisers.

Harry stood and waited for the idle chatter to simmer down before he spoke. "I want to thank everyone for coming tonight. What I am about to say involves the following people: Hermione, Draco, Luna, Neville, Ginny, Susan, Terry and myself. It also concerns Remus, Tonks, Dan and Emma. The rest of you are here tonight because we value your advice and hope you'll be able to help us make an important decision."

He glanced from face to face as the seriousness of his tone was absorbed by those in the room.

"Back at the beginning of the school year, the sorting hat issued a prophecy that included a reference to a Brotherhood. Since that initial prophecy, there has been a second prophecy, given by Hermione, which also referenced a Brotherhood.

"When we first heard the sorting hat's song, we asked Remus to begin research on the only Brotherhood we knew anything about, the Brotherhood of Druidic Knights. Remus, with help from Hermione, Tonks and even Luna, has been rather successful in discovering information about what they were all about. I will turn this over to Remus so he can explain some of what he's discovered."

As Harry sat down next to Hermione, Remus stood to face everyone and smiled nervously. "It's ironic that what started out as little more than a joke, a ruse to confuse the Order of the Phoenix, turned out to be something far more significant.

"The true age of the Brotherhood of the Druidic Knights is not fully known. Druids were not normally known for keeping records, but we have fragments of records which suggest the Brotherhood existed as early as one thousand B.C.. What we do know is they were a group of individuals dedicated to the preservation of the peace and to upholding what they saw as the law. They were firm believers in a 'live and let live' creed. They were also brutally efficient at putting down others who tried to impose their will on society.

"The Brotherhood finally died out just over fifteen hundred years ago, nearly five hundred years before the four founders laid the first stone of Hogwarts. We've managed to obtain the journal of the last surviving member of the Brotherhood. In it he reveals some interesting facts.

"The Brotherhood is led by the Maglios. This person is selected either by the existing Maglios or by their guiding spirit. In the past there were periods when the Brotherhood died out because it wasn't needed. They took such periods into account by imbuing the knowledge and lore of their group into a guiding spirit. The spirit would lie dormant until such time as it was awakened by a group of worthy supplicants.

"The guiding spirit would then instruct the supplicants in the magics of the Brotherhood, which were, by all accounts, formidable. The journal we have in our possession explains the process of awakening the guardian and details some of the many benefits gifted to those deemed worthy. What the journal doesn't detail is what happens to those it feels are unworthy..."

Remus sat on that final note and looked at Harry.

Harry stood with a chuckle. "The look that Remus just sent me says I get to give you all the bad news," he told them as his smile became a grimace.

"There are two pieces of bad news. The first is, as Remus mentioned, a test of some kind, which everyone will have to undergo. We do not know what happens to those who do not pass the test. The second piece of bad news is perhaps more disturbing. This is an ancient rite. As such, it must be conducted under a unique set of circumstances and we do not think we can safely alter the rite in any way. In the case of this particular rite, it's performed outside, in a sacred druid location, and is performed without the benefit of clothing. In other words, if we do this, we'll have to be naked."

He stood, waiting for reactions as the news settled in. Some were as he thought. Tonks began to chuckle. Dan and Emma merely looked intrigued. Hermione was stoic, convinced she could handle it without any problems. Harry hoped that was true, and hoped she could help him because he wasn't sure he could handle it well. Minerva, Arthur and Narcissa looked shocked, while Ginny looked as if she'd just been challenged and was willing to accept it. Susan and Terry glanced at each other and blushed. Luna, as Harry expected, didn't react at all. Surprisingly however, neither did Draco.

"I want to add something here," Hermione said from her seat. "Harry has had me researching dementors again. I did so during our third year, but



this time Harry gave me an idea and a unique angle to look at it from. I'm not positive, but it's quite possible that dementors were created during the siege of Colchester by Queen Boudicca. She was not only queen of the Iceni tribe, but also a druid priestess. If bringing back the brotherhood allows us to study the magic that created the dementors, then perhaps we will find a way of hurting them, maybe even killing them."

Minerva frowned. "Naked," she said tightly.

Harry nodded unhappily. "I don't like it anymore than you do, Professor, but this is a chance I don't think we can afford to overlook. If we could avoid that part of it, I'd be the first one in line to do so."

Most of the Outcasts shared a knowing look. They had seen some of Harry's scars during the swimming sessions and therapy for his leg back at Hogwarts and understood his reluctance.

Ginny broke the silence next. "I never thought that anyone else would see me like this, but let's be honest here. This isn't a romantic situation. It's more like going to one of those muggle beaches where everyone's naked."

"Look," Dan said, butting in. "I don't have a problem with getting naked in front of others as I've been to some of the beaches Ginny spoke of. But I'm not clear what this is going to do. Is this rite going to awaken a guardian to assist us, or is this going to resurrect an Order that has been dead for over fifteen hundred years?"

Harry, Hermione and Remus exchanged glances. Then, with a shrug, Remus spoke.

"To be honest, Dan, we're not entirely sure. The journal talks about awakening the Guardian spirit and the rebirth of the Brotherhood. Cathal, the author, wrote about this part on his death bed so he didn't have time to go into a lot of detail."

"The fact is, either could be the case, Dan. We won't know for certain until we try the ritual. We've found out where the ritual has to be held and we have permission from the Irish Ministry. They have even gone so far as offering to provide security during the rite. The question we need to answer is, do the benefits outweigh the risk and embarrassment of being naked? We have until the tenth of May to decide. That's the first night we can perform the ritual. If we're going to do this, we should all be in agreement by the sixth at the latest so the Irish have time to prepare." Harry said quietly.

"I can't say I like the idea of my students being naked in public, but I also remember a time when rites were routinely performed in that way," offered McGonagall. "The advantages of learning a forgotten and powerful form of magic are alluring. You twelve would be capable of doing things no one else would be able to do until you start to share the information."

"Why us, Harry? I mean Dan and I. We don't know a lot of magic and are the least trained of those you've included. I appreciate what you're offering, but I don't understand why you want to include us," Emma asked pointedly, while Dan nodded vigorously.

Harry looked at the two and grinned. "That's exactly why I included you. We'd all be learning something new, so this would put you at the same level as everyone else. Besides, you two spent your entire childhoods and most of your adult lives as muggles. This gives you a perspective on the subject that most of us just don't have.

"But Harry, you also have that perspective. You weren't raised as a wizard," Dan offered quietly.

Harry recoiled at Dan's comment and his eyes flashed angrily for a moment. He stood, ignoring the worried looks aimed at him and walked to a nearby window.

"My perspective on muggles is... tainted," he said in a quiet voice as he gazed out through the glass. "How I was raised has made it impossible for me to be very objective. If it weren't for people like yourself, Dan, and Emma and most especially Hermione, I'd probably agree with Voldemort. But you've shown me that not all muggles are like Vernon and Petunia..."

Hermione looked at him carefully, wanting nothing more than to wrap her arms around him and offer comfort. But she knew this was something he had to face, needed to face; something he had to come to grips with.

Harry took a few calming breaths then turned to face the shocked group. "I am not Voldemort," he said softly. "Yes, we have similar backgrounds, but I am not him, nor do I want to be him. I have friends, muggle and magical, and I know, in general at least, that everyone is worth saving. I can't help it if sometimes I wonder if I'm right or not."

"No Harry, you're not Voldemort," Luna said, agreeing with him. He winced inwardly as he felt the full brunt of her emotions bore down on him and he raised his occlumency shields to maximum. "You're not Voldemort because you care too much. He doesn't care at all. You may not believe in yourself, but the rest of us believe in you. If you, Hermione and Remus think this ritual is important enough to try, then let's do it."

Harry nodded gratefully and moved to lean over the back of Hermione's chair. He looked at the others questioningly.

One by one they met his gaze and nodded in agreement. All knew that in the coming days they would harbor doubts and have to come to terms with their agreement. But it helped that they were all family. They would support each other.

Hermione knew his admission had cost him dearly. Her hands fisted in her lap and she pictured herself hexing the Dursley's over and over, until the sky fell and the stars burned out.

Otter St. Catchpole...

Charlie peered around the edge of a dumpster. He had been lucky in that he had arrived unnoticed and had hidden himself as quickly as he could behind the grocers in Ottery St. Catchpole.

The town looked to be untouched by the troubles, as people could be seen walking about the streets occasionally. And while they were the first people he'd seen since entering the country, their behavior bothered him.

No one looked around. They didn't even look at each other. During the two hours he'd spent in his hiding spot, he'd seen several military convoys rumble through town. Each time the sound of trucks approaching had been heard, the people scattered, emptying the streets.

He sat with his back to the dumpster, watching carefully and making plans. The Burrow had been warded, which was why he'd to apparate to the town. Once darkness fell, he'd cross the road and make his way to the house through the fields.

Charlie laid his head back against the wall and wondered yet again if he was doing the smart thing. He knew that most of his family was somewhere in Ireland. All he had to do was apparate there and he'd be safe. And, unlike many other wizards and witches, he had enough power to make such a long jump. He'd be exhausted upon arrival, but he'd be away from this place.

When full dark finally arrived, he crossed the road quickly. Threading his way through the backyards of several homes, he eventually reached a series of fields he could travel through to the Burrow. He was well away from the road and the ground was clear enough of obstructions that he was fairly certain he would spot someone approaching a good distance away.

Nearly an hour later he lay quietly by the stone fence that separated the land his family had lived upon for centuries from his neighbors. Ottery St. Catchpole wasn't a big community, but the town had many outlying homes. He was surprised to see only a few of them had lights of any sort shining through their windows. Homes he knew to be muggle owned were being lit by fireplaces, candles and oil lamps. None of the homes seemed to have the steady glow of light only electricity could give.

Peering over the stone wall, he frowned. There was no source of light coming from the squat shape in the distance that he knew was his home. He started to reach for his wand but stopped just short of grasping it. He'd need light, but he couldn't risk using his wand. He rummaged in his rucksack, thankful that working at the Dragon Preserve had forced him to resort to some muggle items. He pulled out the handheld torch and thanked Merlin that dragons were irritable when clutching and exposed to magic, hence all the handlers were given muggle hand torches to avoid annoying the great beasts.

With the torch in hand, he slipped over the wall and proceeded down to the Burrow. He approached the darkened building slowly. Something bothered him about it, but he couldn't quite put a finger on it. It wasn't until he had come within twenty feet of it that he realized what it was that was bothering him. Smoke. There was a faint scent of smoke as if, at one point, the building had been on fire.

He clicked on the torch and swung the beam to hit the side of his home. He gasped and reeled in shock at the site of the burned out building. The fire hadn't been recent. In the light of the torch, the damage looked to be at least a couple weeks old.

Dropping his rucksack, he rushed into the building, pushing past the door that hung crazily by one hinge.

The building had been nearly gutted by fire. The upper floor had collapsed onto the main floor. The outer walls had also been badly damaged, but they had held.

Charlie sunk to his knees as a sob escaped his lips. Of all the possibilities, this was the one he had dreaded the most. Pushing the grief for the loss of his home and the worry for his mother and brother aside, he gathered his wits and pushed himself to his feet.

He looked around for a few more minutes before leaving the building, his shoulders slumped in defeat. He couldn't search the wreckage using nothing more than a hand torch. He'd wait until morning to see what else he could discover.

He walked to the back of the building, an area he knew wouldn't be easily visible from the nearby road, and climbed under his blanket. The smell of burned wood filled his nostrils and he knew he would be plagued by nightmares. Curling up and tucking his knees under his chin, he closed his eyes and let the tears he'd pushed away earlier fall.

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Padfoot Manor, Harry and Hermione's room...

Harry followed Hermione into their bedroom. He was very tense from the meeting and all he wanted was to sit down and relax. He also watched Hermione closely. She was obviously as tense as he was and he had no idea why she was so agitated.

He smiled weakly at the sight of the turned down bed. Winky had laid out a pair of silk boxers for him and a night gown for Hermione. On each pillow was a piece of candy. He shook his head and chuckled while Hermione stared at the bed for a moment, scowling.

"It's got to be Winky's doing, Hermione. Dobby's never done anything like this. Besides, the way he's been acting, he probably would have laid out a field marshal's uniform for me," he said, answering her unasked question.

She shot him a glare, then scooped up the nightgown and walked into the bathroom to change.

Harry shrugged and changed into his boxers, then threw on his robe. From the bathroom he could hear Hermione muttering to herself and he

cringed slightly. He knew she was working herself into a frenzy and when she was ready, she'd explode.

He sat at the table and fingered the pouch of rings in the pocket of his robe. He jumped when the door to the bathroom slammed open and Hermione stormed out. He watched, a bit warily, as she threw on her robe and approached him.

When she grabbed him by the front of his robe and kissed him hard, he blinked in surprise, but went with it anyway. She released him a moment later and stepped back as he slid down in his chair a bit, his eyes a bit glazed.

"You are not Voldemort and are nothing like him!" she spat between clenched teeth. With her eyes flashing dangerously, she spun away from him and began to pace.

"Damn those Dursley's for what they did to you, Harry James Potter! If I ever get my hands on any one of them, I swear I'd be tempted to use a Cruciatus curse on them! How can you even think your opinion of muggles is tainted?"

When she began to curse steadily under her breath, he shook his head. Turning away from her slightly, he pulled the pouch from his pocket and upended its contents onto the table. He eyed the glittering rings for a moment before he shuffled them around a bit, placing them in a neat pattern on the tabletop.

"I know it's hard for you, Harry, but you need to work beyond what the Dursley's have done to you. They are in your past. It's over..."

"Hermione?"

"Do you have any idea how angry it makes me to hear when you put yourself down like that? Sometimes I want to scream! I want to hex those vile muggles into oblivion..."

Harry got out of his chair and stood in front of her as she paced towards him. "Hermione!"

She nearly collided with his chest. Rocking to a stop, she glared up at him. When he reached out and placed both hands on her shoulders, her expression softened somewhat. "What?" she asked, a bit confused.

He led her over to table where he had arranged the ten rings.

Seeing them, her brain lurched, and ground to a halt as Harry got down on one knee.

"Marry me?" he asked, the hope clearly evident in his voice.

She glanced back and forth between Harry and the rings several times, blinking owlishly.

"What?" she squeaked.

Harry glanced at the rings, then up at Hermione and wondered what part of 'Marry me?' was unclear.

"Er... Marry me?" he repeated, his voice beginning to shake with nerves as a cold knot formed in his stomach.

Hermione stepped back and stared at him. "Oh, Harry," she said, her voice hitching. Then, as he watched, she spun away from him and bolted from the bedroom.

Harry watched her leave in stunned astonishment. He stood and looked at the rings then at the open door.

*She didn't say yes, he thought. But then, she didn't say no, either. And what the hell kind of answer is 'Oh, Harry'? It's a simple yes or no question, for Merlin's sake! He felt his heart lurch and clenched his fists. What was he supposed to do now?*

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Padfoot Manor, Dan and Emma's room...

The door burst open and Hermione rushed into the room, much to the surprise of the elder Grangers, who were looking forward to a quiet night of reading in bed.

"Mum! He asked me to marry him!" she said skidding to a halt in front her parents. Emma bounced out of the bed and swept her daughter into a hug. Dan climbed out of bed more sedately and stood smiling at the pair.

"That's wonderful, Hermione!" Emma exclaimed. "Which ring did you pick out?"

Hermione looked at Emma, confused, and the room fell silent.

"Ring?" she asked blankly. Suddenly she had the feeling that something was very wrong.

"Hermione, you did pick a ring, didn't you?" asked Dan finally.

Her eyes darted between the two and a look of horror crossed her face.

Hush Dan. Hermione, dear... what answer did you give Harry?" Emma asked gently.

"Answer?" she asked weakly.

Dan looked at his daughter's expression and began to laugh so hard he collapsed back onto the bed, too weak to stand.

Emma looked at her daughter in horror. "Hermione Jane Granger! Do you have any idea what you've done to that young man? I don't care what answer you give him, but you get your arse back into that room and give him an answer right this minute!"

"Oh gods!" Hermione blurted, realizing the magnitude of what she'd done. Spinning on her heel, she dashed back out the door, slamming it behind her.

Emma watched her go, shaking her head, then turned to her laughing husband. "She got that from you, you know."

Dan got himself under control and looked at his wife. "What did I do?"

"What did you do? Need I remind you that after I said yes, you ran off to share the news with your mates and forgot to give me the ring?" Emma asked archly. "I had to wait four hours for you to remember that you were now engaged, and another hour for you to get your head out of your arse long enough to slip the ring on my finger!"

Dan looked sheepish. "I'd forgotten about that," he muttered. Seeing Emma's expression, he blanched. "It was a lovely wedding, though," he tried.

When she narrowed her eyes and glared at him, he sighed. Climbing under the blankets, he picked up his book and resigned himself to one of 'those' nights. *Just keep your mouth shut, old boy*, he told himself. *This, too, shall pass*.

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Padfoot Manor, Harry and Hermione's room...

Hermione had only been gone for a few minutes and Harry still stood, almost rooted to the floor, trying to understand what had happened. He looked at the rings again. With a shaking hand, he reached out towards them, intent on shoving them back into the pouch and calling for Dobby to take them back to his vault.

"HARRY!"

He turned at Hermione's shout and was startled to see a brown haired blur streaking back into the room. She leapt at the last minute, landing against his body hard and sending them both tumbling to the floor. When they landed, she was on top of him, her arms wrapped around him like a steel band.

He looked up at her, his brow furrowed in confusion. "Hermione?"

She began to kiss him; his mouth, his nose, his face, his neck. Between each, she murmured "Yes!" over and over.

He grinned, wrapping his arms around her. "You will?" he asked breathlessly. "You'll marry me?"

"Yes!" she shouted. When he opened his mouth to ask if she was sure, she kissed him again and he thought his bones would melt.

*Oh, yes, she's sure!* It was the last coherent thought he had for a very long time.

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Padfoot Manor, Remus and Tonks' room...

"HARRY!" echoed through the house and Remus looked up for a moment from his book and began to chuckle.

"Something funny?" asked Tonks as she padded into the bedroom from the bathroom, a towel still wrapped around her neck.

"Well, if that cry was what I think it was, Harry finally got around to showing Hermione the rings," Remus told her, grinning.

"Well, good for him! At least he didn't pussyfoot around and need someone else to prod him into asking." She sniffed disdainfully, then smiled to show she was only joking.

Remus' hand shot out. He grabbed her by the front of her robe and pulled her into an embrace before she could protest. Nuzzling his face between her breasts, his eyes flickered up to meet hers and she smiled.

"Someday, you and I will have to sit down and have a long talk about what it's like to grow up a werewolf, Tonks. You know what it's like to be different, but you don't know what it's like to be shunned, and to have people afraid of you. Harry probably knows what that's like, but I suspect few others here, including you, know..."

She tried to reply, but he had begun to caress her in a way that made all logical thought impossible.

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The Burrow, Ottery St. Catchpole, England...

The sun was barely touching the horizon when Charlie awoke. The night had left behind a chilling dew and he shivered under the lightweight blanket. Every bone and muscle in his body screamed when he tried stretching. He blinked in the bright morning light and, for a brief moment, wondered where he was. Then it hit him. The Burrow.

He sat up and looked at the building he had been huddled against. In the darkness last night he hadn't been able to get a good idea of the damage to the building. In the cold light of day he was able to clearly see the horror that had once been his home. The collapse of the second floor had caused the eastern wall to partially collapse when a support beam broke through the wall.

He stuffed the blanket back into his rucksack and walked around to the front of the building. Looking around, he could see a few people in the distance and knew he probably shouldn't stay here long. But he needed to know what had happened!

Taking a deep breath, he stepped into the Burrow and looked around. The devastation was total. Last night he'd only caught glimpses of it in the light from his hand torch. Now it was laid out in all its morbid glory. The roof was gone. The fire had raged unchecked and he wondered why the fire proofing charms hadn't worked.

Stepping into what used to be the kitchen, he knelt by a familiar looking object. The clock was heavily damaged and no longer working, of course, but it was recognizable. Holding it in his hand, he frowned at it. He knew the clock would be missing the hand for Percy, as it had fallen off when he had been killed. But it was missing two other hands. *Probably for Ronald and Mum*, he thought sadly. *But if the arms fell off after the fire or were destroyed by it*, he mused, *that would mean they aren't dead.*

It was thin. It was probably a false hope, but it was hope. He opened his rucksack and pulled out a t-shirt. Laying the shirt flat on the floor, he gently wrapped the clock in it and put it back into his rucksack. Placing the rucksack against the wall, he sat next to it, trying to figure out what his next step would be. The Weasleys were a large family and Molly could have escaped to seek shelter with any of her many cousins, aunts and uncles. She had no siblings living that she could go to.

Charlie made a mental list of names and places he had remembered visiting when he was little and growing up at the Burrow and decided to check as many of them as he could. Dad and the rest of his family might have given up on Molly and Ron, but he hadn't.

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### **Haven, Ireland (May 2nd)...**

Harry and Hermione had talked long into the night. She had apologized for running out on him and, when it was all said and done, both agreed it would be an amusing memory in the years to come.

Today they had decided to take a day off. Dobby and Winky were preparing a family feast in celebration of the engagement and Harry was almost afraid to see what Dobby's idea of a small family feast meant. Doing their best to escape the excitement of the elves, they had left the manor quickly and, linking hands, set off for Haven.

Harry smiled every time Hermione reached over with her free hand and felt for her ring. Last night, when the two of them had finally gotten off the floor, she had examined each ring carefully before making a selection. Her choice pleased Harry greatly. Her ring wasn't the smallest or the largest he had offered her. It had, however, been worn by his paternal grandmother and half a dozen other Potter women before her.

"So, do we have a destination this morning or are we just walking around?" Hermione asked, enjoying the sunshine.

"I wanted to check in on the orphans. Then I thought you might want to take lunch at the school. You know your parents are in a frenzy of planning with Dobby for tonight's celebration. Do you really want to be there for all that?"

Hermione rolled her eyes. "My mother's already thinking about where we can hold the wedding and we haven't even set a date yet."

Harry stopped her and placed a finger on her lips. "After Voldemort, honey. That's all I think I can promise you. If I could do it right now, this minute, I would. But for your sake, and for the sake of the family we'll make..."

"Reach... reach... reach...", piped a small voice. Harry looked up sharply.

"For the sky!" hissed another small voice.

"Oh... yeah... Reach for the sky!" said the first voice. A nearby bush shook as small giggles were heard.

Hermione glanced at Harry, who was trying very hard not to laugh.

"Who's there?" he demanded in mock anger.

"I am" said the first voice followed by more giggles.

"And who are you?" asked Hermione, peering at the large bush.

"Robin Hood," said the voice, followed by a series of hurried whispers. "No, not Robin Hood. I'm Harry Potter! Now reach for the sky!"

Harry rolled his eyes and Hermione grinned, her eyes dancing with mirth. "Oh no! Not Harry Potter!" she exclaimed.

The bush shook from root to tip and two small boys tumbled out from behind it, then scrambled to their feet. The boys, no older than five or six stood and looked at Harry and Hermione, then each pointed a stick at them.

"You're our poisoners!" said the younger looking boy.

"Prisoners," said the other. The two looked at each other then nodded.

"March! We're taking you to your dome!" said the younger of the two

"Doom!" said the other.

"Oh, yeah"

Harry and Hermione exchanged amused glances and let the two boys lead them to the farm house in the distance. One of the boys ran ahead to alert the Johansens that they were bringing in two desperate poisoners... er... prisoners.

Harry and Hermione climbed the short stairs to the doorway of the house just in time to see Olga Johansen open the door.

"Robert! What are you and Thomas doing to these nice people?"

Robert, spotting Olga, decided that Harry, who had made a wonderful prisoner, would now make an even better shield and slipped behind him.

"Mrs. Johansen?" asked Harry with a smile.

"Yes? Oh me and my manners, won't you two please come in?" she asked, stepping back from the doorway. "You must be friends of Inga and Helga. I'll put tea on, then call the girls, hmm?"

Surprised by the older woman's behavior, Harry and Hermione let themselves be led into a kitchen where she moved about like a force of nature.

"Actually, Mrs. Johansen, Hermione and I decided to stop by to make sure your family and the children had everything they need. I think Hermione's met your daughters, but I haven't," Harry said softly, trying to put the woman at ease.

Olga turned and looked at the pair sitting at her table. Her brow was furrowed in concentration and she tapped one finger against her chin. "Hermione? Now where have I heard of that name before?" she muttered to herself.

The backdoor opened and Sven entered the room followed by two of the older boys who looked to be about ten each. "And that's why we milk the cow from the right hand side boys..." he stopped, staring at Harry and Hermione.

"Papa, we have visitors," Olga said proudly, "Miss Hermione and..." She paused and stared at Harry in consternation.

Harry looked embarrassed. "Miss Hermione Granger and myself, Harry Potter."

Sven's face broke into a huge smile, while his wife sat heavily in one of the chairs, looking at Harry in shock. From the doorway several of the children started whispering among themselves. Little Robert, their captor, gulped loudly and backed away from the door.

"We didn't mean to intrude on your family, Mrs. Johansen, I just wanted to make sure that you had everything you needed," offered Harry.

Sven walked over and shook his hand. "We have much to thank you for, Mr. Potter. You saved our family, and Johan, then you gave us this wonderful home. Now Mama and I, we make one big family and I'll teach the little ones how we grow food for the town, besides learning their numbers and letters."

Harry smiled at the big burly man. "I'm glad Remus was able to help you, Mr. Johansen. When I heard you had taken in all the children from the orphanage, I told him to make sure you had whatever you needed to care for them as well as yourselves."

"Mr. Lupin is a good man, a strong man, but a quiet one. I like that in a person. You can feel his strength without him bragging about it," Sven said softly. Mama, recovered from her shock poured tea for everyone.

Hermione nudged Harry and pointed at the doorway where all the children were standing wide-eyed.

"I thought you were older," Olga said.

Harry smiled at the woman. "I'm nearly seventeen, Mrs. Johansen. From what I understand, not much younger than your daughters, whom I've heard so much about. You're here because your son was a student at Hogwarts and I wanted to save the students and their families. Then you took in these children, offering them love and a home. That makes you even more important to our community.

"I've heard about you and your husband and your efforts to help the community despite being muggles and I'm hoping that you'll continue to be a shining example of everything good in both muggle and magical people."

"Mr. Potter, would you like to see what Mr. Lupin and his elves have done for us here?" asked Sven shyly.

Harry's face lit up. "I think I would, sir. I know you haven't had time to actually start your farm, but I would like to see what you have planned."

Come then, we'll walk around and let the women talk. I'm sure Mama will have some of her strudel ready by the time we come back," he said with a grin.

Harry stood up and frowned for a minute as the muscles in his bad leg protested. With a flick of his wrist, his staff appeared in his hand. He glanced at Hermione and shook his head when she began to speak. Smiling at the older man, he followed him from the house, intent on looking over some of the other buildings the elves had put up for them.

Hermione watched Harry go fondly before turning back to Olga. "He was very worried about the children," she said softly.

Olga leaned forward in her chair and sipped her tea. "The babies, they will be taken care of. Mr. Potter doesn't need to worry about that."

"He can't help it, Mrs. Johansen. Harry is an orphan himself and never had the opportunity that you've given to these children."

Olga patted Hermione's hand comfortingly. "You tell him not to worry. Papa and I may not know much about raising wizards and witches, but we know about raising babies and making sure they are happy and loved. Now, about that strudel..."

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Hogwarts Castle, the dungeons...

Two Death Eaters stood just inside the door to the potions laboratory. Inside, Severus Snape was tethered by a collar around his neck that was connected to a chain leading up to the ceiling. With a single gesture, one of the guards could cause the chain to retract, effectively hanging Snape. They had demonstrated the mechanism to him once when he had tried to escape using a poisonous concoction that killed one of the guards. Since then, Severus had behaved himself and continued to work as instructed.

The door opened and Lucius stepped in. "Wait outside," he said to the guards.

Both men turned and exited the room. Severus glanced at Lucius nervously and he could see his guards bowing where they stood out in the corridor. A moment later Voldemort walked in and Lucius closed the door before taking a position just behind the Dark Lord.

Voldemort casually waved his wand, conjuring a comfortable chair. He sat down and stared at Snape, who had knelt as soon as he'd walked into the room. Snape bowed his head and trembled.

Voldemort looked around the dungeon carefully. He noted the large number of discarded, ruined cauldrons in one corner. From all appearances, the cauldrons were of all types of metals; iron, silver, gold and steel.

"You wanted an audience spy. Speak," hissed the Dark Lord, his tone dangerous.

"My lord, I have reached an impasse in the required research you asked for. The Ritual of Anthrokrak requires three unique and difficult to brew potions..."

"And? I thought you were a potions Master?"

"My Lord, I can make the first two potions without difficulty. The last potion is the problem. The ingredients are highly volatile and I have tried every cauldron type to make the potion, all with the same results," Snape said, gesturing to the pile of destroyed cauldrons.

"Impossible! No potion is that volatile. Show me your ingredient list," Voldemort snapped.

Snape stood and turned, picked up a piece of parchment and turned again. Kneeling once more, he offered the list to the Dark Lord with a shaking hand.

Voldemort looked to Lucius, who stepped forward and took the parchment from Snape's hand. He quickly scanned the list, then gave it to Voldemort, who read it with slowly widening eyes.

"Is this list correct?" he asked incredulously.

"Yes, my lord," Severus said, cringing. "I have double and triple checked the translations. I think I have come up with an idea from the clues in the original texts, which is why I needed to speak with you. Your knowledge of dark lore is without peer."

Voldemort folded his arms and stared down at the potions Master. "Very well, tell me of this clue."

"My lord, when I began to realize that the final potion was too damaging to the cauldrons, I stopped brewing and started to research the history of the rite itself. There is little information about the origin of this rite, but what I have learned suggests that a special cauldron was used. I found one reference in an old Norse text which referred to the Ritual of Anthrokrak and something called the Cauldron of Chaos. It seems that the Cauldron of Chaos was created using meteoric iron and consecrated with the blood from many species, including Wizard, Goblin, Centaur and High Elf.

"The process for making such a cauldron is not known to me, my lord. I do know the High Elves died out as a species centuries ago. That means, in order to complete this potion we need to find at least one existing Cauldron of Chaos."

Voldemort leaned back in his chair and rested his chin on one hand. His gaze grew unfocused as he considered what Snape had told him. "Yes," he murmured. "I do recall reading several texts that mentioned such a cauldron. I know that more than one of these cauldrons was made, but they must be quite rare. Lucius..."

The blond stepped up to stand next to Voldemort in his chair. "My Lord?"

"Send out owls to all our suppliers and contacts on the continent. Just because Potter has trapped us here in Britain doesn't mean we can't get deliveries."

Lucius nodded at his master's command. Snape's eye's widened hearing the name of Potter and wondered how he had trapped them in Britain. Then he dropped his eyes again.

Voldemort considered the man kneeling before him. "I am not displeased with you, Severus. You are still a traitor, but you have proven to me that you still have your uses. As a reward, I will see that you receive extra food."

Voldemort stood and banished his chair. Lucius opened the door and the Dark Lord swept from the room. A moment later the two guards returned and Lucius departed. Snape slowly climbed to his feet and breathed a sigh of relief.

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### **Stonewall Lane, Dublin, mid-morning (May 5th)...**

Harry, Hermione, Remus, Tonks and Michael O'Dalley arrived at the apparation point in front of Government House. A moment later, Dan and Emma appeared via portkey. The Grangers were starting to learn how to apparate, but had not yet mastered the skill.

"Right then," said O'Dalley. "If you notice anyone following you, it's because we have placed a security team in the lane to keep an eye on things for you. They have orders not to disturb you, but they are also here to make sure that people, including the press, don't disturb you. The Minister will meet you here in Government House at six P.M. for the press conference. He realizes that you don't want to answer questions, so he's told the press that you will make a short statement, then go about your business."

Harry knew he couldn't avoid the press conference, but at least this way it would be short and sweet. The security detail was a bit of a surprise, but all things considered, the added security probably was a good idea.

"Thank you, Michael," Harry said over the noise of the busy street, then turned to look at Stonewall Lane for the first time.

In many respects, the Lane resembled Diagon Alley with its many shops. But amidst the nineteenth century storefronts were some buildings of a decidedly more modern nature. The home of the Dublin Daily, the Wizarding paper for Ireland, was a modern looking building of steel and glass.

Gringotts was easy to spot with its gleaming white marble and characteristic slant. Harry had one order of business, then the rest of the day until the press conference was all theirs. Leading the others, he set off for Gringotts.

Inside the bustling lobby, he was met by Ragnok, Managing Director of Gringotts. When Ragnok spotted Harry and his group, he smiled toothlessly.

"Lord Potter, it is good to see you and your friends again. I am pleased to see you are well, considering the recent unpleasantness."

"Director, I am happy to see you, as well. Might we have a word with you concerning a bit of business?" asked Harry with a slight bow.

"I thought you might be here on business, my lord. I have taken the liberty to prepare a conference room where we can talk." He turned then and nodded to each member of Harry's party. When his gaze fell on Hermione, his eyes dropped to her hand and, noting the ring, he smiled broadly.

"Welcome, Miss Granger. I see Lord Potter has finally announced his intentions and that you've accepted. You will make a fine Lady Potter."

Hermione's body tensed. It hadn't occurred to her that if Harry were Lord Potter, she'd become Lady Potter. Harry winked at her and began to snicker. Hermione frowned and made a note to have a talk with her intended about his idea of surprises.

Ragnok led the party to a cozy conference room with a roaring fire. One wall was charmed so they could look out over Stonewall Lane. Sitting around the table Ragnok looked to Harry expectantly.

"Director, as of this morning the town of Haven boasts a population of thirty eight hundred and five people. We've set aside space next to our town center that would be ideally suited to a Gringotts branch. The British Ministry of Magic in Exile occupies an adjoining building and is currently in negotiations that stand a good chance to more than double our numbers as other governments send aid to help in our efforts."

Ragnok's eyes widened as Harry reeled off the numbers. The others could see he had caught his interest.

"What would you expect of us in return, my Lord?"

"I want to set up a fund, Ragnok. I will contribute half a million galleons to the fund, which you will then use to provide low interest rate loans to the people of Haven. Haven has only one official business at the moment. We have a lot of shops and manufacturing spaces that aren't currently being used, but I have many people who need to feel as if they're earning their own way. You bring Gringotts to Haven and administer these loans, Gringotts in Ireland helps us to jumpstart a new town. You'll make money from managing the loan fund and your new branch office, I'll make money off the interest on the loans, and the people we've rescued will regain their self respect."

Ragnok looked up from the notes he'd been taking. "Is it your intention to take Haven public, my Lord? It will be nearly impossible for the town's economy to thrive until you do."

Harry leaned back in his chair and realized that everyone was staring at him. "I don't see that we have much choice, Ragnok. The town itself is heavily warded, as are the surrounding areas, but I think we'll have to drop the *Fidelius* charm around the town itself."

Remus leaned forward. "Harry, think about what you're saying. You're talking about exposing everyone!"



Harry sighed. "We're exposing them anyway, Remus. Today, at the press conference, we'll be telling the world that we stole Hogwarts right out from under Voldemort's nose, along with a bunch of the wizards and witches. People are going to wonder where all those people are. No, dropping the charm on Haven will allow the town to start to function like it should. We can keep the *Fidelius* up on the school, the Operations Center and the Manor house, however. My thought was to set up a ward similar to the one I put on Britain. Given its much smaller size, I shouldn't need any help to do that."

Remus frowned while Tonks and Emma exchanged worried glances. Ragnok watched the exchange with interest.

"Remus, Harry's right," Dan said. "The town can't begin to work if it remains hidden from the local Wizarding population. Haven needs to be able to move products in and out, and the people need jobs. I agree that exposing the town increases the danger level, but we have a large number of Ex-Aurors in the population, nearly two hundred, and there are... what? One hundred others in training? We can set up a constabulary to protect the town."

Remus nodded reluctantly, then turned to Harry. "Alright, I don't like it, but I see the need. However, I would suggest that tonight you simply announce its existence and not where it is. We need time, Harry. We need time to plan this and to set up a force capable of defending the town."

Harry glanced at Hermione, who nodded in agreement, before he turned back to Remus. "We'll do it your way then. I guess, in my rush to get people back on their feet, I overlooked the details."

Remus clapped him on the shoulder. "It's alright, cub. It's a good idea, but we need to refine it a bit first. In the meantime, I think Director Ragnok would like to get back to the business at hand."

"Not at all, Mr. Lupin," offered Ragnok. "This conversation has been enlightening, to say the least. However, I need to confer with the board members of Gringotts to determine the extent of the branch we will open in Haven. But I will agree at this point that Gringotts will open a branch office in the town. I will owl Mr. Lupin with the details and specifics when I have them."

Harry carefully expelled the breath he'd been holding and smiled at the Goblin. "Thank you, Director. I do hope you will do us the honor of joining us some evening for dinner in Haven?" Harry asked.

Ragnok's looked shocked. Goblins were never invited to dinner by wizards! When Harry stood, Ragnok, who had to shake off the urge to gape, stood and bobbed his head. "I'd be honored, my lord," he stammered.

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The Notting Hill section of London...

Charlie Weasley was exhausted and hungry. In the last three days he had visited the homes of several relatives, trying to discover where his mother and brother were. To his surprise, not every home he visited was deserted.

Great Aunt Milly still lived in her little apartment in Seaton. He had managed to get a meal and a full night's sleep. She had been ecstatic to see him, but she was approaching one hundred and seventy and kept asking him his name over and over again. Charlie spent a comfortable night on her couch with a warm blanket and a full belly. He left in the morning, promising that he'd find some way to return and help her once he found his mother.

That was two nights ago. Since then, he had slept in burned out buildings and scavenged food from a looted grocery store. Now he was heading for his cousin's apartment, a place he'd only visited once when he'd been ten years old. His cousin was a squib and worked as an accountant.

Charlie was shocked to see large swatches of London had burned to the ground. There were a lot more people in the city than in the urban areas where people were hiding and hoping things would blow over.

The city seemed to crawl with people and military convoys were constantly moving about. Charlie was horrified to see many convoys contained at least one Death Eater. He overheard one person claiming Death Eaters were civilian consultants helping the military control things until the government got back on its feet again.

Struggling to remember the address, he wasn't sure he'd be able to find it. And with all the convoys, he was feeling a bit exposed. He'd have to wait until dark to check in with his cousin and find out if he knew where Molly was.

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### **Government House, Stonewall Lane, Dublin...**

Harry sat with his friends in a small anteroom just off of the official press room in Government house. Amelia and Arthur had met them there. Both of them would be participating in the press conference, as well as Brogan Mallory, the Minister of Magic for Ireland.

Harry leaned back and closed his eyes, thinking of their day. After Gringotts, he and Hermione had gone off on their own, exploring and just enjoying being out without worrying about missions, or people.

Strangely enough, everyone accidentally met up again in front of Brigid's Bridal Boutique. Emma laughed seeing both Hermione and Tonks eagerly eyeing the various gowns in both muggle and Wizarding styles. Fortunately, Harry and Remus were spared the experience of being dragged inside the building since they all had a dinner engagement.

After dinner they'd walked leisurely to Government house where they were now waiting for the press conference to start.

Hermione hid a grin as she watched Harry. He was obviously nervous about the upcoming news conference. He'd sit down for a few minutes, then

stand and pace, then sit and wipe sweaty hands on his pants. Then he'd repeat the process all over again. She finally managed to get him to sit with her by the simple expedient of capturing his hand and refusing to let it go. She knew he hated the press and the fame of the Boy-Who-Lived, but he'd asked for this conference and he would have to learn to deal with it.

"Relax, Harry. You'll give your statement and that's all you need to do," she whispered.

When he nodded, then looked around for an escape route, she rolled her eyes and tightened her grip on his hand...just on the off chance he decided to make a run for it.

A moment later, Michael O'Dalley slipped into the room. "They're ready now, my lord," he said softly and Harry eyed him grimly. Sighing, he stood up

Following O'Dalley out of the room, he was directed to a seat up on the stage with Mallory and Amelia. The room was filled with people eyeing him curiously. A moment later a witch stepped up to the podium and addressed the crowd of reporters.

"In a moment the Minister will make a short statement, then Harry Potter will make a statement, followed by Minister Bones of the British Ministry of Magic. Both Minister Bones and Minister Mallory will be available after their statements to take questions."

Harry could see the disappointment in the eyes of the reporters and he fought to hide a smile.

"Ladies and gentleman, the Minister for Magic, Brogan Mallory," the witch announced, and then stepped away from the podium and sat down

"Citizens, Wizards and Witches of the world. In the past month we have been witness to the extraordinary and horrifying events taking place in Britain. By reason of our close proximity to the danger, your government has been taking measures to ensure the safety of our people. Today I have introduced a bill to our Wizengamot requesting additional funding to increase our Auror force.

"We have taken steps to ensure your safety and will continue to do so, now and in the future. One of those steps was a decision that some have called dangerous and foolhardy. To those I would say, we are Irish! We have lived through adversity and come out the other side stronger for it. The decision to allow Harry Potter to come to our land wasn't made lightly on our part. It was, in my opinion, a gamble that has paid off. Mr. Potter was not only instrumental in preventing Voldemort from leaving Britain, but he also orchestrated the total evacuation of Hogwarts students and staff, not to mention its vast library of precious books of lore. Thus denying the evil Dark Lord of it's bounty.

"But rather than hearing about it from me, let the world hear from the man himself. Ladies and gentlemen, I give you Harry Potter," Mallory said with a large smile, then he stepped back.

Harry stood and stepped up to the podium. He blinked rapidly as the flashes from many cameras went off. Trying to clear the spots from his vision, he stared back at the people in the room.

"Minister Mallory," Harry began softly, "for myself and for the people we've managed to save, I thank you. I also would like to thank the people of Ireland for welcoming us.

"Some months ago, when we first realized what we were up against, we made plans. Plans to save as many as we could and plans to prevent the spread of Voldemort's madness. We have saved nearly four thousand people and, in the process, have created a defensive shield that is designed to prevent the spread of the Dark Lord's diseased ideals.

"To the people of Ireland, I say rest easy. While we have significantly reduced the threat against your lives and your homes, the threat still remains, and we are working closely with your government to ensure your safety. But Voldemort will not step on sacred Irish soil anytime soon.

"To any still in Britain who may hear my words, I say take heart! You are not alone and we will not abandon you! Britain may be under the heel of Voldemort, but we shall never surrender to him.

"Even as I speak, we are fighting back. The stain, the curse of Voldemort, has been stopped at the shores of Britain, making it harder for his evil to spread. When the time is right, we will take back what is ours and see that he perishes in the flames of his own madness.

"To that end, Minister Bones is working closely with Minister Mallory and other Wizarding governments around the world to coordinate our actions. With no small degree of respect, I yield the podium to her, so that she can explain what the British Ministry is doing to protect our people and the world," Harry said, then he stepped away from podium. Two of O'Dalley's men stood from their chairs and escorted Harry off the stage ignoring the shouted questions from the press.

Stepping into the anteroom, Harry let the stress bleed away. He walked forward into Hermione's open arms and let her wrap him in her embrace, taking strength from her support.

"Merlin! I hope I don't have to do that again," he whispered.

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The Notting Hill section of London...

Charlie Weasley inched toward the building he wanted to approach. Parts of London apparently still had electricity and the building he wanted was surrounded by lit streetlights.

He sat back in the shadows and considered his options. From what he could see, the building he wanted was close to one that the military was using, which explained the checkpoints at both ends of the street and why the area in-between was patrolled every few minutes.

He adjusted his rucksack and moved out carefully, trying to stay in the shadows. He hadn't gotten twenty feet when he halted. He had heard a clicking noise behind him.

"Alright, mate. Come out nice and easy and you may not get hurt," said a rough voice.

Charlie turned to see two men holding weapons on him. One man wore a helmet with a set of goggles attached to it. He could obviously see Charlie and track his movements as the weapon followed him.

Unsure of the weapons or the strange eyepiece the man wore, Charlie whirled on his heel and started to run. From behind him came a warning, then a sharp noise. Charlie felt something fiery slam into his upper leg and he started to fall. He apparated instinctively, using the coordinates he had looked up days earlier for Ireland. He had memorized them on the off chance that something like this happened.

He reappeared in a darkened alley and tumbled to the ground. Once he'd skidded to a stop, he sat up painfully and examined his leg. Now that he was in Ireland, he could use magic again. Pulling his wand out of his rucksack, he cast the light spell and looked over the wound. It was ugly, but he'd been wounded before. With a mental shrug, he healed himself, and then leaned back against the alley wall. As the adrenalin washed from his system, exhaustion set in. Before Charlie realized what was happening, he was unconscious.

A little over an hour later, a figure stood over the unconscious redhead. When the tip of a wand lit up the alley, Charlie groaned, but didn't wake. Had he done so, the merry twinkling of bright blue eyes would have startled him.

"My word, if it isn't Charlie Weasley! What a fortuitous and welcome find," murmured a grandfatherly voice.

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### **Authors Notes:**

First off, Alyx is better, although that is a matter of opinion if you ask me. She claims she's better, but I see no sign of her insanity improving.

A few have complained about the number of new characters. Unfortunately no matter how much you might want to see Harry, Hermione, Remus and Tonks do it all, it's just not possible. We need to introduce new characters who will have jobs that will happen mostly in the background. A few of the new characters might be more visible than others. But not by a large amount.

Mama Johansen is a bit of a pushy woman, she insisted we give her a greater role than we had originally planned, but hey, it works. She's not really replacing Mrs. Weasley although she will share many characteristics with the Good Mrs. Weasley.

The fact that Dumbledore is still hovering around the edges and stirring up trouble should be an indication that we have no intention of crushing him anytime soon. So please stop asking that we let Harry kill him. It's just not going to happen yet.

Yes, we admit it. In the last chapter we poked fun at both France and the Euro. It's not our fault. Canada made us do it!

If one more person decides to drop us a note telling us that Britain includes blah blah blah and blah, we will relocate this story to Antarctica and tell all the nit pickers to buy warm clothing cause we're moving your country to someplace comfy.

As to the readers creeped out by our comments about the French President. Well if you think politicians, from any country, aren't sleaze balls then I have a bridge to sell you.

We're sorry if people think we've kept the details of the Druid rite vague, but then why should we tell you a couple chapters before we actually use it. All you need to know is (a) The ritual will provide them with goodies, but (b) not before it embarrasses them all.

Not every single person will be hooked up with someone. Sorry.

*Bobmin*  
*FanficAuthors.net*

# Sunrise Over Britain

## Chapter 4 - Labor Pains

### Standard Disclaimer:

Professor Severus Snape walked out onto the stage at gunpoint. Behind him stood another figure that looked strangely familiar.

Harry nudged Hermione in their seats. "Watch this," he whispered.

"They could be brothers!" gasped Hermione.

The figure behind Snape prodded him with the barrel of the Submachine gun. "Say the words!" he snarled in a light German accent.

Snape glanced back at the man and frowned. He too was struck by the uncanny resemblance. Shrugging he began to speak.

"The authors of this pathetic tale wish you to realize they are not JK Rowling. They own nothing of the Potterverse and make no claims upon the copyrights therein," Snape said disdainfully.

"Now watch, he's gonna say it!" Harry exclaimed to Hermione.

"Say what?" asked Hermione in exasperation.

"His own famous words."

The figure behind Snape prodded him again with the machine gun. "In the words of a famous American, Yippee Kai Yay Motherfucker!" the man growled, then pulled the trigger.

"Hans Gruber, we got him especially for this chapter," Harry said smugly.

Hermione watched the famed terrorist turned thief blow Snape into multiple pieces and she found herself strangely aroused by the sight. Without even thinking her hand slid to Harry's crotch and caressed him.

"I can't believe you're writing this stuff!" Alyx said turning on Bob in a fit of anger.

"Oh come on. You won't let me write fun stuff like Harry having a harem and dozens of orgasms a night with fifty women. So I have to turn to Man's second best friend. Violence and explosions!" Bob retorted, barely looking up from his playing Doom 42.

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### Sunrise Over Britain

#### Chapter 4

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#### Irish Ministry of Magic, (May 9th)...

Brogan Mallory looked up from his desk as Michael O'Dalley escorted Amelia Bones and Arthur Weasley into his office. This was the first time he was meeting them here. Previously they had met at Haven or in the Public Affairs Office prior to the press conference a few days ago.

Smiling, Mallory waved the three to seats. They then sat quietly for the few minutes it took his aide to bustle about serving tea.

"Minister Bones, as the host country to your Ministry, we have received a number of inquiries from other Ministries, along with offers of assistance that I need to pass along to you," Mallory said as the door closed behind the aide.

Amelia nodded seriously. "Yes, I was hoping that our Press Conference might start some diplomatic wheels turning. We are most anxious about opening dialog with the Canadian and American Ministries as soon as possible." When Mallory raised an eyebrow in question, she hurried on. "I do not mean to cast an aspersions on your ministry, Sir, or upon your hospitality...", she said.

"Please, Amelia, call me Brogan," offered Mallory with a vote winning smile.

Amelia adjusted her monocle and eyed him for a moment, trying not to scowl. Her view of politics was skewed by roots in law enforcement and Fudge's tenure as Minister. While she understood the need for political posturing, at least intellectually, it didn't mean she had to enjoy it.

"As I was saying, we have a number of items which rightfully belong to the British Government. From what I have learned, both Canada and the United States have offered to host the British Government in exile. There is some talk of the government perhaps locating to New York City so it can be close to the Security Council. In any event, we want to begin the process of returning these cultural items."

Brogan was about to say something when he realized that O'Dalley was laughing. He frowned and turned to face his Auror turned special liaison.

"I apologize, Minister," O'Dalley said, still chuckling. "But I'm sure you recall the British complaining about the 'Cultural Bandits' that were robbing museums all around the country?"

Mallory leaned back in his chair. As the pieces fell into place, he turned to gape at Amelia, who smiled sheepishly at him while Arthur fidgeted in his

chair.

“Just how many cultural objects are we talking about here?” asked Mallory in an astonished tone.

Amelia looked at Arthur, who had the grace to blush. “Several thousand I think. I don't have a complete count of what we took. We warned the Prime Minister that we would be taking steps to ensure that the British Cultural treasures were preserved.”

Mallory shook his head in a mixture of awe and amusement and made a note on a piece of parchment. “Alright, I'll try to set up a meeting with both the American and Canadian Ministry representatives for you. Is there anything else?”

“Yes, sir,” offered O'Dalley. “As you are aware, Lord Potter is planning on dropping the *Fidelius* charm on the town of Haven once they have a working constabulary. Right now they're training forty people to work as such, but they would like to put their force under Irish control. Essentially, the idea is to assign the town of Haven four Aurors. One would be the nominal head of their constabulary, while the remaining three would cover an eight hour shift. Lord Potter has offered to pay seventy five percent of the Aurors pay with our government picking up the remaining twenty five percent.”

Mallory leaned back in his chair. “Mr. Potter's participation in the press conference has done a number of good things for our people. Morale is up and the peoples confidence in the government is high. They know the fight isn't over, but they are determined. I think Mr. Potter's idea has merit. As it stands, our own Auror recruitment is up by nearly sixty percent, and the head of our MLE is in seventh heaven with his new budget.”

Mallory paused for a moment, thinking quickly. “When do you expect to drop the *Fidelius* charm?”

“No later than the end of the month. It will take us at least that long to get our constables trained properly,” answered Amelia.

“Would Mr. Potter be willing to show off the town to the press?” Mallory asked in a hopeful tone.

Amelia frowned. “I'm not entirely sure about that, Brogan. Harry... he is an intensely private young man. He does what he does not because of the fame or glory. He does it because he's the only one who can. I promise you I'll ask him on your behalf. I have no doubt in my mind that he would be willing to allow you and myself to show the press around the town. But for himself? I think he'd be happy to never see the press again in his lifetime, let alone have to address them or escort them around.”

“Yes, I sensed his discomfort around the press and whenever anyone spoke about his exploits,” Mallory said. “He is clearly not a politician, but his natural shyness makes him even more endearing to the public. I'm afraid he will never be able to live his life outside of the public eye, Amelia. You might want to sit him down and try to explain that to him.”

Amelia nodded thoughtfully, then consulted her notes. “Oh, that reminds me, Brogan. Harry has asked me to pass his thanks to you and your Aurors for agreeing to provide security for the ritual they will be conducting tomorrow night.”

Mallory smiled and waved that away with a hand. “Nonsense. Mr. Potter is a welcome guest to our country. If we can help by providing a little extra security for a rite, then so be it.”

Amelia returned his smile. Neither commented on fact that the 'little extra security' included fifty Aurors.

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### Parliament building (May 9th)...

Lucius sat behind a large ornate desk and enjoyed the view from his window. He could see the near empty streets and military convoys patrolling them. Power was back on to most of the city, except those areas too damaged by fires. The military had combed through employment files of the utilities and forced people back to work, often at gunpoint. In some cases, families had been executed in order to get people working.

There weren't many civilians visible on the streets, and those that were quickly went about their business. People were afraid to interact on anything but a superficial level.

When the office door opened, he looked up from his musing to accept a report from one of his Death Eaters. He quickly scanned the report, frowning. The team that had gone to HMP Erlestoke had reported back that their target was already dead. When the power failed, and the support personal had fled the prison, the inmates had been locked in and were not fed or watered. Lucius was not pleased. This was a personal project of his, one which he hoped to present to his master as an accomplished fact, and it was beginning to look like he had thought of it too late.

Although someone can survive without food for a fair amount of time, water is an entirely different matter. A person can die from dehydration in as little as five days to as much as two weeks. It had been nearly four weeks since the prison had been abandoned, leaving one Vernon Dursley to die. Petunia had suffered a similar fate, a fact he had learned only yesterday. According to his records, that left only Marge Dursley, an unrelated aunt who had limited value in his mind, and a cousin, Dudley. He scribbled a note, which he then passed to the waiting Death Eater. The man took the note and left the room quietly while Lucius turned to contemplate the scene from his window again.

Outside, the word quickly spread, find Dudley Dursley. Find Dudley and bring him to London, alive and unharmed.

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### Padfoot Manor...

Hermione watched Harry and worried. As the time approached for them to invoke the Rite of Summoning, he became withdrawn and surly. She knew why he was upset. The problem was she didn't know how to fix it, or even if it were fixable.

She had spoken with Remus and Sirius as well as her parents. Not that it had done her any good to do so. They all seemed to think that if anyone could reach him, she could.

Harry was upset about the upcoming rite because of the nudity involved. He wasn't upset at the others being naked as much as he was concerned about himself being naked. Hermione understood his problem, but his reason behind it was one she didn't have much experience with. In the last few days, as the time of the rite approached, she'd come to realize that she had much the same problem, though it was for different reasons entirely.

She had been certain that being naked in front of others wouldn't bother her. She and her parents had visited clothing optional beaches in Europe in the past. It hadn't even phased her when her own parents went au natural at those beaches.

It was startling to realize that while such things were perfectly fine for her parents, the idea of doing such a thing herself made her skin crawl. And that revelation gave her an idea. Perhaps together they could combat the fear.

"Harry?"

"Hmm?"

"I think we need to talk about something. Come over here," Hermione said softly. Her eyes sparkled mischievously.

He eyed her suspiciously, but did as she asked.

She stood and cast a silencing charm on the room, then sealed it to prevent anyone from walking in. Smiling at Harry, who stood uncertainly in front of her, she began to unbutton her blouse.

"I realized," she said softly, "that we're both very uncomfortable with nudity. Though our reasons are different, the results are the same for both of us."

Harry's eyes widened and he swallowed nervously as she peeled out of her blouse.

"Tomorrow night," she continued, "we'll have to be naked in front of our closest friends, when the fact is, neither of us is even comfortable being naked with each other. We've tried it a few times, like in the bath, but always in dim lighting."

She reached around and unhooked the clasp of her bra, then shrugged her way out of it before reaching for Harry and the buttons on his shirt.

He stood, immobilized by her actions, and knowing what a deer felt like when caught in the headlights of a muggle car. What was worse, she kept talking to him. Didn't she realize how distracting it was? He gazed at her naked breasts and opened his mouth to tell her just that, but nothing came out.

"Love," she said as she unbuttoned his shirt and kissed his exposed flesh, "there's nothing about your body for you to be ashamed of. The scars are not your fault, and they're only the outer most part of a very complex and beautiful person."

Harry moaned slightly and helped her remove his shirt. Every time that they had made love, or been naked together, it was with reduced lighting. It was at night and the light of his Everlast Candle softened the stark lines that crisscrossed his torso. He trembled under her touch as she embraced him and he reveled in the feel of her bare breasts against his skin.

"I want you," she whispered into his ear. "I want you to take me, now in the bright light of day. I want to watch your beautiful body and I want you to watch me. I want you to know that I love you for more than just your body and that the scars that bother you so much mean nothing to me."

When she unbuttoned her skirt and let it fall to the floor, his mouth went dry. When she knelt in front of him and unfastened the front of his pants and let them drop to the floor, his head spun as the blood dropped further south, leaving all rational thought nothing but a vague memory.

She suppressed a grin when he popped out of the front of his boxers and she gripped him lightly in her hand. She looked up at him and smiled impishly, then ran her tongue along his length. Harry groaned and clenched his fists fighting the urge to guide her head with his hands. She did it a second time, then she stood and led him over to a day bed in the room.

She sat behind him on the bed, and he tensed when he felt her begin to caress the scars along his back. The haze that had replaced his thoughts receded and his hands fisted as he resisted the urge to stand up and move away from her.

"You are not your scars. They are part of you, yes, but they don't define who you are," she said in a husky voice.

Harry shivered as her breath ran along his back. He try to accept what she was saying, but it wasn't easy. He turned to face her and looked into her eyes. Seeing love and trust reflected in them, and not the disgust or pity he had half expected, he knew she was right. To her, his scars meant nothing.

Reaching for her, he felt the weight of shame lift from his shoulders as he pulled her into his embrace. When he lay back on the bed, taking her with him, he thought, *the light of day never looked so good.*

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Haven School of Witchcraft and Wizardry...

Ginny went about her classes with the rest of her school mates, but her mind and heart weren't entirely in it. Tomorrow night she and the rest of the outcasts would participate in a rite, last performed over fifteen centuries ago. That the rite was ancient wasn't a problem, but the requirement of being naked was not a prospect she was very comfortable with. She felt she could handle it, although she never expected to have to expose herself

to so many people at one time.

No, what bothered her was the fact that Charlie had not replied to her owl. She had written Charlie's boss and had learned that he had left the same day he had received a letter from a family member. She could only assume that the letter he was talking about was his own. The question now was a simple. Where was Charlie Weasley?

And as if the problem with Charlie wasn't enough to distract her from studying for her OWLS, her brothers had stopped by last night with gossip that her father might be crushing on a widow in Haven. That piece of news both elated and worried her. She wanted her father to be happy, but it really signaled the end of his relationship with her mother. Intellectually, she knew it was over, even if she was still alive somewhere in Britain, but her heart frowned over the idea.

Ginny sighed and pushed away her school books. Perhaps it was time to write another letter to Charlie...

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Padfoot Manor...

Neville Longbottom looked at the note that the house elf had delivered and smiled. Millicent Bulstrode had sent it, saying that she would be sending him cuttings from a giant flesh orchid later today along with seedlings for sunflowers and mandrakes. He shook his head, remembering that Millicent's plans to escape Voldemort had collapsed in the final rush to evacuate Hogwarts and she had ended up coming to Haven with the rest of the school. Her family had been one of the first rescued by the extraction teams after the students arrived.

The work that he and Ginny had performed during the evacuation had enabled Professor Sprout to quickly restart the greenhouses at the new school. Neville had helped her as much as he could until he had been pulled off for his current project.

Neville couldn't help but grin and puff his chest out with pride. Harry had given him leave to set up greenhouses large enough to support the hospital. Harry had also instructed him to be 'exotic' with his thinking. He wanted Neville to plan on building a set of greenhouses capable of supplying both common and rare potion ingredients.

This was a side of Herbology that Neville had never experienced before, but Professor Sprout had some good suggestions for him. He had been looking to construct typical railway style greenhouses when a comment from Hermione sent him scurrying to the library to check out the advancements made by muggles over the last century. As a result, and with the help of the house elves, he had put together four traditional greenhouses, and two of a more advanced geodesic design using Fresnel lenses. The advanced lenses had to be purchased from muggle suppliers, unlike ordinary glass, which could have been conjured. But the net result was a greenhouse that enabled Neville to provide a blooming season all year.

Professor Sprout was so impressed with the design she wanted him to write it up for Backyard Herbologist Magazine.

Neville leaned back in his chair and thought about the ritual they would be undergoing tomorrow night. He had no problem with himself being seen naked, but he was ashamed to admit he did have a problem with others seeing Ginny so. He and Ginny had talked about this over the past week and really hadn't reached any solution or conclusion, other than the fact that she would be naked in front of other guys. Something in their conversation however sparked an idea in him.

*"Nevie, I know it bothers you, but have you thought about how much it must bother someone like Harry?" she asked him.*

*"What do you mean?"*

*"You know how he is about those scars of his. I can positively promise you that Harry is not going to be looking at me and lusting after my naked body. He's going to be too embarrassed. And Draco? He's bonded to Luna! He couldn't look at me like that even if he wanted to. Remus? Mr. Granger? Both of them have their own wives and girlfriends to keep them in line and I doubt they're going to be interested in looking at me. No, I see what Harry's doing by choosing who he did. He picked couples only. In doing so, he arranged it for each person to have someone there to support them, someone who loves them above all others.*

*"Harry did it right. I do feel sorry for him though. He must be tormenting himself over this. He carries a lot of extra guilt from what those muggles did to him," she said sadly.*

Neville's expression hardened. *If Harry can put up with this, then so can I,* he thought. *Ginny's right. Harry must be tormenting himself right now.*

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Ballincollig, County Cork, Ireland...

Charlie slowly reconnected with the world and realized he was laying on a comfortable bed. His leg was sore and his body was stiff, but otherwise things didn't feel too bad. He lay for a moment longer, trying to recall exactly what had happened when it all came flooding back to him. He opened his eyes and blinked madly in the bright sunshine.

There was the sound of a muggle television nearby and, from outside the window, came the rumbling of trucks on the street. He started to sit up, but his strength gave out before he could.

"Rest easy, Charles," said a familiar voice.

Charlie whipped his head around and he looked up. Albus Dumbledore stood in the doorway, smiling benignly.



"Professor Dumbledore? Where... what..."

Dumbledore crossed the room and sat on the edge of the bed. He pat Charlie on the shoulder. "Rest easy, Charles," he repeated. "I found you in an alleyway that is commonly used as an apparation point. You were unconscious and magically exhausted."

Charlie frowned and tried to recall the events. "Yes, I was in London, looking for signs of my mother or of Ron. Ginny had sent me a letter asking me to come to Ireland, but I went to England to find Mum. There was a muggle army patrol on the street. I ran. I remember a burning in my leg and I apparated as soon as I felt myself starting to fall."

Dumbledore peered closely at him. "You are still weak from exhaustion, Charles. I will bring you some food. As for news of your brother and your mother, I fear the worst for both. Young Ronald was trapped in greenhouse number six when the back wall was opened to the Forbidden Forest. I fear the Acromantulas made short work of him. As to your mother, she vanished before the troubles began. The divorce between your parents hit her very hard, I'm afraid. I did try to locate her, but after the change of government, most of the Order was forced to go into hiding."

Dumbledore stood and walked to a small kitchen. Taking sausage, bread and cheese out of a muggle refrigerator, he made quick work of slicing and arranging it on a plate. Placing the food on a tray, he levitated it over to Charlie. He then filled a teapot with water and, with a flick of his wand, heated it.

"I take it you didn't find any sign of your mother, Charles?" he asked, his voice sorrowful.

"No, sir," Charlie said, his mouth full of sausage. "I found one great Aunt still in her home, but everyone else was gone."

Dumbledore poured them both a cup of tea and nodded sadly. "Yes, I fear we're in for very dark times. Voldemort has won the war in Britain, and our best hope for fighting him is being controlled by dark influences. But no matter. Charles, you must rest for a while still. You are not ready to be up an about yet. Another day or two should do the trick. Then we can talk of important matters and make plans."

Charlie had glanced up sharply at Dumbledore when he mentioned dark influences, but he didn't comment yet. Turning back to his breakfast, he tore into the meal. He was barely finished when a wave of fatigue washed over him.

Placing the tray on the night stand, he was asleep moments later.

Dumbledore vanished the tray from the table and sat contemplating this turn of events. He had caught the press conference Harry had given in Stonewall Lane, but had arrived too late to intercept him. The next morning, the Dublin Daily was full of coverage of the event. He read Harry's words again and shook his head. Harry had brought over four thousand people with him! The number astounded him and made him even more eager to find the boy. Once he controlled Harry Potter, he'd have those people backing him as well.

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## **Padfoot Manor...**

Emma looked up as Dan entered their bedroom. She put down her quill to look at the pile of books her husband was struggling with. He stumbled over to the table and dropped them with a loud crash.

"I swear I don't know how you and Hermione do it," Dan said in an annoyed tone.

"Do what?"

"How do you manage to memorize all these spells and wand movements? I always knew you were both smart and it always made me proud, but lately I've begun to feel a bit like a moron here."

"Memorization seems to come easily for both of us, Dan, but the ability to memorize isn't really a measure of intelligence," Emma offered in a placating tone.

"I know that, love. But while you and Hermione look at something and memorize it almost immediately, I get stuck struggling with it," he grouched as he pulled out a small book from his back pocket. It looked to be mostly plastic with a spiral bound flip top. Opening the book, he flipped several pages until he found a clean one. Then, tapping his wand to the new page, a hand appeared over it, holding a wand. A moment later, Dan's voice named the spell, gave the incantation, then the hand made the appropriate wand movement.

Emma blinked in surprise and watched her husband go through the movements for the spell several times before she overcame her shock. "Dan? What is that?" she asked curiously.

Dan looked at her and smiled mischievously. "This, my oh-so-incredibly-intelligent-and-sexy-wife," he said smugly, "is my version of crib sheets for wizards. I used the same idea in college, although I admit I had to read the pages. Remus helped me with the spell to record the image and the voice. Each page contains one spell."

"B-B-But did Remus show you how to enchant the pages like that? The playback spells aren't for enchantments, I thought," she said in protest.

Dan shrugged. "I don't know. I just know that Remus showed me the spells and Harry showed me how to make the first page, then I used them to build myself a little reference book. I had to have O'Dalley find me the plastic sheets I needed, but an office supply store had them."

Emma frowned and summoned a house elf who she sent off in search of Remus.

## Hogwarts Castle...

Peeves rummaged through the boxes Harry Potter had brought him. After some digging he found exactly what he was looking for. Many of the pranks that Harry had left him were nothing more than that - pranks. Annoying they may be, but they weren't what he wanted. However, one box was filled with objects much more deadly. Stuffing his pockets, Peeves decided it was time for him to stir up the black cloaks.

Sir Nicholas watched Peeves for a moment before he turned to the Bloody Baron. "This doesn't look good," he murmured.

"No, but we may have some new company when he's done," the Baron replied with a feral grin.

Peeves turned transparent and floated through a nearby wall. His plan was a simple one. Besides, he had permission from Harry Potter himself to wreak a little havoc, didn't he?

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## Haven Operations Center...

As much as Harry would have loved to spend the entire day making love to Hermione, they both realized they had duties to attend to. Harry kissed her gently and promised to meet up with her at dinner, he needed to talk to Draco and Miles. He helped her get dressed first and, in doing so, nearly caused her to change her mind about what they'd do that day. He only laughed while she grumbled about it being unfair that he had to kiss her skin before covering it with clothing.

Harry was whistling as he walked the path from the back of the manor to the Operations Center. The center itself was a squat, non-descript building. From the outside it was a single story brick building with a few windows and several large doors. The inside was an entirely different matter. The building extended several levels below ground. The first level contained most of the administrative offices and planning areas. The second level contained classrooms, an auditorium for large briefings and several reinforced training areas. There were two additional levels below that which were slowly being occupied as new needs arose.

Miles looked up at the knock on his door and, spotting his visitor, he smiled warmly. "Harry, come in!" he said, waving the young man to a chair.

"Draco will be joining us soon. He sent me an owl a few minutes ago letting me know he would be a little late."

"Excellent. While we're waiting, have you had a chance to look over information the Irish provided us?"

Miles frowned. "Yes, but I think you're more on the mark in regard to the numbers than the Irish are. I figure we're looking at one hundred marked Death Eaters. The real problem is, with Voldemort stuck in Britain now, any other recruits Dolohov picks up will not be marked."

"What about those heading into Britain to join him?"

Miles rummaged through a stack of parchments before finding the one he wanted. "According to my counterparts in the French and German Ministries, they have noticed a significant drop in the number of undesirables they've been monitoring. The Germans report several Pureblood societies have all but vanished from their soil. We could be looking at Voldemort swelling his ranks in Britain to as many as two or three thousand Death Eaters once they're marked."

Harry scowled. "I'm such an idiot, Miles. I should have made the ward to work in either direction, but I was only concerned about keeping Voldemort locked up inside Britain. Now I can't modify the ward without removing the existing one and, frankly, I don't think I want to go through that again."

Miles scowled, recalling Harry's illness after he'd erected the ward. "Yes, I quite agree."

"Alright, since we can't stop the flow of men to him, at least for now, let's talk about what we can do," Harry said evenly.

Miles reached for another piece of parchment. "Well, of the four hundred and twenty families which comprise the Hogwarts student body, we've located three hundred and twenty of them and rescued two hundred and ninety. Thirty families have sided with Voldemort and have been placed on the 'Do Not Rescue' list.

"Our primary concern is finding those missing one hundred families and identifying which of them should be rescued and which shouldn't. Voldemort has set up two camps, which 'troublemakers' are sent to. At first, it seemed as though everyone was getting sent to a camp, but things are starting to settle down in that regard. That, we believe, is partly the result of Lucius Malfoy's influence on Voldemort. He always was a pragmatic bastard," Miles said, grimacing.

Miles and Harry both looked up as Draco entered.

"I see I'm just in time. What has my illustrious sire done this time?" Draco asked wryly.

Miles motioned him to a seat. "Just. I was telling Harry about our problems locating those last one hundred families."

Draco scowled. "Yes, well I think we may have a bit of a handle on that, but I need to run over to the school and talk to Professor McGonagall. Some of the elves have mastered tracking for their masters. It was a talent they used to keep an eye on small children. I have five elves that can track people down, assuming that we can provide a personal object that belonged to at least one member of the family.

If that isn't successful, then we have no choice but to tackle the camps the hard way. The problem with that idea is that, while the elves can maintain an invisibility spell, they are almost as effected as we are by dementors."

"What about the students of those families being put on the 'Do Not Rescue' list? What are we telling those kids?" asked Harry curiously.

"Minerva and I spoke about that several days ago, Harry. If the student is fifth year or above, Minerva decided to tell them outright. In all instances however, after they got over their shock and anger, the student has disavowed any actions taken by their family. Two seventh year students have gone as far as asking for legal council in regard to breaking all ties to their family. For those younger than fifth year, it was decided not to tell them just yet," Miles offered.

Harry stood and walked to the map that took up one wall. "Alright, when can we begin searching for the missing one hundred families?"

"I can start by the end of the week, Harry," Draco said softly. "We still need to find out if we can track them or if we're going to do it the hard way."

"Good enough, Draco. Thank you for your efforts, and thank your elves for me."

"Harry," Miles began, hesitantly. "There is one piece of bad news which I am reluctant to bring up, but I took the liberty of having some of Draco's elves do a quick pop over to see if your relatives were alright."

Harry stiffened and he turned away from the map to glare at Miles. "I have no relatives alive except for those here in Haven," he said coldly, though his eyes blazed with anger.

Draco and Miles exchanged a look. Draco shook his head slightly to warn Miles off of the delicate topic. Miles acknowledged the message and continued on with his list of things to talk about.

"Yes, well, according to Amelia, we should see the first American contingent of volunteers, some one hundred trained Aurors, just around the end of this month. Canada has offered another one hundred Aurors, and offers of volunteers from other Commonwealth nations have poured in. Amelia is in talks with several other European countries that are interested in offering help."

Harry thought for a moment. Most of the countries involved had been appalled by what had happened in Britain and the offer of help came mostly out of fear that it could happen to them as well. It wasn't a noble reason for offering help, but Harry wasn't about to turn them down on some noble principle.

"Miles, we need to start thinking about what we're going to be doing with these volunteers once they arrive here. Some will be bringing their families, adding to our overall population. The numbers don't bother me. What does bother me is what we're going to do with them." Harry frowned, thinking of the mass of soon to be bored people sitting around Haven with nothing to do. And many of those people would be trained Aurors. He shuddered at the thought. Bored people could quickly cause problems.

Miles' eyes lit up with excitement. "Harry, so far we've been rescuing people, and reacting. We currently have a force of roughly two hundred wizards and witches. With the volunteers coming in, we'll easily double that, and double that again. It will be time for us to stop reacting and start making Voldemort react instead."

Harry turned back to stare at the large map, all the while thinking furiously about what Miles had said. Finally his eyes came to rest on one section of the map.

"Azkaban," he breathed.

Miles blinked in surprise then grinned wolfishly. "Aye, an attack on Azkaban and perhaps a mass breakout would be a big blow to him."

Harry turned away from the map, his eyes gleaming. "Let's get planning for a raid on Azkaban, with the intent to break out as many prisoners as possible," he said. He paused for a moment, thinking quickly. "Let's plan on a small but very noisy raid on Diagon Alley at the same time."

Miles jotted down some notes and began to chuckle. "Very good, Harry. A small ruse and a main thrust elsewhere. Draco, Caleb and I will start working up the details. When do you want to launch this raid?"

"We shouldn't be too hasty. I think we should wait until we have some of the volunteer forces here and trained to work with our men," offered Harry.

"Good enough. We'll get on it," Miles replied.

A few minutes later, Harry left the office. Looking back just before he closed the door, he grinned. Miles and Draco already had their heads together and were taking notes at a furious pace.

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## Hogwarts Castle...

Anthony Edwards was a minor cog in the great war machine wielded by Voldemort. A sergeant with only minor responsibilities, Edwards led his group of ten Death Eaters from their quarters outside of the castle into the Entrance Hall. Voldemort kept the number of people allowed in the castle to a minimum, but somewhere along the line he had absorbed a healthy dose of paranoia. As a result of that paranoia, the castle was routinely patrolled by Death Eaters.

Edwards checked over his men carefully. He had once been caught by Voldemort with one man not wearing his mask and had suffered several agonizingly long minutes under the Cruciatus curse because of it.

Glancing up, he mentally checked his route. He hadn't been a student of Hogwarts, so the idea of the moving staircases was unusual in his mind. When Voldemort had taken over the castle, something had happened that caused most of the castle's magic to drain away, freezing the staircases in place. He had heard the tales of the moving staircases and frankly he was grateful they didn't move anymore.

Edwards led his men upwards into the castle, their patrol route started on the seventh floor and worked its way down to the dungeons before repeating.

"Hey, did you see the new batch of muggle girls they brought in last night? I swear some of them are real lookers," exclaimed one of the men.

Edwards smiled, hearing that. His men might not be the greatest group of wizards working for the Dark Lord, but they were loyal, and happy to be working for such a great man.

"I can't wait to get my hands on one of them," said another. "Do you think they'll start passing them out as rewards again, or will we still have to share them?"

Edwards stopped the men on the landing of the fifth floor and motioned for them to be silent. "What is that?" he said quietly, staring up the staircase.

At the top of the landing to the seventh floor was a bright light. It was indistinct at first, but it was slowly resolving itself into a form of a young man with black hair and intense green eyes. Edwards and his men pulled their wands and started up the staircase cautiously.

"That looks like Harry Potter," one whispered.

Edwards nodded and tightened the grip on his wand. He paused and waited for his group to gather together on the landing of the sixth floor. As soon as the group was together, a small figure appeared and hurled three objects at them.

"Down!" shouted Edwards, and then gave action to his words by diving to the floor. As his men followed him down to the floor, he saw the three objects sail over his head. There was a sound of three muffled reports against the wall. Relieved, Edwards climbed to his feet and scowled at the poltergeist.

"Nasty black cloaks!" shouted Peeves as he floated out over the hall of stairs. "Nasty Wizards, spill your gizzards!"

One of the Death Eaters raised his wand and Edwards pushed it back down. "Don't bother. He's a poltergeist and none of your spells will affect it. The castle also has ghosts and we can't do anything about it because we don't have anyone with a necromancy skill anymore. Our Necromancer died in Potter's attack on the Ministry."

The men stared at the pesky poltergeist for a minute, then Edwards turned to look at the figure at the top of the landing. From this vantage they could see it was some sort of projection.

Edwards took a single step towards it... and the landing pulled away from the wall. The floor creaked ominously and everyone froze. The upper and lower staircases swung with the landing and Peeves laughter cackled and echoed in the hall.

With a loud cracking sound, both stairways gave way. Edwards and his men screamed as they plummeted the distance from the six floor to the ground. Peeves danced a little jig, then he turned and bowed to the illusion of Harry Potter before running through a nearby wall.

The fall itself probably wouldn't have been fatal, had they not brought the other staircases down with them.

The bottom of the hall exploded in a shower of wood, stone and metal. Mixed in were bits of bone, flesh and blood as several tons of material that had once been the hall of stairs crashed to the ground. A huge plume of dust filled the hallway.

Voldemort himself stepped from his chamber to see what all the noise was about. As the dust slowly cleared, a dreadful silence filled the hall only to be broken by the faint moaning of a Death Eater, whose arm had nearly been severed clean off by flying debris. Voldemort's eyes flared red dangerously and the castle rang with a joyous shout.

"Old Snakeface is quite a disgrace, wizard's gizzards in his face," shouted Peeves and then he broke into a fit of giggles.

Voldemort hands curled into fists and he flew into a rage, killing the wounded Death Eater. He vowed to put Lucius on to finding him a new Necromancer.

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## **Padfoot Manor...**

It wasn't until late in the day when Remus was finally able to catch up with Emma and Dan. Remus slipped into the room and watched quietly while Hermione gave them their lesson in ancient runes.

"The use of the Ehwaz rune, depending upon its alignment, can either strength or weaken the spell. For example, Ehwaz reversed Kenaz would mean to weaken the power output where an Ehwaz Kenaz would strengthen the power output," Hermione said, then paused to look at Remus curiously.

"I'm sorry to interrupt, Hermione, however your mother sent me an elf earlier in the day asking for me to see her," he offered apologetically.

Emma looked confused for a moment, then her expression brightened. "Oh yes! Dan, show Remus your book."

Dan stared at his wife for a moment, then reluctantly reached into the back pocket of his pants to remove the small book he had made and handed

it to her.

"Remus, I remember you and Hermione talking about how you were looking for ways to turn Haven into a profitable venture for Harry. Well, I think I might have find a partial answer to your problem. Or rather, my resourceful husband has," Emma said proudly.

Dan looked embarrassed and Hermione looked intrigued as Emma waved around the small book. Remus watched the family with thinly veiled amusement. As Emma explained, Dan looked increasingly embarrassed and Hermione was practically bouncing with excitement.

"Think about it, Remus. We can make books like these that can be sold worldwide to students. They're tough, nearly impossible to tear and the plastic is dirt cheap when purchased in quantity," Emma said in an exuberant tone.

"Why limit it to things used only by students?" asked Hermione, catching her mother's infectious enthusiasm.

Remus took the book from Emma, looked at it and then glanced back at Dan. He then placed the book down on the table, activated a few pages and watched the display carefully. Seeing that Dan had used the spell he'd given him, he then closed the book and ran a few tests on it. "You used the spells I gave you, didn't you, Dan?"

"I did, yes. Your playback spells did exactly what I wanted them to do," he replied, confirming Remus' suspicions.

Remus walked over a chair and sat down. He stared at Dan intently, clearly gathering his thoughts. "The spells I gave you are great for playing back a memory. They're like an instant Pensieve, but only work on one memory. What I am curious to know is how you took a playback charm and managed to imbue a piece of plastic with it, as well as a specific memory?"

Dan shrugged. "I just used the spells you gave me, Remus. Harry walked me through setting up the first page and helped me form the memory. After I got the first page down, the rest was easy," he replied in a defensive tone.

Remus looked at Hermione and could see she was now glancing between the book and her father. Then she grinned wildly at her father. Emma's expression matched Dan's. Both were confused and didn't understand why Remus was making a fuss about it.

"Harry," Hermione said with a grin.

Remus nodded, then turned back to Dan. "I think you've spent so much time around Harry of late that you don't realize how many totally unique things he's capable of doing. Harry could be an enchanter if he wanted to be."

Seeing Dan and Emma's puzzled expressions, he ran a hand through his tousled hair and thought quickly. "Alright, let's try it this way. You both know that any wizard or witch with sufficient magical strength can make something like a portkey, right?" At their nods, he continued, though more slowly. "What you may not know is that most of us are limited, for the most part, in what spells we can imbue an item with. It's not based on strength or knowledge, it's based purely on a talent one is born with, not learned, much like Nymphadora's metamorphic talent. An enchanter has no such limitation set upon them. They can take any spell and imbue any object with it. It's a rare talent and enchanters are an important part of the Wizarding world."

Seeing that Dan and Emma now understood the difference, he tried to hide his grin at Hermione's obvious impatience and got on with it before she could interrupt.

"There are few ways of adding magic to something. Mixing it with a potion, or sometimes creating it from a potion, is two ways to go about it. The Weasley twins and their famous Canary Cremes is an example of a transfiguration performed using a potion mixed into a candy. Both Fred and George have the ability to also take a regular object and enchant it with a spell. About one in six wizards can enchant objects."

"I can't, I've tried," offered Hermione, her disappointment obvious.

"I can't either, Hermione," replied Remus. "But it was an ability that both James and Sirius had, so I'd invent the spells and they'd do the enchanting.

"Dan here has been working with Harry and Harry helped him do the first enchantments. Neither of them realized just how valuable a skill that really is. It's something to be proud of Dan."

Remus reached out and picked up the book. "Now, as to the book, I think Emma may be on to something. What we have here is a study aid that could easily be the companion to the regular textbooks. When one considers the number of students there are at any moment we could be looking at selling fifty thousand copies per year internationally. Yes, Emma, I think you were right to tell me about this. I'll speak to Harry about it in the morning. Dan, would you mind if I borrowed the book until tomorrow?"

"Sure, take it, but Harry's already seen it. In fact, it was his suggestion as to how to organize the book and put it together."

Remus grinned. "I think we can run with this. We've been looking for things to help get Haven on it's feet. This will really help."

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Ballincollig, County Cork, Ireland...

Charlie Weasley slowly opened his eyes again. It was much later than when he was last awake.

"Ah, we're awake again, are we? Tell me Charlie, how are you feeling now?" asked Dumbledore in a kindly fashion.

"Better, Sir. Much better in fact."

"Excellent," Dumbledore said, smiling. "You are still dealing with it, and you seem to be recovering quite well. Here, I have taken the liberty of preparing a meal for you. Eat, and afterwards we will talk of things, some good and some not."

Charlie took the offered platter of food and hungrily tore into it. As he ate, he tried to remember why Dumbledore had been separated from the Order, the school and his family. There had been rumors of a disgrace, of attacks and several deaths at the school, but those had been mostly rumors. Both his father and Bill had written him about Ron, but neither had gone into great detail except to say that Ron had sexually assaulted Hermione Granger and had brought great shame upon the Weasley name. Mum's letter about the matter was disjointed and didn't make much sense. She apparently placed all of the blame upon Hermione and said she had ensnared Harry Potter under her spell.

That didn't make much sense to Charlie, but he had to admit to himself that he didn't know Hermione all that well. He had met her during Harry's first task at the Tri-Wizard tournament and a few times afterwards. She seemed like a nice enough girl at the time. One thing from both his parents' letters had been clear on one subject. Dumbledore had tried to defend Ron at his hearing, while Hermione and Harry were on the prosecuting side.

Charlie sighed as he ate. He finally had to concede to the idea that he simply didn't have enough information and the fact that his family had always trusted and respected Dumbledore weighed heavily in his favor.

"Professor? Just what is going on?"

Dumbledore smiled gently down at Charlie and took a seat nearby. "Now that is good question. Let me see if I can put it in proper perspective for you.

"During the summer, when Harry Potter went missing, I have reason to believe that he fell under an evil influence. During the school year, he deliberately orchestrated a series of character attacks on myself and others, which resulted in massive changes occurring at Hogwarts. I believe that Harry truly believes he is doing the right thing, but he is being led by the Brotherhood of Druidic Knights, a dangerous Wizarding society. Furthermore, I'm not sure the Brotherhood still adheres to its ancient and noble ideals, since Harry has surrounded himself with people known to be supporting dark arts. For example, one of his principle advisers is none other than Narcissa Malfoy and her son, Draco.

"There are other people close to Harry who have corrupted him further. And I think what we're looking at is a separate organization from Voldemort's. Considering the changes that Harry has undergone, I would not even rule out some form of mind control being used on him. Perhaps even a Liquid Imperius curse."

Charlie struggled to consider the idea that Dumbledore had presented him with. He found it hard to believe that Harry would turn dark, and yet... Narcissa and Draco Malfoy? The Malfoy's had always skirted around the edge of being dark, at least legally, and they had a ruthless reputation. It wasn't an impossible concept that Narcissa was somehow controlling Harry Potter and his friends.

When Charlie yawned and leaned back against the pillows on his bed, Dumbledore smiled gently at him. "You must rest. Another day, perhaps two, and you will be recovered. For now, rest, think about what I have said and we will discuss it more when you are more awake."

Charlie nodded and closed his eyes. Tomorrow would come soon enough and he and Dumbledore would be able to figure out what to do.

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### **Draco reinvents Q Branch, morning of May 10th...**

Draco trudged up stairs to the ground level of the Operations Center. Training with the elves had been progressing rather well and they were working with Caleb's Auror forces very well. But he wasn't satisfied. The problem was a simple one, the extraction teams, and his elves, needed equipment that didn't exist. Draco knew enough to recognize that fact, but he lacked the ability to do anything about it.

Stepping out of the Operations Center, he blinked in the bright light and considered whether to run over to the school and have lunch with Luna or head back to the manor house and have lunch with his Mum. Narcissa had been put on the late night shift as a healer trainee at the hospital and she was usually awake by noon to meet with him for lunch.

Opting to take lunch with his mum, he set off down the narrow path towards the manor house. He hadn't gone very far when he heard the sound of heavy footsteps coming up behind him. Turning, he was startled to see the trees on the path being shoved aside and a large ogre striding up the path with a heavy club over his shoulder. Draco squeaked in surprise and the ogre stopped and stared at him.

"Draco tasty!" bellowed the ogre and it unlimbered the club and stepped forward.

Draco took off at a dead run in the opposite direction as fast as his feet would carry him. He was more than halfway to the manor house and ready to start shouting to everyone that a ogre was coming when it dawned on him that the ogre hadn't followed him. The second clue was the fact that a non-speaking creature like an ogre not only knew his name, but clearly spoke it. Skidding to a halt, he turned and faced the direction from which he had come. He could clearly hear the laughing in the distance. Frowning, he started towards the sounds of the laughter, then he paused and cast a disillusion spell on himself. Training with the Aurors of the extraction force and his elves had managed to teach him a few things about stealth that Slytherin house hadn't.

Sneaking up on the sound of laughter he was confronted with two sets of twins, one red-headed and the other blond. The other curious matter was the floating ring which seemed to be displaying what the Ogre would have seen.

"Find another person, Georgie!" said one of the blonds.

"Yes Georgie, do find another," teased the other red head, obviously Fred.

Intrigued, Draco changed his mind about stunning them all and hanging them by their toes in the nearest tree. Instead, he watched as George

began to move around and noticed the movements within the ring echoed George's movements. Dispelling the illusion charm, he stepped out from behind a tree and cast a cannon blast spell. The loud explosive sound knocked Fred off his feet and George collided with the two blonds. All three fell in a heap.

"Hello ladies and gentlemen," Draco said with a wry smirk.

"Merlin, Draco! Are you trying to give us heart attacks?" whined Fred.

"Well, if you two weren't playing around scaring people, I wouldn't have to return the favor, now would I?" asked Draco, offering Helga a hand up.

"He does have a point, brother mine," said George.

"Oh, I know he does. I just refuse to admit it." replied Fred.

Draco sighed in frustration. "Can you guys at least pretend to be serious for a moment? You two have more inventive talent in your little finger than any ten wizards I know and you're wasting it on jokes."

Fred straightened to his full height, which was a good three inches over Draco. "Wasting? I will have you know we've been inventing stuff..."

"Yes! That's my point, George!" exclaimed Draco.

Fred looked insulted. "Wait a tic! I'm Fred! He's George," he said pointing at his twin.

George looked up from one of the blonds he was holding. "I am? Oh, wait, that's right. It's an even day. That makes me George today."

Draco grabbed his head and pulled hard on his hair. "ENOUGH!" he bellowed and both sets of twins recoiled from him. "There are teams that go out every night putting their lives on the line, and they need equipment to make their job easier. You two," he said, jabbing a finger at the now subdued pair, "have the know-how and inventiveness. That Ogre, can you make it smaller? Don't you see? You can see what the Ogre saw, probably hear what it hears as well. If you could make the same thing, only instead of an Ogre you used a pixie or a fairy, the extraction teams would have a tool that would allow them to explore an area safely! They need so much and you two are playing games!"

Fred glanced over at George and the two communicated silently for a moment. "Draco, it's not like we don't want to help," said George.

"But Miles told us to leave the dangerous work to the professionals," finished Fred sadly.

Draco folded his arms across his chest. "Yes, he's right, you two aren't trained for the extraction teams. I'm training with them now and it will be months before I'm good enough to go along. But Miles is wrong, you two have uses right now."

"What about us?" protested one of the blonds.

Draco looked surprised. He was only vaguely familiar with the two girls and barely knew their names.

Fred grinned broadly. "Inga's right. They'd be dead useful, even if they aren't witches."

"I'm Helga, not Inga," protested Helga annoyed that Fred would think she was her sister. Inga, Fred's girlfriend smacked Fred on the arm. "Stop thinking she's me!" she pouted.

Fred looked to George for support, but George knew better. Instead he suddenly found some overhead clouds extremely interesting.

Draco ground his teeth in frustration. "Fine! Look, you four, I'm in charge of providing support services to Miles and his people. As of this moment, you are going to be put to work inventing the equipment the teams need. I'll speak to Harry about it and get his approval."

The four twins grinned broadly at Draco and he knew he was opening a major can of worms, but he also knew the Weasley twins were the most dangerous pranksters on the planet. If the Johansen twins were half as good on the muggle side, the quartet would be truly formidable.

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## Derreenataggart West, Evening of May 10th...

Harry stepped into the grand foyer of the manor and looked over his friends. He tried to suppress the chuckle that threatened to escape. Each was dressed as if they were going on a winter trek, knowing full well that once they arrived at Derreenataggart they would be getting naked.

Beside the core group who'd be participating in tonight's ritual, Minerva, Narcissa, Bertrand, Amelia and Arthur had been asked to attend as observers. Harry had approached each in turn and explained the rite and its requirements. He felt it was necessary to include the parents wherever possible. Terry's parents had decided that since Amelia was attending it wasn't necessary for them to attend as well. Harry accepted that. He knew that Terry's mum, a witch, was settling in nicely at Haven, but his father, a muggle engineer, was having difficulty immersing himself into a mostly Wizarding town. It was an issue that Harry knew he would have to address at some point, Terry's dad wasn't the only muggle in Haven.

Right now they were getting ready to portkey to Derreenataggart. There was still several hours before the appointed time, but he wanted to give people time to get used to the area. Nodding to everyone, he grabbed a hold of the hula hoop that Remus offered and motioned for the others to do the same. Tonks had the second hoop to keep the crowding to a minimum.

Hermione smiled shyly at Harry when she stepped to his side and grabbed onto the portkey. He was about to say something when the foyer vanished. A moment later they appeared in a large tented pavilion. Harry waited until every one had appeared before walking to the front of the tent.

"Everyone please, give me a moment of your time," Harry said, holding up a hand. He waited a few moments as everyone turned to face him before continuing.

"We are two hours ahead of schedule. The rite begins at midnight. We arrived early so that everyone could take some time to examine the circle and get used to the area. We are currently in a field left fallow. Next to it is a farmer's field and the two are separated by a fence that has been charmed with a notice-me-not spell, so I do not expect any difficulty with the farmer, unless you cross that fence. Do us all a favor, leave the poor man's crop alone and stay on this side of the fence. Also, for our protection, the Irish Ministry had graciously provided us with an Auror security detail. Please do not bother them. Now, if everyone will follow Remus, he will take us out to the circle, where you will be allowed to roam about for the next hour and a half."

Stepping from the pavilion, Remus led the group towards the circle. It sat upon a small knoll and was ancient, with only eight of the stones still standing. Two others, toppled over, lay nearby and another two were missing entirely. The axial and portal stones were on an east/west axis. Unlike the other stones, the portal stone was wider and taller.

From the stone circle one could look out and see the Atlantic Ocean. Even though it was well after dark, it was possible to look out from the circle and see shipping traffic making its way to nearby port cities.

Hermione looked at the circle with an intense curiosity. She had read about these circles, and read some of the conjecture as well. Some thought that the circles were actually an ancient form of Wizarding transportation. The portal stones seemed to suggest that was the case, but the problem with that theory was most circles were active only under specific astronomical conditions. To be used as a transportation system would mean the circle would have had to be active all the time. And everyone knew that wasn't the case. The circles are too tied to the astronomical calendar.

Suddenly Harry squeezed her hand painfully. "Look! That building is moving, Hermione!" he exclaimed. Dan, who was standing behind him, chuckled. Hermione looked at the bright lights in the distance and frowned for a moment until she realized what it was.

"Harry," Emma said gently, "that's not a building. That's a ship, probably a cruise ship, considering its size and the way it's lit up."

Harry looked startled. "We're that close to the ocean? Bloody hell, Remus should have told me! I would have come here earlier then."

"Why Harry?" asked Hermione. His reaction puzzled her.

"I've never been to the ocean before," he replied in an awed whisper.

Hermione frowned. She and her mother exchanged a glance. Harry had been deprived of so many experiences they took for granted. Dan clapped a hand down on Harry's shoulder and he looked up at him.

"Later in the summer I'm going to insist we all take some time off. Emma and I know a place in the south of France that we can take you to, where you can get your fill of the ocean," Dan offered. Harry smiled shyly, looking like a five year old who'd just been offered a lap by Father Christmas.

Hermione tugged on his hand. "Come on, Harry, let's take a closer look at the circle. You won't be able to see much of the ocean in the dark. We'll come back here when it's light."

Harry nodded and let Hermione lead him back into the circle.

Dan and Emma watched the two wander away. "You know," Emma said in a sad voice, "I always thought I would find great fulfillment in helping my grandchildren experience new things. I never thought I'd start early with my future son in law."

"Emma..." Dan admonished.

"I know, I know, Dan. It's just that these little slips he makes, like never having gone to the ocean, it tears at me and I know it tears at Hermione..."

Dan closed the distance between himself and his wife and took her into his arms. "Em, don't you worry about Harry. Hermione will take good care of him and we'll help her. He's never been to the ocean before, or the mountains, and yes, I asked him about them a few days ago. He is working hard to put his past behind him and we'll help him. But we can't help him if we keep stopping to lament over what he's never had.

"It's way too early to think about grandchildren, but you're right. We're going to help Harry experience things he's never experienced before. He's a little old to cuddle and hand over to a pile of puppies for the fun of it... Well, maybe Hermione can do the cuddling for us," he concluded with a chuckle.

Near the portal stone, Harry and Hermione looked in Dan and Emma's direction and grinned. "That looks interesting," Harry murmured. "Must be the idea of her getting naked," he joked.

"Harry!" Hermione said, swatting his arm. Privately she had to agree, however. Her parents hadn't been the type to display a lot of public affection towards each other. You knew they were in love by how they acted, without all the public displays. It was, in Hermione's opinion, something she thought she would have wanted for herself, but Harry had other ideas. Harry wasn't into extreme displays of public affection either, but he was always close enough that he could reach out and touch her hand, and he did so, frequently. And every so often he'd shock her by being more overt. And privately Harry was surprisingly affectionate with her.

Hermione turned to look at Harry. His gaze was fixed on the portal stone, but it was unfocused.

"What is it? What do you see?" she asked him, her tone tinged with worry.



The stone," he murmured, "it's radiating power. It feels like I'm looking at something that can look into my very soul and see every flaw and see every stain... and yet it feels caged, trapped within the stone. The whole circle is infused with power, but this stone the most of all."

"Will this be a problem?"

"I don't think so, Hermione. We came here to awaken something. Perhaps what I'm seeing is the aura of what we're going to awaken."

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### **Ginny and Neville...**

Not far from where Harry and Hermione stood, another couple faced a different issue.

"Look at it, Ginny. It's the Celtic range flower! They're very rare and only grow at sites that are considered sacred..."

Ginny placed both hands on her hips and stared at her boyfriend. Sometimes he could be so dense! "Neville, forget the flowers for a moment. I want to talk to you."

Neville looked up from the flower he was holding in his hand. "HmMMM?"

"I know we've talked about this, Neville, but I want you to keep your eyes where they belong tonight."

"Ginny, you know I've only got eyes for you," Neville said bashfully.

"Yeah, well, tonight you won't have just me to look at," she grumbled.

"We're not going to have that tired old argument again are we?"

Ginny looked down at her feet. For the most part she directed the way their relationship ran, but every so often she would say something or do something and Neville would take charge, putting her firmly in her place.

Neville reached down and cupped her chin, pulling gently until she was looking at him. "Ginny, for every couple here, each guy would say their girl is the most beautiful. I'm no different. You hate your red hair and your freckles, I love each and every freckle and, if I have to, I'll spend the rest of my life telling you that. Maybe someday you'll believe me," he told her firmly.

Ginny's eyes misted and Neville pulled her into a tight embrace. He held her firmly, the flower long forgotten.

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### **Draco and Luna...**

Of all the couples present tonight, Draco and Luna were perhaps the one least worried by the upcoming ritual. The soul bonding Luna had performed to save Draco's life was firmly in place and it served to re-enforce their feelings for each other. The bond was serving another, equally important purpose. It was allowing Luna to become more focused on everyday events without the spacey feeling she previously imparted to everyone.

Luna nudged Draco, motioning him to look at Ginny and Neville, who were embracing. "In a way, I almost feel sorry for our friends, Dray..." Luna said softly.

Draco looked at Luna in surprise. As long as he had known her, she had never had anything bad to say about anyone.

"What do you mean?"

"Look at Ginny and Neville. They are so much in love, and yet are so insecure about it."

Draco smiled gently at her. "Not everyone has the advantages we have, Luna. I know how you feel, even when you're going to sleep in the school and I'm kilometers away in the manor. I can feel you through our bond."

"I know, Dray. But look at Harry and Hermione. They're so close to having something like what we have, but they can't seem to take that extra step. Something is scaring them."

"Could they have a bond like ours? Your magic created our bond and, from what I've read, it's very unique in all of the magical world." Draco asked.

"Harry and Hermione could," Luna replied softly. "His ability to manipulate auras is very similar to what my magic did. What is an aura, but the light generated by the soul? My magic mixed our souls, beloved. Harry could do the same thing by linking his aura with Hermione's."

"Have you spoken to Harry or Hermione about this?"

Luna frowned. "I would like to, but I'm not sure it's my place to bring this to their attention. Should I get involved? He's touched her aura a few times and each time it's excited her, and frightened him."

Draco scowled and marched over to a nearby standing stone, thinking furiously. Finally he turned and walked back to her. "I don't know, Luna. I think you're right to be cautious but, on the other hand, if you had some material to back up your idea, you could show it to Hermione. She could take it from there."

Luna smiled. "She would, wouldn't she? That girl has two loves in life. Harry, and learning, and she's in seventh heaven when she can combine the two of them."

Draco lightly gripped her arm and motioned her attention back towards the pavilion where Remus was signaling everyone to come back.

Upon re-entering the pavilion, everyone noticed that while they had been gone the interior of the tent had been changed. There were now twelve small rooms and one large central area, where Remus now stood to address them.

"Folks," he said, having gotten their attention, "I know we talked about this, but I wanted to let you know we've taken a few precautions. While we can't do anything inside of the circle, I have placed a set of obscuring charms outside of the circle that will make it impossible for anyone to see inside of it. Those of us inside the circle will appear fuzzy and indistinct to those outside.

Now, since I am the only one here who speaks Gaelic well enough, I will be casting a translation charm on everyone present so that you will understand what I'm saying. Follow my lead and remember the incantations we discussed. You know the English version and, with the translation spell in place, you will incant in modern Gaelic. The rite is in Gaelic and while we could possibly try it in English, we have no guarantee that it would work.

"Finally, you'll note we have twelve rooms here in the pavilion. In each room you will find a simple white robe. Change out of your clothes into the robe. Remove all your clothing and jewelry. Once everyone is changed, we will proceed from the pavilion to the circle. Once inside, I will signal for everyone to disrobe, then I will begin the rite.

"We don't know what to expect, so don't let anything startle you into rash action, like leaving the circle," Remus concluded warningly.

When everyone nodded their understanding, he smiled. "Good enough. Let's go get into our robes, shall we?" he asked with a wry grin.

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### **The Stone Circle of Derreenataggart...**

Harry stepped into the circle and positioned himself near the portal stone. He had read the auras of the stones in the past hour and knew this stone was probably the source of the greatest potential danger. Being close to it allowed him to watch and possibly shield the rest should a problem arise.

Only eight of the original stones were still standing. Two more had fallen and two were missing entirely from the circle, but their psychic imprint remained strong in the circle. Stones might be missing, but the power was unbroken. Remus had marked standing positions carefully, taking into account the missing stones. Hermione was to Harry's right, and her parents were on his left.

As everyone formed a circle within the circle, Remus stepped into the center of the group. Once, a long time ago, an altar stone would have been situated at the center of the circle. Now Remus stood where that ancient stone had once been.

Remus looked around and nodded to himself, seeing everyone was in the right position. From outside the circle he heard Amelia call. "Two minutes to midnight, Remus!"

Taking a deep breath, he opened his robe and let it slip from his shoulders to the ground. Remus then eyed everyone in the circle as, one by one, they dropped their robes. Harry cringed slightly as his robe fell to the ground and Hermione reached out and touched his hand. He looked over at her and she smiled impishly at him like she had yesterday and he couldn't help but remember where that smile had led to. Everyone was looking at their partner or refusing to make eye contact with anyone except Remus.

Remus held his wand aloft and he traced an intricate series of movements in the air. The burning tip of his wand etching the air with fiery runes in its wake. He traced four distinct patterns of runes, one for each of the four cardinal compass points, then he stopped and traced a single rune over his head. Once that rune was complete, it exploded with a golden brilliance and a dome of light grew to encompass the entire stone circle.

Amelia Bones exclaimed in dismay as the golden dome burst forth and quickly turned opaque. The circle and those on the inside were now totally isolated from everyone else.

Within the golden dome, Remus lifted his wand again and said an incantation. From the tip of his wand a small golden ball emerged to float. He then turned to nod at Harry.

Harry lifted his staff and repeated the incantation. This time a much larger ball emerged and moved to join with Remus'. The two merged into one large orb.

When Harry was finished, Hermione lifted her staff. She had opted to use her staff tonight since it was ideal for working a ritual, where fine control was important. Her orb was about half the size of Harry's. One by one the outcasts, Hermione's parents and Tonks added their orbs to the now huge ball floating above Remus' head.

With the orb now complete, Remus made a motion to start the final sequence of the ritual when three voices cried as one.

"HOLD!"

Remus tore his eyes away from the huge glowing ball hovering over his head and looked at the people assembled. Harry, Tonks and Luna were all glowing, surrounded by a soft nimbus of bluish-white light. All three had a glazed look in their eyes. As one, they stepped into the center of the circle. Harry placed a hand lightly on Remus' shoulder and Remus found himself flung from the center. Draco and Neville managed to catch him before he could crash into the dome surrounding them all.

Harry lifted his staff to the hovering orb and his nimbus flared around him. "Eocho mac Tairdelbaig, son of Aonghas and Ceana, I, Harry, son of James and Lily, Magic's child, command thee to awaken. Thy time hath come!" he cried in a loud voice.

Harry took one step back and Luna took his place. "Eocho mac Tairdelbaig, son of Aonghas and Ceana, I, Luna, daughter of Bertrand and Vespa, Gaia's child, command thee to awaken. Thy time hath come!"

Then Luna stepped back and Tonks took her place. "Eocho mac Tairdelbaig, son of Aonghas and Ceana, I, Nymphadora, daughter of Theodore and Andromeda, Changling's child, command thee to awaken. Thy time hath come!"

The others shared a concerned look at this strange turn of events. The ritual had somehow gotten out of their control and three of their members were under an unknown influence. Hermione raised her wand to interfere.

"No!" hissed Remus. "We have started this, it must be played out!"

She reluctantly lowered her wand and watched as Tonks stepped back. Harry extended his staff upwards, Luna and Tonks did the same. They touched the points of their wands and staff together and the hovering orb roiled as if it had become liquid. A moment later came a tearing sound from the orb as it moved to the portal stone. It seemed to suddenly deflate as it connected and poured its energy into the stone.

As the orb deflated, the portal stone began to glow and a dense mist roiled from its surface. Within the mist came flares of light, as if hundreds of fireflies were trying to light the night. Even the golden light of the dome dimmed as the mist filled the circle.

The sparkling lights danced across the surface of the stone, then moved out to fill the entire circle. Everyone present felt an uplifting of their spirits as the dancing lights filled the dome. The surface of the portal stone bulged oddly and the lights on its surface increased their speed. As the lights moved, everyone moved out of their position to stand behind Harry, Luna and Tonks. Whatever had taken control of the ritual was not finished with their friends just yet.

Hermione gnawed at one fingernail with worry as she watched her fiancée stand before the portal stone.

"Who awakens me from my slumber?" said a voice with a strange echo.

Harry, Luna and Tonks bowed at the sound of the voice and Harry stepped forward. "We summon you, Eocho mac Tairdelbaig. Darkness stalks the realm and thy brotherhood must return to its ancient task."

"Old blood and older magic I sense among you and your companions. Approach, one at a time, and announce thyself so that I may know thee."

Harry walked to Hermione and took her hand. She could see that whatever the controlling force was that had taken over Harry was more in the nature of guiding him than controlling him. He pulled her hand to his lips and kissed her softly, then smiled shyly at her. She let him lead her to the portal stone. There, Harry stopped and placed one hand flat upon the stone.

"I am Harry, son of James and Lily, of the house of Potter. I stand before you with my chosen, asking for guidance," he intoned in a formal tone, then he looked at Hermione meaningfully.

Placing her hand upon the stone, she spoke next, using the same form as Harry had. "I am Hermione, daughter of Dan and Emma, of the house of Granger. I stand before you with my chosen, asking for guidance."

Hermione gasped as she felt another presence in her mind. This was unlike her experience with Harry during their legitimacy training, or even when he touched her aura with his own. This presence was commanding, firm and unyielding, but not hostile. The presence paged through her memories, from her growing up as a muggle to her discovery that she was a witch. She saw flashes of her life, some events she considered vastly important and others that seemed inconsequential. The troll during her first year, her purchase of Crookshanks. Her impressions as she watched Harry run the maze during his third task of the Tri-Wizard tournament, Dolohov cutting her chest with his curse, and Harry waking up after his illness.

Bemused, she let Harry lead her away from the stone allowing Luna and Draco to take their position.

Luna placed her hand upon the stone and spoke. "I am Luna, daughter of Bertrand and Vespa, of the house of Lovegood. I stand before you with my chosen, asking for guidance."

Draco placed his hand on the stone repeating the phrase and he moaned as if in great pain and fell to his knees. "There be darkness and stain upon this one. Foul deeds and fell events he hath partaken of," said the voice in an angry tone and a buzzing sound like hundreds of bees emanated from the stone.

Luna lifted her head defiantly and pulled Draco's hand from the stone. "Nonetheless, he is my chosen and has renounced his ways. I have chosen him over others and will cleanse the stain from his soul. The evil upon him was forced their by his sire and not of his choosing."

There was a moment of silence, then the voice from the stone spoke again. "Very well, child of Gaia. Few wouldst have the ability to cleanse his stain, but thou dost," the voice said reverently. Then the voice turned harsh. "Draco, of house Malfoy and Black, thou have been found wanting, but I sense the potential within you. Thou can cause great good or great harm. Thou doth stand at a crossroad, one path leads to the light, the other to your doom. Know that I will hold thee to a higher standard than these others. Only thy chosen has stayed my hand this day."

Draco looked up at the stone, his face contorted by fear and pain, his breath coming in great gasps. Luna knelt and Draco leaned into her. She smiled softly, wrapping her arms around him. Harry stepped up behind the couple and carefully lifted Draco to his feet. He drew a shuddering breath and nodded gratefully to Harry, then they all moved away from the face of the portal stone.

With the way to the stone clear, Tonks moved forward. Harry watched the pair with considerable worry. If Draco could be held accountable for actions his father forced on him, then who knew what Remus would be held accountable for as a werewolf.

Tonks placed her hand on the stone and repeated the ritual words, then Remus did the same. There was a moment of silence which grew into an uneasy pause. Remus trembled as the spirit rifled through his memories.

"My daughter," said the voice in a gentle tone, "thou art sure this be thy chosen? He is cruelly afflicted and through no fault of his own, doth harbor a great dark beast within his breast. For nigh unto two score years he hath combated the beast and won, but his strength doth wane and soon the beast must win."

Tonks grasped Remus' hand, holding it tightly. "He is my chosen and I want no other. His beast is contained and I will give him of my strength to fortify his fight."

"Very well then. Remus, of house Lupin, place onto me both thy hands," commanded the voice.

"Long ye have fought to control the beast within thee and long have ye suffered with this affliction which began in thy earliest of years. Changlings child has chosen you as her mate, but even her power cannot rid thee of thy affliction, for such knowledge has been lost in the antiquity of time. Thou art cursed, my child, but have borne thy burden with honor. Darkness dwells within thee, but from a curse to a boon I will turn it," said the voice.

Remus gave a strangled cry and his entire body burst into a multicolored halo. Collapsing to the ground, he writhed there for what seemed an eternity before the halo faded from sight and he returned to normal.

"Now dost thou control the beast within, Remus of house Lupin. Rise and stand like a man among thy family."

Tonks bent over and pulled Remus to his feet. The former marauder followed her to stand next to Luna and Draco, his expression was a mixture of relief and wonder. Harry watched the pair curiously, sure that Remus would have a tale to tell when this night was done.

The next couple to approach the stone were Hermione's parents, Dan and Emma. Emma placed her hand on the stone copying the motions of the others. A moment later, Dan copied her motions and the two stood silently in-front of the portal stone. In some ways, the process reminded Harry of the Hogwarts sorting hat with its strange mixture of verbal and mental communication.

Once all the couples had communed with the stone, the lights dancing across its surface began to speed up again.

"A strange and diverse group thou art, and yet all here are bound to a common purpose. Prophecy lights thy path but denies thee the tools to complete thy tasks. All presented are worthy, even the dark stained one who bears the protection of Gaia's child and Magic's child.

"This is the time that was foretold many eons ago. Prophecy and Brotherhood merge to face a fell foe," said the voice from the stone. Then the surface of the Portal stone began to bulge outwards. As one, each person within the circle grasped their upper arm as they felt a burning sensation. The stone bulged more, then the bulge rebounded back into the stone. The surface rippled as if made of water and out of the stone stepped a figure. The golden dome that covered the circle exploded outwards in a great flash of light and a howling wind whipped away the mist.

The figure stood nearly two meters tall, with long white hair, a neatly trimmed beard and, most surprisingly, he was translucent. He raised both hands upwards as if in prayer and the golden dome that surrounded the stone circle vanished from sight. "Math Mathonwy, Teutates, Cailleach Beara and Danu

I call on thee, Gods of old! The conditions are met. The Brotherhood reborn. Bless our rebirth and help our children find their way out of darkness!" he cried in a vast voice.

High above the stone circle a meteor appeared and plummeted to earth. Spitting sparks and flame the meteor appeared to slow and change its course until it finally came to a stand still only a few meters above the stone circle. The molten stone hovered for a moment longer then gently lowered itself until it floated between the figure's arms.

"I, Eocho mac Tairdelbaig, invoke the Brotherhood as mentor," said Eocho. The stone seemed to split into twelve equal parts and each part moved to hover in front of each person.

Harry reached with his hand and grasped the glowing stone expecting his hand to burn with its heat, but the stone was strangely cool in his hand. The stone flashed white and then vanished, leaving him holding a medallion on a heavy chain.

Eocho nodded at Harry in approval, while the others, encouraged by his results, did the same.

"Each of thee now bares the mark of the Brotherhood. No matter what family thou had before, all present are family, now and forever. In thy hands dost thou hold the badge of office. Thou hast, each of thee, asked for guidance, and guidance I shall provide. I am Eocho, mentor. Grasp thy badge and but think of me when thou hast need and I shall come," said the figure of Eocho and then he slowly faded from view.

Harry felt strangely calm, as if the rite had left him a profound sense of peace. He lifted the badge and placed it around his neck, then he bent over and scooped up his and Hermione's robes. He handed her the robe and before she could even think about putting it on, he wrapped an arm around her waist and pulled her close to him. He kissed her neck gently and she moaned slightly in his ear. He released her to put his own robe on, knowing that she had felt his stiffening arousal and he had no intention of letting anyone else know. He turned to see each couple had been similarly moved with their own partners and he smiled.

"Merlin's beard!" exclaimed Remus as he released Tonks and put on his robe. "Did you feel the power?"

Harry pulled his badge out from under his robe and examined it. It was a simple Celtic cross overlaid atop a Celtic knot. It was made of metal,

despite having come from what was obviously stone, as if it were lit with an inner light. The back of the badge contained a single rune.

"I'm not entirely sure, but I think it would be best if we didn't remove these medallions," he said in a low tone. "There is more magic in them than would be needed for a summoning charm."

Hermione looked over at Harry's medallion after examining her own. "The rune is different between Harry and myself and I don't recognize it."

Remus looked at his medallion and then glanced over to look at Harry's. "The rune on mine is different also. Mine looks like Ansuz, but it's different, not the same."

"I think the next step would be to put together a list of questions for Eocho," suggested Hermione.

"Tomorrow," Harry said firmly. "It's late and I think we all could use with some sleep. We started something tonight and I'm sure we all have a lot of questions about what is going to happen next. I just don't think we'll get answers to those questions tonight. When we get back to the manor, I'll ask Dobby to prepare a mid morning brunch. I think we can all do with a bit of a lie in this morning."

Remus nodded and pointed to the pavilion not far from the stone circle. "We can use the portkeys we used to get here to go home. I'll go talk to Amelia and let her know we're all all right, though tired, then we can leave."

Harry laid his arm over Hermione's shoulders as they walked to the pavilion. She leaned into him. "I don't know if I want to get dressed just to go home and get undressed again," she murmured against him.

"Are you that tired?" Harry asked her.

"No, I just don't want to have to spend all that time dressing and undressing. You have something I want very much tonight, Potter," she said with a grin.

He tightened his grip on her and ducked his head as they entered the tent.

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Ballincollig, County Cork, Ireland (May 11th)...

Dumbledore woke in a foul mood. The previous night his detectors had lit up like sky rockets, waking him from a sound sleep and waking Charlie Weasley. The detectors were crude and could only say that the magic was definitely from Harry Potter and that it was coming from the area around Castletown, on the coast. He attempted to apparate to the location immediately, but the published coordinates for the town were closed off by Irish Ministry Anti-Apparation wards.

Only Ministries used wards that sent people polite messages that stated an area was closed off until further notice after you'd bounced off them. They thought it rude not to do so, while the person apparating usually thought it rude to be thrown back to their destination point so firmly. Private wards would have kicked him out and left no message at all in his head. Making a portkey was out of the question, since he had never visited the town and could not visualize the arrival location.

To make matters worse, the noise of the detectors had awoken Charlie Weasley and he had to spend time calming down the irate red head. So it was with no small amount of annoyance that Dumbledore awoke this morning in a less than jovial mood. On the other hand, Charlie had recovered enough that Dumbledore woke to find him busy cooking breakfast.

"Good morning, Mr. Weasley," offered the old wizard as he entered the room.

"Good morning, Professor," Charlie replied, placing a platter of eggs and sausage on the table. "I hope you don't mind me making breakfast for us? I thought with what happened last night you might want to get a early start on checking out that disturbance."

Dumbledore filled his plate and smiled. "Not at all, Charles, and you are quite right. If we cannot apparate to Castletown this morning, we will have to do it the old fashioned way and travel there as muggles do."

Charlie looked up sharply at that comment and tried to hide a smile. No matter how hard Molly had tried, Arthur had managed to instill a fondness for all things muggle in his children. They didn't obsess over it like their father did, but they still enjoyed visiting the muggle world now and then.

Dumbledore peered over his half moon glasses at Charlie. "How are you feeling this morning? Do you think you could stand a trip?" he asked in a jovial tone.

"Professor, I know I make a poor patient and I'm itching to get out and about. My family is in danger and I need to do something about it."

Dumbledore chuckled. "You will my boy, you will. And I daresay your family will be grateful, once they learn of what you've been doing. Now, let us get ready to go visit Castletown and see if we can discover why Mr. Potter was using so much magic last night."

Charlie nodded, then paused. "Professor, how do you think Malfoy is controlling Harry? Ginny wrote me one time saying Harry could throw off an *Imperio* us curse."

Dumbledore paused and thought frantically for a second. "There are a number of possibilities, my boy. He could be coerced into performing for them via some sort of curse on a loved one. That's a possibility which I think is likely. However, my heart fears that they may have used a liquid

Imperius. And if that is the case, only another dose will overcome the first.”

Charlie looked shocked. “B-B-But that would destroy his free will entirely!”

Dumbledore sagged his shoulders as if he were defeated and nodded his head sadly. “Yes, I am aware of the damage it will do to Mr. Potter. Let us hope it will not come to that, however.”

Charlie walked over and placed a comforting hand on the old man's shoulders. “It will be alright, Professor, you'll see,” he offered encouragingly.

Dumbledore shook himself and privately congratulated himself on his acting skills. “Come, young Charles. Let us go see what we can find out.”

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### **Padfoot Manor...**

Harry took another helping of eggs from a platter on the table. He smiled as he listened to Hermione and Remus debate over the questions they should be asking Eocho. The two had started wrangling over the issue as soon as he and Hermione arrived at the table and hadn't stopped. On the other hand, their argument meant that the rest of them could eat in peace.

Harry coughed loudly to catch everyone's attention. Looking unsure of himself, he had one question he had to ask. “Who here feels different this morning?”

Dan looked up from his plate. “I'm glad I'm not the only one noticing the change,” he murmured. Emma glanced at him in surprise.

“What? I did ask you about it before we came down to brunch. You said you didn't notice anything, but I'm telling you, something has changed,” Dan said firmly.

“I felt it also, Harry. When I woke up I tried performing a simple levitation spell on a quill. You remember, like we did in Flitwick's class in first year? I'd swear I was able to force the feather to float just by levitating the tip of the quill instead of the whole thing,” Neville said fervently.

“Yes!” exclaimed Dan, “It's like we've been focused.”

Harry leaned back in his chair thinking for a moment. “I felt that also, although I haven't tested my magic this morning. But that wasn't what I was asking. After the ritual I felt a kind of peace. Always before, when I thought about Voldemort, I felt anger. It was frightening just how much anger I felt. I still feel the determination to take care of Voldemort, but its like the anger is controllable now.”

“I think we all came away from the ritual with changes like that Harry,” offered Remus.

Harry turned to his old friend. “And what of you, Remus? Eocho said some rather startling things to you yesterday.”

“I'm not sure,” Remus replied, a bit worried. “I can still feel the Lycanthropy within me, but it feels different somehow. It's almost as if I now have control over it, rather than the other way around.”

Luna laughed and everyone turned to look at her in surprise. She didn't often interject herself into these conversations.

“What's funny, Luna?” asked Harry.

“Remus,” she said with a smile. “He's no longer a werewolf, he's a were-animagus.”

Remus flinched back in his chair, his expression thunderstruck. “A were-animagus? Is that even possible?”

“Oh, Remus, of course it's possible. Eocho's coming caused the birth of many new species last night. I can't wait to see the Golden Ostaphant up close. They're supposed to be larger than a sperm whale. If that kind of magic can cause the start of new species, it can certainly fix one tired old werewolf,” Luna said dreamily.

Remus looked as if he wasn't sure whether to be insulted over the “old” comment or not. Tonks, on the other hand, simply slid under the table, weak from laughter. Emma tried to hide her smile behind her cup, while Dan and Harry laughed openly. Remus growled in his throat and glared at Harry. Unfortunately for him, his glare of death no longer worked properly.

When the laughter finally died down, Harry rapped on the table. “Alright, I suspect over the coming days each one of us is going to be meeting with Eocho privately. I'm not sure if he can appear on his own, or if he has to be summoned. But for now, why don't I summon him and we can see about getting started?”

Looking around the room and finding no objections, he pulled the medallion from under his shirt and held it in his hand. Concentrating on Eocho, he waited. Barely seconds passed before a form coalesced at the head of the table.

Harry looked at the figure carefully. He noted the ancient robes he wore, his feet bare.

“Who summons me?”

Harry stood and walked to the head of the table. “I did, Múinteoir,” Harry said respectfully.

“What is it you wish of me, Maglios?”

Harry looked perplexed. "I'm sorry. Maglios?"

Eocho looked at Harry sadly, then he surprised everyone by speaking in modern English. "Has so much of our old ways been lost then? You are Maglios, leader and warrior king to your people."

Harry blinked in surprise and Eocho smiled in return. "Sit and listen, my children. Learn the history of our Brotherhood."

Harry took his place next to Hermione at the table.

"Long ago, in a time when men were cruel and oppressed even their own brothers, there arose a king. King Mag was a stranger to this land, born of a woman not of the people, but of the captured concubine of his father. Mag's rule, unlike his neighbors, was a gentle hand and his land prospered because of it.

"Eventually other kingdoms looked upon King Mag with jealousy. An alliance between three neighboring kingdoms resulted in the downfall of Mag's kingdom and with his dying breath he did curse those that would conquer his people. Mag's son, Arthimus, fled our shores and traveled far and wide learning all that was good, and all that was bad, about man. He traveled into the east and learned from the masters of lore. As he traveled, he gathered his allies. Arthimus, with his mate, Chysta, formed the core of the Brotherhood. Around them they gathered many who would follow them and abide by new laws, laws originally created by King Mag.

"In honor of King Mag, the leader of the Brotherhood is always called the Maglios. Eventually, Arthimus and Chysta returned to Mag's kingdom and freed his people from the oppression of the neighboring kings.

"As Arthimus assumed the throne, he passed the Brotherhood to another and, in so doing, set the foundation for the Brotherhood for all time.

"In days to come I would speak with each of you, alone and with your chosen mate. Much time has passed and there are things which I do not understand. There is much for each of us to learn. All of you have proclaimed to have a chosen mate, and yet many are not mated? This is something which violates our laws and which I do not understand."

Harry exchanged a worried look with Hermione and Remus, then he turned back to Eocho.

"Honored Múinteoir, as far as we can tell, some fifteen hundred years have passed since the Brotherhood once existed. Much has changed in that time and I am sure that Remus can help you understand these changes, as well as helping us understand the ways of the Brotherhood. But for now, can you tell us what happened last night? Most of us awoke this morning to find things have changed for us."

Eocho smiled gently and once again address them in a more formal, ancient manner. "Yes, thou art as impatient as I sensed, Maglios. Very well then, the burden of Brotherhood is not without its benefits. In agreeing to uphold the law in a selfless manner we receive certain refinements. Some of thee will discover thy magic hath grown in strength, others will discover control has improved. Still others will learn that other qualities have been enhanced.

"There will be things thou wilt learn that will be unique to the Brotherhood and it is important that all of thee have the ability to learn it. After we all speak privately, we will speak again as a group, and begin to learn the unique magiks of the Brotherhood."

Hermione was practically bouncing in her chair at the idea of learning something that had been lost for all these years. Eocho nodded in her direction. "Thy quest for knowledge does thee credit, my daughter," he said gently to her.

"Honored Múinteoir, will we have time to talk of other things? We have several ongoing research projects that your magic might be able to help us with..." She said, then stopped when Eocho held up his hand.

"We will have time to speak of research and magic, child. My time among thee is limited to when I decide thou art ready. Last night thou didst awakened the Brotherhood, but thou art just babes, knowing little of our ways and traditions. My task is to train thee and I will be here until that task is complete."

"Maglios, I will come again to thee this evening. I would speak with thee and thy mate then," Eocho said, then he faded from sight.

"Well that left me with more questions than answers," quipped Draco.

"At least it explained why we feel different this morning," said Dan in a soft voice.

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### Author's Notes:

This is the point you dread the most in the file. The AUTHOR'S NOTES!!!! So first, let me say that Alyx and I hope you all enjoyed your holidays. If you didn't, please don't take that as an invitation to telling us what a miserable time you had. We enjoyed ourselves.

To those reviewers that must insist that they explain to us the physics of things like Apparation. Please don't. You make yourself look like an idiot trying to put a scientific explanation on magic. IT'S MAGIC.

I don't get it. A reviewer that claims to be a slash writer of Draco/Harry fics rolling their eyes over the names for Hermione's parents. Lets roll our eyes over the concept of Harry ever falling in love with a guy, let alone his hated enemy. Sure the names are lame, but then I won't tell you what I think about Harry being gay.

Does anyone really believe that at this point Dumbledore is up for being forgiven? Perhaps in another story, but not this one.

We haven't seen the last of the Dursleys, although Petunia and Vernon are pushing up daisies at this point.

Any resemblance between Snape and Metatron in the previous chapter was purely coincidental.

Charlie, working in Romania with the dragons never got the full story from anyone and even when people did write to him, he ended up getting conflicting stories.

Luna says Nerfherders are truly one footed. She is our resident expert on strange creatures so we have to take her word for it.

We have it on good authority that Hermione is properly chastised by her performance during the proposal scene and has volunteered a spanking by Harry. However if you want to see that particular scene, you'll probably have to go over to one of Kinsfire's stories. Alyx won't let me write stuff like that.

And finally we're taking a break from the Pet Peeves for a while because we found ourselves starting to repeat peeves. Never a good sign.



*Bobmin*  
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# Sunrise Over Britain

## Chapter 5 - Relationship building

### Standard Disclaimer:

The curtain pulled back to reveal two large saplings bent in towards a center point. The saplings strained against the ropes holding them in place. Between the two saplings stood Severus Snape, tied to each sapling. There were ropes from his wrists, legs and neck, going to each sapling. Snape struggled against the ropes futilely.

From off stage, a small figure with a huge head walked slowly towards the center of the stage.

Down in the front row sat all of the outcasts. Hermione pulled her head out of Harry's lap to watch the action. Behind them sat the authors.

The huge headed figure turned to the audience.

"I am told that this poor being has words for you today. But I don't think you'll like them." said the metallic figure, then it turned towards Snape.

"Tell the people in the audience what you need to say and be quick about it. End their misery mercifully," said Marvin.

Snape looked up and glared at the android. Marvin pulled out the Point of View Gun and shot Snape with it once.

Snape looked over android's head towards the audience. "I regret to inform you that the authors of this story make no claim to being JK Rowling or having any literary value whatsoever. In fact, this depressing chapter is in no way related to the Potterverse. I apologize for what you are about to read, and hope that it doesn't drive you to do something rash."

Marvin the android shook his head ruefully. "I knew this wouldn't come to a good ending."

Harry, out in the audience, barked "Shields up!"

As one, everyone reached down and pulled up an edge of the large plastic sheet to cover themselves. Marvin sliced the rope holding the two saplings in place, causing them to spring back to their original position.

Draco, discovered much to his dismay that someone had charmed his piece of plastic to be pass through, and stood up in disgust, covered in Snape guts.

Alyx turned to Bob in a fit of anger. "These are getting more violent! And what is this bit about Hermione and her face in Harry's lap all the time?" she asked in an outraged tone.

"Violence gets us ratings my dear... and as to Hermione. Well I'm just making Kinsfire jealous. He's trying a non-sex story at the moment and these bits probably tease the snot out of him. But maybe she's just sleepy."

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### Sunrise Over Britain

#### Chapter 5

#### Padfoot Manor (May 11th)...

Harry sat at the desk in his study poring over books. It wasn't his favorite occupation, but he had come to realize the necessity of it. His life and, more importantly to him at least, the lives of everyone around him, centered on his finding the "power he knows not". His search had led him into all sorts of obscure branches of magic, and that was how he had discovered the similarity principle of Voodoo, which he had used to successfully ward Britain against Voldemort's Death Eaters from escaping.

"I feel thy desperation, my lord Maglios," a soft voice said from behind him.

Harry sighed and looked up from his books at Eocho. "They depend on me, honored teacher, and I am driven to find a power my foe doesn't understand, or know how to deal with. My family's lives depend upon me."

"Thy burden is a heavy one, Maglios, but the power thou doest seek lies not within yon books. There is no spell, no special magic to which thou canst use to defeat thy foe. Thy power already works and is all around thee. Thou doest inspire others to strive for a better life, thou doest lead by example and love in the same manner. Thou doest lead and others willingly follow thee."

Harry laid his book down on the desk and placed the quill in its holder. "Then the 'power' he knows not does not mean a magic like I had hoped. And it will come down to a duel between him and I after all."

Eocho nodded gently. "It hast ever been thus, my lord. Direct confrontation is the way of these prophecies. Instead of seeking for obscure magics, thou shouldst be looking to weaken thy foe before thou doest confront him."

Harry looked at Eocho in confusion. "But I thought I could not confront him until our powers were equal?"

Confront him one at a time, aye, but must be avoided for now. But art thou not a man? Or art thou a leader of men? And is thy foe not the same? Does he not lead men like thee? Canst thou not weaken him by weakening his followers and make them doubt their choice?"

Harry leaned back in his chair, thinking furiously. "So what you're saying is to attack his organization, to sow doubt and dissension with the ranks of his Death Eaters. We already have plans in the works to do such things, honored teacher."

Eocho smiled. "I know of thy plans and I know of thy fears and doubts concerning them, Maglios. I felt thy concerns when we first touched minds. The burden of leading is never an easy one. Oft times thou will have needs to send men to their doom and it will be unavoidable. Thou canst never truly share thy burden, but thou canst draw strength from those around thee. Thy woman, for example. She is strong and believes in thee, despite her heretic views."

Harry looked up sharply, then chuckled. "I suppose to a Druid such as yourself, Hermione's beliefs would appear to be heretical. A lot has changed in the time you slept, honored teacher. Man has experienced the very worst he can be and has shuddered back from that image. Despite his baser instincts, many strive to better themselves and live in peace. Not everything is perfect or we would not have need of thy help, honored teacher, but know that Hermione is a loving person first and foremost. Her compassion is matched only by her desire to learn. Yes, she is a Christian, of the same faith that ultimately destroyed your way of life. But even that faith has gentled over the centuries. And she is a product of that gentleness. I would rather give my life than see her lose that."

Harry never heard the door to his study open, nor did he notice Hermione enter until he was finished talking to Eocho. He blushed, noticing her, and she smiled back at him, her eyes bright with unshed tears.

Eocho nodded in Hermione's direction and she walked over to sit in a chair near Harry's desk. "I don't think thou doth understand just yet, Maglios. Thou doth wield it unconsciously on all those around thee. Thy chosen one loves thee unconditionally, but thy power has invoked changes within her that she might have never realized had thou not come into her life. Thou art a catalyst, Maglios, and even though thou dost hate the idea of being a leader, let alone hero to people, thou canst help what thou art."

Harry glanced at Hermione, who looked very thoughtful. "I think I understand, honored teacher," she said. "Harry exerts an influence on those around him. His influence makes people strive to reach for their own potentials?"

Eocho smiled broadly. "Thou wert a smart woman to start with, child, but under the influence of the Maglios, thou hast taken thy abilities to greater heights. He hath helped not only bring forth thy intelligence, but hath awakened other things within thee. And that leads me to another issue which I fear I must bring up."

Harry and Hermione shared a glance at Eocho's suddenly serious tone and Harry motioned for him to continue.

"There are many laws and traditions by which the Brotherhood live. Some can be easily forgotten as a product of their age and no longer applicable. Others, however, cannot be so easily dismissed. Of the twelve that have awoken me, only two are married. And yet all are intimate. This casual intimacy is disturbing and will have an impact on thy ability to learn our magics. Control of the magics will be erratic, at best. This is why we only accepted married or unattached members in the past."

Harry seemed to contemplate that for a few minutes, then he smiled. Hermione looked at him, confused.

"Why are you smiling? Don't you realized what a problem this is going to cause?" she asked him archly.

"Are you kidding me, Hermione? Don't you understand? I'm the Boy-Who-Lived, Harry Potter, Savior of the Wizarding World, and in the past few days I find I'm also the Maglios... all these useless titles and the burdens they cause. Then Eocho here comes along and tells me I have no choice but to add another title to the list, and it's the one title I want the most of all. I'm not going to argue with him about it. He's the one who has to tell everyone else. But in this particular case, I'm going to do exactly what my honored teacher wants of me, with no fights."

Hermione looked at Harry in confusion. "Title? What title? He's talking about all of us getting... oh! OH!"

Harry chuckled and looked at Eocho. "Alright, she's smart, but in some ways she can be as dense as I am all the time," he said to the translucent figure before turning back to Hermione. "I know we talked about waiting until after Voldemort is gone, and that was probably a good idea, but we don't know how long that will take. If Eocho says that being married to you will make it easier on both of us, then I'm willing and eager to accept the title of husband. The title of father can wait until after Voldemort."

Hermione's eyes grew wide and bright with more unshed tears and she reached out to clasp his hand.

"I am willing to accept the title of wife as well, but you are right," she said, then she looked at Eocho. "This is a bombshell. Some of our members are quite young by our standards. And while in your time a girl might be married by the time she turned fourteen, in our time we have certain ages that people must wait for. I will turn eighteen this coming September and Harry will turn seventeen at the end of July. In the eyes of our people, we will be adults then. The same can't be said for everyone else."

Eocho nodded. "I understand. But thou must understand that the magics we will learn will be dangerous, and the bond created by intimacy must be solidified or it can push the magics to dangerous levels."

Harry frowned. "I am unwilling to give up what I have gained from Hermione. I'm not talking about just the sex. She takes my nightmares away... I couldn't imagine trying to sleep without her anymore and I wouldn't want to even try."

Hermione squeezed his hand, but held herself silent. She knew about his nightmares, he had them nearly every night. How he managed to sleep at all mystified her. But she also knew that as long as he felt her presence in the bed, the nightmares were held at bay. He could be in the throes of one and a single touch from her changed his nightmare into something else and he'd settle down. She'd have her own nightmares occasionally and

his presence comforted her as well.

Eocho's eyes were gentle as he gazed at the two of them. "Thy dedication, one to the other, doth thou credit. I know the demons that plague the both of thee when thou sleep and I will tell thee that I foresee a time when the demons will no longer bother thee. In the meantime, Remus and I will talk about how to best broach this topic with the others. By your leave, Maglios."

Harry nodded and Eocho faded from sight.

"Merlin, that is going to take some getting used to. He is able to pop in and out without being summoned. And what is this about you being so willing to marry me, all of a sudden? I thought you said we had to wait until after we had dealt with Voldemort?"

Harry blushed and he absently shuffled some parchments on his desk. Finally, he stopped and looked up at her. "I know what I said. I said something that sounded practical, something that sounded logical. I thought 'let's hold off getting married, this way if something happens to me, she can move on'. It wasn't what my heart wanted, it was what my head said to do."

Hermione slipped from her chair and knelt in front of Harry. "You idiot," she said gently. "Married or not, if something happened to you, I'd still be devastated. I don't think I'd want to go on."

Harry reached out and cupped her cheek in the palm of his hand. "I know. I feel the same way. I also discovered when I tried to get my will made that us not being married made it more difficult. I..."

A single tear slid down her cheek. "Harry," she choked, "I want you alive, not your money. I don't give a damn about your money."

Harry chuckled. "Hear me out, love. I know it's not very romantic, but it's important. The Potter fortune, combined with the Black fortune, is one of the largest in the world. Not just the Wizarding world, but the world. I tried to amend my will to take into account our relationship, and my relationship with other people, like Remus and Tonks, but my solicitor warned me that I would risk the will being contested because of the lack of formal relationships. Add to that the simple fact that I don't want to wait any longer. Maybe I'm being selfish, but I don't care anymore. I want you to be Mrs. Hermione Potter. But like a fool, I said we'd wait until after I had taken care of Voldemort and I didn't see a way out of that.

"Now Eocho comes along and says it's a problem that we're not married? He's given me a way out after I stuck my foot in my mouth."

Hermione leaned back on her heels and watched Harry carefully as he explained what he was thinking. Privately she had to admit she had been a little disappointed that he wanted to wait until after Voldemort, but she could see the logic behind it, even if her heart said otherwise. If Eocho would permit, they could legally get married anytime after the end of July. Or with Tonks' permission, before then.

She blinked in shock when Harry levitated her from the floor and into his lap, then she shivered in delight as he nuzzled against her neck.

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## Castletown Ireland...

Albus Dumbledore and Charlie Weasley appeared at the apparation point for Castletown, then both checked their costumes again. Charlie had chosen a more mundane look of sneakers, blue jeans and a white T-Shirt, while Dumbledore wore a beige leisure suit and a lemon yellow fedora. Charlie was sure that the hat didn't match Dumbledore's suit, but was too polite to say anything. The man was, after all, the guiding light of the Wizarding World, and could wear what he wanted.

Stepping out from the alley way, both men looked around the busy port town. It wasn't large, as towns went, so hopefully they would be able to find out why Harry had been here last night.

Charlie spotted what looked like a petrol station and a bus depot.

"Professor, wait here a moment. If that's a bus depot like I think it is, they may have a local map I can purchase that will help us."

"Do you have enough money?" asked Dumbledore.

"I think so. When I realized I would eventually end up in Ireland, I exchanged enough galleons to get two hundred punts," Charlie said, fingering the money in his pocket.

Dumbledore nodded and Charlie crossed the street, then entered the store. A few moments later, he came back out carrying a small bag. He rejoined Dumbledore and removed a map from the bag, before passing the bag to the older man. Dumbledore peered into the sack and smiled as he reached in for one of the loose lemon drops.

"Thank you, my boy! I don't feel quite myself without a lemon drop to start my day."

Charlie carefully unfolded the map, looking for some sort of clue. "I don't know, Professor. Castletown is known for being one of the largest whitefish fishing ports on the Atlantic coast but... wait a tic..."

Dumbledore peered at Charlie as he flipped the map over to read something on the back.

"Would it be possible that he went to a stone circle, Professor? There's a Druid circle not two kilometers from here," Charlie asked intently.

Dumbledore motioned him over to a nearby bench. "It is possible, I suppose. The Brotherhood of Druidic Knights could have rituals which might require the amplification effect a circle would provide. Circles have a long history of aiding in rituals and rites. And considering the amount of power we were picking up, it is possible that some rite was being conducted. Since the circle is so close, we could walk to it and see if we can pick

anything up. But I noticed you're limping, my boy. Does your leg bother you still?"

"A bit, Sir. It didn't bother me when I was at the flat, but we're walking more here. I'll be alright. If it gets too bothersome, I'll transfigure a cane for myself to help."

Dumbledore looked at him with concern, then nodded reluctantly. "Very well, Charles, but if your leg becomes too painful, I must insist you tell me at once. You were injured by a muggle weapon and we do not know what kind of damage it caused. Your healing may have missed something."

Charlie smiled at the older wizard and then led him up the hill towards the stone circle.

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### Haven Operations Center (May 20th)...

Miles Pickerton was discovering that his days were becoming increasingly busy. Once, not to long ago, he had thought he would retire a mid level Unspeakable and former Auror. And then he'd met Harry Potter and his life had been turned upside down. Instead of quietly retiring into obscurity to live off his ministry pension, he had been sent to Azkaban Prison, been rescued from said prison and given the job of planning the ultimate downfall of Voldemort. It was, in Miles opinion, a breathtaking turn of events. And he wasn't even going to mention the addition of Minerva in his life. Not that there was anything between him and the Headmistress. Of course not. But that didn't mean there couldn't be...

Miles shook his head and tried to stop wool gathering. He had more important things to worry about as he descended deep into the Operations Center building. Over a week ago, Draco had dragged the Weasley and Johansen twins into the building and given them space to work on some projects. Miles hadn't been happy about that, but Draco had insisted that both sets of twins would turn out useful if Miles would just let them have some space.

Space he had given them, on the bottom floor, along with instructions to stay out of his hair. And for nearly a week things had remained quiet. The twins went about their business, and he went about his. Until this morning, at any rate. The morning started out well enough, but he had just set a cup of tea on his desk when the whole building shook, spilling it. That would have been enough to attract his attention, but the building shook at random intervals after that. Putting aside his schedule, Miles had quickly made his way down to sub level four, where the twins had set up shop.

Now he was poised to enter the room they were using and he paused to reconsider. He had his hand on the doorknob, ready to turn it, when the door vibrated again and he could hear muffled shouting from within.

Squaring his shoulders, he opened the door and stepped in.

And found himself shocked. He was inside a small office, which would have been normal for this room, except that one wall had a door and a wide glass panel in it. Inga and Helga both worked nearby. Helga sat at a drafting table, working on a diagram and Inga worked at a desk. Inga looked up from her work at the desk and smiled at Miles. Miles was grateful for the fact that both girls wore shirts with their names monogrammed into them.

"Can I help you, Mr. Pickerton?" Inga asked politely.

"Err... I came down here to find out why..."

Miles stopped and blinked in surprise as one of the Weasley twins ran past the window. He was literally being chased by several hundred dog sized crabs. A moment later the other Weasley twin ran by the window, shouting something and laughing.

Inga shook her head. "Just a moment, Sir. Let me call in the boys."

Inga stood and walked over to a wall panel. She pressed a stud in the panel and spoke into it. "Guys, we have company and I think it's time for you to show off some of what we've done."

There was a moment of silence, then there came a sound of an explosion and the room rocked for a moment. Inga smiled apologetically at Miles. "There'll be right out, Sir. They had to clean up the mess first."

A moment later both Weasley's appeared at the window and one stepped through the door.

"Mr. Pickerton! Excellent! I had hoped you would come down to visit us sooner or later," said one of the twins. Miles had no clue which one he was.

"Now, Fred, you know the rules when talking to those that can't tell us apart. You forgot to identify yourself," admonished Inga.

Fred smacked himself in the head. "Bugger! Now I have to clean the dishes next week!" he exclaimed, then he turned to Miles.

"Mr. Pickerton, how much did Draco tell you about what we're doing?" Fred asked in a serious tone.

"Not enough, it seems, Mr. Weasley. Basically, he told me that you are working on some projects for him."

Fred grinned and Miles, for once in his life, was grateful he had never had any kids. A grin like that should be illegal.

"Well, Sir, let me start by welcoming you to your S branch."

"Q branch," Inga corrected quietly. Helga stifled a giggle at the drafting table.

"Right, Q branch. Interesting thing those muggles come up with," said Fred then he turned back to Miles. "Draco asked us to look into developing a

few tools for your teams, Sir. Let me show you some of what we've come up with."

Touching the stud in the panel he said, "George, bring out the fairy flier first."

George nodded and walked out of sight for a moment, then he returned stand in front of the door. Helga stood from her table and walked over to a cabinet and pulled out a small plastic hoop, then handed it to Fred. George placed a small box on the floor, reached into it and pulled out what appeared to be a large fairy.

"That's not a real fairy, is it?" Miles asked, concerned.

"Of course not!" Inga said, indignantly. "The twins would never force some poor magical creature to do their bidding. That's something old lizard lips would do."

"Snake face, darling. We call him snake face, not lizard lips," Fred said, a bit absently.

"Right, snake face. I'll remember this time. Go on with your explanation."

"Right." Fred turned to Miles and held out the hoop. "This is a modification of a prank George and I developed and Draco found out about. The hoop provides visual and aural feedback from what the fairy will see and hear. Through a series of easy to learn hand movements, you can control the fairy and use it to enter a building, or to scout out an area which might be too dangerous to send a person into. The range is limited, only a kilometer max, but Draco said that this sort of capability was needed.

"Because there is no direct wand usage, this is un-trackable by Voldemort's forces," Fred said. As he spoke, the fairy lifted off from George's hand and turned to peer through the window at Miles. Miles could see the image clearly in the hoop that floated in front of Fred. Fred waved his hand in a shooing motion and the fairy took off, flying above what seemed like table after table of 'projects'.

Miles walked over to a nearby chair and sat down, thinking furiously. Finally he looked up at Fred. "This is what Draco asked you to work on?"

Fred managed to look a little embarrassed. "Well, you see, the point of it is, Malfoy... er... that is, Draco, asked us to come up with ideas for things the teams could use that don't require a wand to activate. The fairy flier is just one of those ideas. We're also working on ideas that the teams can use in defense, as well as offensive ideas. The girls here," he said, gesturing towards Helga and Inga, "have told us about a lot of muggle devices and we've been working on coming up with magical versions."

George walked in from the other room and stopped next to his brother. "We would have told you, Mr. Pickerton. We asked earlier if we could help, but you didn't take us seriously. I'm afraid we have a bit of a reputation and it got in the way this time."

Miles leaned forward eagerly. "So what else have you developed?" he asked, his voice laced with curiosity.

George offered Miles two innocuous looking balls. "Flash Bang Nullifiers. The girls gave us the idea by telling us about muggle flash/bang grenades used by the pleasesmen."

"POLICEMEN," corrected Helga firmly, rolling her eyes at him.

George shot her a grateful look. "Right, policemen. A flash/bang grenade is supposed to use noise and light to stun an opponent for a few critical seconds in order to overwhelm them. The flash/bang/nullifier grenade does exactly that, except that it takes it one step further and overloads all wands in range, say two to three meters. Total effects last less than fifteen seconds, but that fifteen seconds could be handy."

"We're also looking into making a more advanced nullifier that would work for at least a minute or more, but we haven't got that perfected yet," offered Fred.

Miles leaned back in his chair holding the two flash/bang/nullifier grenades and smiled. "Boys, I take back everything bad I said about you two after your St. Mungos operation. I didn't realize what Draco had set in motion with the four of you, but I approve. I want you all to meet with Caleb. He's one of my primary team leaders. He can give you valuable insight on what kinds of tools his team needs."

Fred and George looked at each other and couldn't help exchanging a grin. They had always prided themselves on their pranks, but this was a level of recognition they never expected. If even only a small percentage of their inventions helped in the fight against Voldemort, they would have something to really brag about.

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## **Padfoot Manor...**

Remus stood by the window in the main study while everyone filed into the room. He had spoken with Eocho immediately after the guardian's conversation with Harry and Hermione. Eocho had wanted to speak with each member privately before he addressed everyone again. He had wanted to test the measure of their commitments to their partners, as well as help them recognize the changes that the ritual had imposed on them.

Luna and Ginny experienced an acceleration to their growth process. By the night of this meeting, they were physically the same age as the other students. While neither Luna or Ginny were large girls, the accelerated growth was noticeable, at least to Neville and Draco. Magically, everyone experienced enhancements. Neville received a power boost, as had Terry and Susan. Every member had gained the ability to perform some wandless magic, although Harry still had abilities in that area that far exceeded everyone else.

Remus turned to face everyone. Not only had the new Brotherhood members shown up for tonight's meeting, but Remus had insisted the parents and guardians for the students attend as well.

"Thank you all for coming tonight. As I explained earlier, Eocho has finished his preliminary examination of everyone's skills and he and I have set up a training schedule. Luna, Ginny, you are excused from beginning your training until after your OWLS, which we know start in two days," he said, smiling to the two cringing girls.

"Now, one of the other reasons why Eocho wanted us all together tonight is because of a rather embarrassing topic," Remus said hesitantly, then he sighed and squared his shoulders. "To be blunt, sex."

A number of people, including Harry and Hermione, blushed at his comment. "Eocho dropped a bit of a bombshell on us a while back and we've been trying to figure out... that is, we need to..."

Harry stood, joined Remus at the front of the room and placed a hand on his shoulder. Remus looked at Harry gratefully. "What Remus is trying to beat around the bush about is the fact that we are all intimate with our partners."

Arthur and Terry's parents frowned while Amelia turned to look at Susan in shock. Susan looked back in defiance and lifted her chin.

"Eocho has informed us that the Brotherhood has a special ceremony, a type of hand-fasting, which solidifies the bond formed between two people who are intimate on a routine basis. The reason for this is simple and straightforward. Each of us will be learning magics that, without this bond, will be difficult to control, even dangerous," Harry said quietly. Then he paused, waiting for people to catch up from the initial shock.

Arthur shook his head and looked at Ginny. She blushed, but refused to turn away from her father's gaze.

"Wait a moment," said John Boot. "Are you saying that Terry has been having sex with Susan? And some ghost says they have to get married?" As John's face became mottled in anger, Terry winced.

Remus stepped forward and raised his hands in a placating gesture. "No, that's not entirely what we're saying, John. What we're saying is that Terry and Susan can continue to see each other without the intimacy. If they want more, they have to undergo the hand-fasting ceremony."

John glared at his son. "Well, he'll just have to learn to keep it in his pants then, won't he?"

"Thou wouldst deny thy son of his chosen mate?" asked a voice. The air in front of the fireplace shimmered and Eocho appeared.

"Know this, all. I have spoken unto each member this past week and tested the measure of thy commitment to thy chosen. The bond that exists between each couple is already very strong, but is still brittle. Like iron in the cold, it can be shattered if it is treated wrongly. The ceremony will take that strength and give it resilience. 'Tis but a simple matter. Each must ask in their heart if they can wait until an appropriate time to wed. Or will they partake of the hand-fasting and seal what they already know in their hearts they have?"

Eocho looked at each of the members, then turned to the parents.

"This must be decided by each person, individually. Advise thy children, but the decision is theirs and theirs alone," Eocho said firmly.

"No, by god, it is not their decision," said John Boot.

"Dad," Terry said, looking more than a bit worried.

"Hush, Terry. I'm talking to this ancient glow worm here." John said.

Terry sighed, pulled out his wand and whispered something, pointing it at his father. Then he stood and walked over to him. The man's eyes moved frantically, but his body remained frozen in place.

"I'm sorry I had to do this, Dad, but you've left me no choice," Terry said sadly. "I'm of age and I'm not living under your roof. Had I not been a wizard and managed to escape Britain, I would have joined the military so I could help retake my home. But I'm an adult wizard, I'm training to be an Auror, and may be able to help my friends and my country."

"Susan has lived next door to us since we were babies. She's my best friend in the whole world and I love her more than I can say. She's an adult witch and she also happens to be the woman I want to spend the rest of my life with."

Terry ignored the pleased gasp from Susan, and the shocked look from Amelia. Instead, he leaned in close to his father and met the man's eyes with a firm gaze.

"We can talk about this like the adults we are, or we can end this conversation. You raised me to respect you and Mum and I do love you both. But it's time to let me make my own choices. Now, I'm going to release you from the binding and I expect you to behave yourself," Terry said, stepping back from his father and releasing him from the spell.

John Boot swayed for a moment and then he collapsed heavily into a chair. He wiped his face with a shaky hand and looked at his son for what seemed to be minutes before speaking.

"When I was your age, I decked my old man for trying to run my life. It's not a moment I'm overly proud of, but now I see that I'm making the same mistakes he did... I'm sorry, Terry," he said softly, then he turned to Susan. "I always thought that someday you'd be a member of the family, Susan. You and Terry were inseparable growing up. I don't know what your aunt thinks about all this, but welcome to the family."

Susan smiled shyly at John and then turned to look at her aunt, who was sitting stonily in her chair, watching.

"There are things going on here that I do not like, and yet I cannot but wonder if we adults are paying for being too lax with our children. Harry is not

yet of age and he is engaged. Draco and Luna are bonded. And now my niece tells me she wants the boy she grew up with to be her husband.

"None of these things would have happened if we parents and care givers had done our jobs in the first place and protected our children. A terrible burden has been placed on all of them and I do not like it. I blame myself for some of what has happened. As head of the DMLE, I could have ordered a review of Harry's stay with the muggles, but I didn't. In a sense, we all share a common blame for relying upon Dumbledore.

"And then we stood idly by and let our children awaken an ancient cult with ancient rules and we're again reaping our rewards. Susan, you are the daughter I never had and I love you with all my soul. If Terry is what you want, you have my permission to marry him. I always knew you would, I just thought it would be a few years from now."

Silence descended on the group. Susan smiled tearfully at her aunt, while Terry blushed and looked at his feet. Then, as one, everyone turned to look at Bertrand Lovegood. The former publisher blinked in surprise, and then grinned.

"Don't look at me and expect me to blow my top. Luna and Draco have bonded. She's chosen him and nothing will come between that relationship. We knew they would be getting married this summer," he replied, looking content.

Narcissa nodded. "I have to agree with Bertrand. I would have hoped that Draco would have waited, but circumstance being what they are between them, I won't insist upon it," she said.

Dan and Emma exchanged glances with each other, then Dan shrugged. "They're engaged, and he's already sleeping with her. For us to complain now would be silly."

Harry and Hermione blushed, and Dan winked at the couple.

Tonks smirked at Harry. "You do realize that I still have to give you my permission since you're not legally of age yet?" she asked in a teasing tone.

Harry laughed. "Of course. Just as I hope you realize that the ministry is paying your Auror's salary with my money," he replied.

Tonks stopped and looked thunder stuck for a moment. "Right, now, where do I sign?" she asked, grinning.

Everyone turned to look at the two people that had yet to chime in with their own opinions. Constance Longbottom and Arthur Weasley. Mrs. Longbottom merely shrugged and pointed at Arthur. "Neville's of age, so he can do as he pleases, permission or no. But I think it's all up to Arthur anyway. It's his daughter, and she's underage."

Arthur sat silently his face a conflicting mass of emotions. He glared at Neville, then at his daughter for putting him in this position.

"Dad?" Ginny said hesitantly.

Arthur turned and scowled at his daughter. "I don't like this, Ginevra. I don't like this one bit."

"Dad, this is what we wanted anyway, but if you say no, then I promise you Neville and I will go back to being just a dating couple, no fooling around."

Arthur ran his hand through his hair and Ginny noted for the first time that gray was seeping into his flame colored locks. He looked at her and his eyes narrowed. "No. I know you Ginny. If I said no, you would do just as you said.... until you turn seventeen, at which point you'd tell me to bugger off and marry him despite me."

Ginny looked down at her feet, having the good grace not to deny her father's accusation. Tonks, who could better see the girl's expression, barked out a laugh at the young redhead's mutinous look.

Arthur shook his head and sighed in resignation. "I don't like it, but I don't have a good enough reason to stop it. Neville is a good man, from a good family. Strange. I came here today to find out what's happening with my daughter, only to discover she's sleeping with her boyfriend. That's the very last thing I expected learn. Oh, I suspected, but there's a difference between suspicion and knowing."

Arthur turned to Harry and his expression grew hard. "Tell me this, Harry. Is your little group really what you need in order to take on Voldemort? And did you have to include my daughter?" he asked angrily.

Tonks nearly bolted to her feet, angry and ready to pounce on the man, but Remus held her back. "Wait," he murmured, his gray eyes stormy with suppressed anger.

Harry sat up straight and looked at Arthur. "I didn't include your daughter, Mr. Weasley, she included herself and gave me her trust and friendship. Were it not for her and your sons, Fred and George, you and the rest of your family would probably be in a camp in Surrey right now. Take a look around you, man! How many of the Order of the Phoenix did I bring from England with me? Your daughter earned my respect and my love and she earned you your place here in Haven. She's like a sister to me. And yes, each and every person in this room will play a role when I face Voldemort, including yourself, Arthur. I have to face him, but it will be the job of everyone else here to make sure I get that opportunity."

Arthur reeled back in his chair as if Harry had slapped him and Ginny glared daggers at her own father.

"Harry," Hermione said, laying a hand on his.

"No, Hermione. He asked and has a right to know. There will come a point in time when we will all be in danger. There will be a point when lives are on the line and some of us might not come back. None of us knew what would happen when we invoked the summoning for Eocho, but all of us knew, without a doubt, that we would be facing Voldemort. And still we came, as you did, Arthur."



"Harry... I apologize. I was out of line," offered Arthur. "It's just...she's my daughter..."

Harry held up his hand, stopping him. "Arthur, she's not my daughter. She isn't even of my blood. But I love her like a sister. I can't promise that she'll always be safe, but each of us would give our life for each other."

Arthur nodded and looked at Ginny, who was sitting across from him, her eyes flashing dangerously. "Ginny," he said, waving her to come to him.

She stood and walked to him, her gait stiff. He reached out and took her hand in his. "We have paid a heavy price in this war. Percy, Ronald, your mother. I didn't want you to become part of that price, Ginny."

Her gaze softened and she squeezed his hand. "You can't protect me forever. The Brotherhood will help by giving me the ability to protect myself, and my brothers and sisters," she replied in a whisper.

"I know, but it's hard to let go."

"I'm not asking you to let go, Dad. I never will. I'm just asking that you don't strangle me."

Arthur nodded and pulled her into his embrace. "You'll always be my little princess, you know."

Ginny's eyes grew bright with unshed tears and she nodded against his shoulder. "I wouldn't want to be anything else."

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### **First Date...**

"The patient in bed two is still waiting for her dinner, Ester," Melinda said as she scribbled a quick note in a patient's file before dropping into the pile of folders on the desk. "For some reason, she insisted on muggle gelatin for her dessert and the kitchen staff assured her they could provide it. Other than that, the ward's quiet and most have been bedded down for the night."

She stood up, stretched tiredly and smiled at the other woman's snort of amusement. "The paperwork for the day shift is done and I'm going home."

"I told you that you should have put in for night-shift work, Melinda," the older woman said, her eyes dancing. "The ward's much quieter."

"And boring," Melinda added.

"True, but it helps me catch up on my reading. Besides, we're not exactly running over with patients, so I don't image the day-shift is any more exciting," Ester commented as she slid into the chair behind the desk and watched the other woman put on her coat.

"That will change," Melinda said quietly, her eyes darkening at the thought. "And Merlin help us all when it does."

When Ester made an unhappy noise, Melinda looked up. "In any event, I leave the ward in your capable hands. I'll see you in the morning."

Taking her leave of the older woman, she headed for the exit. Stepping out into the night, she pulled her coat a bit tighter and tried to shake the dark thoughts that followed her towards home.

The hospital was equipped to handle most situations, but she was worried about what would happen when the rescue teams became assault teams. The number of patients would skyrocket, and the casualties...

She bit her lip and tried to force her mind in another direction, then jumped, startled, as a voice called out from the darkness.

"Melinda?"

"Arthur? Is that you?"

"Yes. What are you doing out here so late?" the redhead asked as he approached her.

"My shift just ended," she told him, waving a hand towards the hospital. "Is there something wrong?"

"Yes. I mean, no, not really..." He trailed off, running a hand through his thinning hair. He smiled weakly at her. "It's good to see you again. Are you getting settled in all right?"

"Yes, fine. Thank you for asking."

"And the hospital? Things are well?" he asked distractedly.

"Yes. We don't have many patients, but I was able to brew some needed potions today and..." She stopped speaking for a moment and looked at him carefully. "Arthur, what is it? What has you so upset?"

"It's nothing, my dear." He gazed off towards the manor in the distance and she watched as he clenched his fists.

"So you routinely take walks in the dark?"

When he said nothing, only continued to look towards the manor, she sighed. Sliding an arm through his, she felt his body tense further. His head whipped around and he stared down at her. "A wise woman told me not long ago that denying our emotions only makes things worse in the end. I

didn't believe her. At least, not in the beginning."

"It sounds as though you've been speaking to Mrs. Johansen," he said as she began to pull him down the path towards the village in the distance.

"I have and it helped. I know we don't know each other well, but I'm willing to listen. If you're uncomfortable in sharing your troubles with me, I certainly understand. Either way, Olga was right. Talking with someone can help."

"Where are we going?" he asked, ignoring her not so subtle suggestion.

"The village. I haven't had dinner yet and they're still serving in the community kitchen for another half hour. Olga found out that those of us getting off at the hospital at the end of shift were too late to take dinner in the kitchen and persuaded them to stay open an hour later."

"You don't eat at the hospital?"

"Usually, yes, though not everyone does so. Tonight, however, the kitchen staff was obsessed with some sort of muggle dish a patient asked for and were a bit harried, so I figured I'd drop into the kitchen in the village."

"Muggle dish?" he asked, intrigued. "What was it?"

"Something called gelatin," she told him, her face screwing up. "I'm not sure they got it right, though. It moves, Arthur. It jiggles like a cup of flubber worms!"

"How intriguing! Do you think they'd have any left?"

"I'm sure they do. The cooks were so fascinated by the stuff that they made tubs of it," she told him, shuddering slightly.

They chatted about inconsequential things as they entered the village and followed the path to the kitchen.

Entering the large room, they stopped and looked around. Several long tables were set up in the hall and the meals were served buffet style from a large steel counter near the kitchen proper. There were a few people about yet, though the kitchen staff seemed to be cleaning up.

"We seem to be a bit late," Arthur said, frowning.

"You're right. Oh, don't worry," she said, smiling at his expression. "I have food in the cottage, I just didn't feel like cooking tonight." She looked towards the counter and spotted a familiar face. "Ah, there's Inga. Maybe she can squeeze me in."

Dragging him towards the younger woman, she smiled when the blond looked up and grinned.

"Melinda! It's good to see you," Inga told her as she stacked unused plates.

"Hi, Inga. Are you working here now?"

"Oh, no. Joyce was sick. Fred's busy with Draco tonight, so I said I'd fill in for her," the blond said. She turned her gaze to Arthur and flushed slightly. "Hello, Mr. Weasley. It's nice to see you."

"Good evening, Inga," he replied. "It looks as though you're cleaning up, but do you think you could spare a meal for a hungry healer who just got off work?"

"Healer? Oh, Melinda! Sure, no problem. We're still serving for another fifteen minutes. It's just soup and sandwiches tonight, I'm afraid. Why don't you both go sit and I'll bring it out to you?"

As they found a quiet spot in the dining hall away from the noise of the kitchen, Arthur looked around with interest. He'd been there before, of course, but he'd never really paid much attention to it, as he normally took his meals at the manor.

The hall was much like the Great Hall in Hogwarts, though not nearly as large. The concept was similar, however, and allowed for a great number of people to be served very quickly.

When Inga approached the table with a large tray, Melinda's stomach growled and she laughed. "I guess I was more hungry than I thought!"

"We'll fix that right up," Inga told her as she put the tray on the table. Unloading it, she smiled at them both. "I know it's not fancy, but it's filling!"

"You're a life saver," Melinda told her. "I wasn't looking forward to cooking. I'm not very good at it, you see. Your mother offered to teach me, and I'm thinking of taking her up on it."

"She'd be happy to do it! Mama loves to cook." She then placed a platter of sandwiches and two bowls of soup on the table in front of them, along with two glasses of pumpkin juice. "We have milk, if you'd prefer, over on the sideboard," she told them, pointing.

"This is fine, Inga. Thank you," Melinda said, unfolding her napkin and placing it in her lap.

"Oh, but I wasn't really hungry," Arthur said, frowning down at the bowl in front of him.

"Nonsense. The soup is delicious," Melinda told him. "Try it."

"Well, if there's nothing else?" Inga asked.

"No, this is heaven. Thanks, Inga. Tell your family hello for me."

"I will," she said, her eyes dancing as she looked between the two. When Melinda flushed and stared at her soup, she grinned and picked up the tray. "Just leave your dishes when you're done," she called out as she turned away and went back to the kitchen.

"Well, that was...awkward," Arthur said quietly as he fussed with his napkin.

"Awkward? Why?" Melinda asked.

"She's dating my son."

"I'm aware of that. How does that make anything awkward?"

"You don't know my sons, Melinda," he told her, suppressing the urge to roll his eyes.

"You think they'll be upset over...this?" she asked, waving a hand to encompass the hall.

"No, of course not. It's more a matter of them teasing me about...this," he replied, pointing at her and then himself.

Her eyes widened as she began to understand. "But we're just two friends sharing a meal," she protested.

"Maybe," he replied as he picked up a sandwich and stared at it as though it contained all the answers he sought.

"Maybe," she repeated quietly, her voice emotionless. "I see."

When he dropped the sandwich back onto the platter and grabbed her hand, she looked up at him, startled.

"No, I don't think you do. Of course we're friends, Melinda, but the twins are different. They live for a good prank, and the Johansen twins are just like them. Inga will tell Fred that we were here together. Fred will tell George, then they'll tell Bill and Ginny. Normally, I wouldn't mind that. But after the argument Ginny and I had tonight... Well, things are...difficult...right now."

"Arthur," she said gently, "it's just a meal. If you're uncomfortable being here with me..."

"No, it's not that. I like being with you, spending time with you." He blushed and began to stammer, but she interrupted him.

"I enjoy being with you, as well. Why don't we just leave it at that, for now?"

"Right, good." He reached for the sandwich he'd dropped, only to realize he still held her hand. "Sorry," he said, dropping it quickly.

Picking up her spoon, she thought it best not to tell him that Inga was watching them both with mischievous eyes. "So, you had an argument with your daughter tonight?"

"What? Oh, yes." He began to eat, just for something to do.

"Is that why you were out walking?" she asked him as she turned her attention to her meal.

"Yes. I said some things to her and to Harry that I'm not proud of. I didn't think my way through the situation, I simply reacted to it."

"Ah, yes. The one disease we've yet to find a cure for," she said quietly.

"Disease?"

"Foot-in-Mouth disease. Very dangerous," she told him, her eyes bright.

When he simply stared at her uncomprehendingly, she shook her head. "Arthur, we've all had the same problem at one point or another. It's worse when it hurts those we love, but it happens."

"That doesn't excuse what I said."

"Of course it doesn't. But I'm sure she's forgiven you."

"Maybe, but I'm not sure I can forgive myself. Had I not been so trusting, so willing to blindly follow where others led, my daughter wouldn't now be in this situation, and I wouldn't have lashed out at Harry for it," he told her miserably. "I've no one to blame but myself, of course."

"What situation?" she asked him gently, her face puzzled.

"They have to get married. Hand-fasting they're calling it, but it amounts to the same thing."

"Have too...? Arthur, I know our society is a bit archaic, but surely they don't have to get married! There are other options these days. Things aren't as bad as you think."

"Options? Of course there aren't any options. Oh, she'd stop if I asked her, but once she turned seventeen, she'd tell me to bugger off and I'd lose her."

"Stop? What are you talking about? You can't just wave a wand and make pregnancy go away!" she told him firmly.

"Pregnancy? What?!" he exclaimed, his eyes boring into hers.

"So she made a mistake. Forcing her to marry because of it is a good way of insuring she's miserable for the rest of her life," Melinda told him, her eyes sparkling with anger.

"Are you mad? She's not pregnant," he told her indignantly.

"Wait. Not pregnant, you say?"

"Of course not! There are charms for that sort of thing, you know."

"Strangely enough, I did. It might have something to do with being a healer, or perhaps it was having been married that taught me," she said sarcastically.

"What on earth made you think she was pregnant?" he asked her, bewildered.

"You said she 'had to' get married. That generally only means one thing in our society, Arthur. And as I'm obviously missing an important piece of information, I took the only reason left open to me...pregnancy."

He sat back on the bench a bit and stared at her. "I'm sorry, Melinda. I didn't mean to snap at you that way." He shook his head and grinned. "Pregnant. Merlin, I never thought of that. You're right. Things could be worse."

"Right, pregnancy is worse. Hello? Still missing the point of this over here," she told him, a bit aggrieved.

"Sorry. To sum it up quickly, Harry, Ginny, Remus and several others performed a ritual. As a result, those involved must become hand-fasted." Seeing the question in her eyes, he held up a hand. "I can't go into details about the ritual itself, Melinda. I'm sorry," he told her gently.

"All right. So your daughter took part in this ritual and now must become hand-fasted to Harry?" she asked, trying to clarify the situation.

"Harry? Merlin, no! She'll be hand-fasted to her boyfriend, Neville."

"Neville? But you said... Nevermind, I'm getting a headache," she muttered, squeezing her eyes closed.

Arthur leaned over the table and took her hand. "Would you like me to get you a potion, my dear?"

"What? Oh, no. That's all right," she said. Opening her eyes and seeing the concern in his, she sighed. "So, Ginny is to become hand-fasted to her boyfriend, Neville, due to some ritual they performed. Do I have that straight?"

"Yes, that's about right," he replied, leaning back, but keeping her hand in his. "It came at me a bit suddenly. Well, to be fair, it came at everyone a bit suddenly. Those that performed the ritual were no more aware of the outcome than those of us who didn't. I found out about it tonight and the shock of it ... well, I didn't behave well. I left the manor to try to clear my head, but wasn't succeeding very well."

"I'm sorry, Arthur. I wish I could help," she told him, squeezing his hand gently.

"But you have." At her puzzled look, he grinned again. "You were right. It could be worse. Rather than being hand-fasted, Ginny could have been getting married because she was pregnant."

"True," she murmured, picking up her glass and taking a sip. She thought about lecturing him about pregnancy not being a dread disease, but changed her mind. A father was a different creature all together, and she wasn't about to tackle the little-girl-vs-mature-woman issue with him. At least, not tonight.

"I think part of the problem was sex, you see," he told her merrily, having sorted out the problem in his mind.

She choked on her pumpkin juice. "I beg your pardon?"

"It wasn't so much the hand-fasting that bothered me. It was the fact that I found out she was having sex with Neville." His eyes grew distant and he rubbed a thumb gently over the back of her hand as he thought about it. "I'd always known the possibility was there, you understand. But being told, flat out and without any prevarication that, yes, your daughter is having sex with her boyfriend? Well, it hit me rather hard, you see."

"I do, yes."

"It's fine for me to have a sex life, and the boys, of course. But my daughter? No father wants to hear that!"

Her eyes danced. "You have one, then?"

"Have one what?" he asked, his eyes finally returning to hers.

"A sex life," she said bluntly.

"Melinda!" he exclaimed, blushing furiously.

"What? You brought it up."

"I did not! Oh, well, maybe I did. But you don't just ask a person something like that!"

"Why not? It's not as though it's illegal," she told him, grinning outright.

"It's not a topic generally spoken of in public," he said, snatching his hand away from hers.

"Public? Arthur, on the off chance that you hadn't noticed, the kitchen closed quite some time ago."

He looked around jerkily. Most of the lights were shut off, the serving counter was clear of dishes and the hall was empty.

"Oh, right," he said dumbly.

When she stood up, he looked back at her, his face still ablaze with color. "Melinda," he began, his voice pleading.

"It's all right, Arthur," she told him gently. "I enjoyed the meal and the company, but it's getting late. I'll just clear these dishes and go home."

"No, leave them," he told her, standing. "I'll walk you home then come back and take care of them."

"You don't have to," she began.

"I want to. Come on." He wound her arm around his and escorted her from the hall. When they stepped out into the night, he took a deep breath and let it out slowly, realize that he felt better. "Thank you," he told her quietly.

"For what?"

"For listening. You were right. Talking to you about what happened tonight did help."

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### **Dalton, Georgia (USA)...**

The sign on the dingy shop window merely said Rupert and Sons, Antiquities. From the outside, the shop looked like any other roadside antique dealer in rural America. There were some rusting farm implements in the front yard and an old Studebaker that had seen better days sat around the side of the building, rusting in the humid Georgia sun. In fact, from the outside, there was very little to recommend the shop. It appeared that the owners had blurred the lines between antique and junk a long time ago.

The door chime dinged once and a small, almost gnome-like man sat up from his position behind the counter where he had been dozing. It was probably just another curious tourist hunting for a rare bargain. He did have those rare bargains, some of them right out in plain sight, but most people never recognized them for what they were.

A tall man approached the counter and the gnome eyed him warily. He was dressed in black from head to toe and he wore a cloak despite the heat. This man was no tourist.

"Mr. Rupert, I presume?"

"Aye, that's me."

"I am given to understand you are also a dealer of rare and hard to find items. Item's so rare, one would have to be a wizard to find them."

Rupert's eyebrows raised in surprise and he eyed the man more closely. He hadn't missed the emphasis the man had placed on the word *wizard*. "Aye, some have said that about my skills in finding things for them."

The tall man nodded, as if approving of the shopkeeper's caution. "Very well, then. You may call me Mr. Smith. I am a buyer's agent for a wealthy European client who wishes to add some unique items to his expanding collection. Do you think you might be able to help?"

Rupert fingered his wand, then nodded. "Why don't you step into the back with me and we can discuss your client's requirements?"

Rupert flicked his wand and the front door locked and the open sign flipped to around and read 'CLOSED'.

Leading the tall man into the back was like going from night to day. Where the front room was dingy and cluttered, the back room was spotless. Items were carefully placed on the shelves and priced, an elegant table and plush chairs sat in the center of the room. Rupert motioned for the man to take a seat.

"Can I offer you some tea? Or perhaps coffee?"

"Coffee, please. Black, no sugar."

Rupert poured two cups, handing one to Mr. Smith, then sat in the chair across the table from him. Pulling out parchment and quill, he looked inquiringly at Mr. Smith.

Smith smiled for a moment, then pulled a small notebook from his pocket. "My client has several specific items he desires greatly, but on the top of his list are Strangler Collars and Cauldrons of Chaos," Smith said, eying Rupert carefully for his reaction.

Rupert frowned. "These are proscribed items, Mr. Smith."

"I am aware of that, Mr. Rupert, as is my client."

"So long as you do. I won't have it said that I'm selling proscribed items to unknowing clients! But as you are aware of that fact, I can assure you that I can get the items for you. In fact, I happen to be in possession of two Cauldrons right now. I got them a few years back from an estate sale in New Orleans."

Smith leaned forward anxiously. "You have two of them? Now?"

Rupert smiled. "I am an expert at what I do, Mr. Smith. I collect rarities. If I remember correctly, one Cauldron is in near perfect condition, whereas the other has clearly been used. I'd rate it's condition to be good." Rupert stopped smiling and turned very serious. "Mr. Smith, you do realize that these are not going to be cheap? Selling proscribed artifacts to anyone but a museum carries a frightful penalty."

Smith nodded in reply. The American Department of Magic took a very dim view on someone selling proscribed artifacts. It was one of the few civil crimes that resulted in a sentence of a Life Wipe. The Life Wipe spell sent its victim into a coma for an undetermined amount of time and, when said victim emerged from that coma, he or she suffered from irreversible amnesia. The Department of Magic routinely sent Life Wipe victims to Muggle hospitals and they vanished from Wizarding society forever.

"Mr. Rupert, my client is prepared to pay you handsomely for your efforts on his behalf. Not only will he pay you for any of the items you locate, but he's also offering to partially fund your search for what he wants. And he'll pay you a finders fee on top of that."

Rupert's eyes widened slightly. This guy was a live one, all right. It was time to talk about the important things. Rupert scribbled a price on a scrap of parchment, noting it was per Cauldron, and slid it across the table to Smith, who glance at it.

Smith nodded. The price was about twenty percent less than he was prepared to pay, but he understood Rupert was low balling the price to ensure he'd come back to him for more business.

"I think we can do business, Mr. Rupert. I should like to inspect the Cauldrons. Just a precaution, mind you. If they are acceptable, we can proceed to the next step," said Smith.

Rupert stood. "Of course. If you will follow me."

Smith rose and followed Rupert to a wall covered by a Persian tapestry. He tapped the tapestry once and it rolled up, revealing a door. Rupert opened it and entered, with Smith on his heels. The room was more cluttered than the previous, but the objects in it were clearly well taken care of.

"Tell me, Mr. Smith, how much do you know about the Cauldron of Chaos?" asked Rupert as he stopped in front of a pair of small crates.

Smith frowned for a moment. "Not as much as I probably should, but my client has informed me that each Cauldron has a unique mark on the bottom, a sort of manufacturers mark."

Rupert nodded. "Aye, that they do. But a true Cauldron of Chaos has a form of magic all its own. A dangerous magic. I suggest you either put on the gloves that are on the case behind you, or you levitate the Cauldrons. Touching one can drain you magically. That is why I keep them sealed in these boxes. They are dangerous objects."

Smith looked startled for a moment. This was information he hadn't been given! He reached around and put the heavy dragon hide gloves on while Rupert opened both crates. Then he stepped back.

Peering into the crates, he was surprised to see how small they were. These couldn't be more than a number four cauldron, capable of only a few doses at a time!

"Small, aren't they?"

"Yes. I understand they were made from meteoric iron. They had to be small, considering they probably didn't have a lot of the iron in the first place," Rupert replied.

The Cauldrons were a glossy black, but they seemed to suck in light, rather than reflect it. Smith reached in and pulled one of the Cauldrons from the case. It was very heavy, far heavier than it's size would have implied. Even through the heavy dragon hide gloves, he could feel the Cauldron pulling at his magic, and for that first time that day, he was truly frightened. Unpending the Cauldron, he quickly checked the mark on the bottom to the list he had. Then he returned the Cauldron to the crate. He repeated the process with the second, noting this Cauldron had some minor usage damage to it. When he was done, he quickly walked away from the dreadful Cauldrons and sat heavily on another crate, shivering.

He looked up when Rupert handed him a small vial.

"Pepper up potion. I always need a dose after handling them," Rupert offered.

Smith downed the potion in a single gulp and steam blew from his ears for nearly a minute before he started looking better. He handed the empty vial back to Rupert with a grateful nod.

"Shall we retire back to my office to discuss the details?" Rupert asked.

Back at the table Rupert waited for Smith to begin.

"The Cauldrons are authentic. If you can provide me with account information, I can see that the transfer is made to your account within twenty four

hours. In the meantime, I will provide you with shipping information, so these will go to a drop point in Paris, where they will be couriered, by hand, to him directly. I will also provide you with a list of other items, but my client wishes to get as many Cauldrons as possible.”

Rupert nodded. “I can arrange that, Mr. Smith. I will ship as soon as Gringotts confirms the funds transfers.”

After giving the shopkeeper the shipping information, Smith stood and shook the man's hand before showing himself out.

Rupert watched him leave and drummed his fingertips nervously on the table for a moment before scribbling out a note on some parchment. Rupert's fear of the Life Wipe wasn't exaggerated. Nearly twenty years ago he had been caught selling proscribed artifacts and he was given a choice, cooperate with the government or face trial and a probable Life Wipe. He had taken the cooperative road for himself and thus started living the double life of an informant. The government was very circumspect in their operations. Most of the time they monitored his customers and found other reasons to charge them with crimes, thus avoiding blowing his cover.

He knew this sale would interest his political masters, especially since the objects were so dangerous and being shipped overseas.

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### Haven School of Witchcraft and Wizardry (May 18th)...

“Are you sure this is the right thing to do?” a voice whispered from a nearby table.

“You know it is! Our parents are doing everything they can to help the Master. If they'd been able to get us out of Hogwarts, we be helping them. With Potter releasing the *Fidelius* charm at the end of the month, we have our chance. Not only can get they get Potter, they can get us out of this bloody place and back where we belong!” another voice hissed quietly, although not quietly enough.

“Yes, but how?”

“Until the *Fidelius* is dropped, any owls will go through the Irish Ministry first. There's no way they'd forward them on for us, and they'd wonder why we were writing our parents anyway, since we've both said we don't want any contact with them. But when the charm comes down, the Ministry will stop checking our mail, and we can owl them the exact location of the manor. They can get in and kill Potter and his bloody friends before anyone knows what's happened. We can leave with them. With Potter gone, there will be no one left with enough strength to oppose the Master.”

Millicent Bulstrode stood behind a bookcase in the library, her eyes narrowed in concentration. When the overheard conversation moved on to more mundane matters, she took a bit of a risk and peeked out from behind the bookcase to note who the speakers were.

When Madam Pince announced that the library would be closing in ten minutes, Millicent took her books to the librarian's desk and checked them out. The two students she'd been eavesdropping on didn't notice the dark, thoughtful look she sent them.

Hurrying from the library, she weighed her options. In the end, she realized she only had one real choice. Changing directions abruptly, she shrunk her books, put them in her pocket, and headed for the Headmistress' office.

Reaching McGonagall's door, she raised her hand to knock, but hesitated. It was getting late. There was no reason this couldn't wait until morning. She still had homework to do, and she was sure the Headmistress had more pressing concerns...

Growling to herself, she straightened her shoulders. She was making excuses and she knew it. This was more important than homework, and the Headmistress would certainly want to know about it. With that thought firmly in mind, she knocked on the office door briskly.

“Come!” a voice called from within.

Opening the door, Millicent stepped into McGonagall's office and closed the door behind her. She spotted the Professor sitting behind a mammoth desk piled high with paperwork, and nearly cringed. She was interrupting, she should have waited...

“I was wondering how long you would stand outside my door before knocking, Miss Bulstrode,” McGonagall commented just before looking up and pinning the younger woman with bright, hazel eyes.

“You knew I was there, Professor?” Millicent asked, surprised.

“Of course. Albus Dumbledore isn't the only one with a few tricks up his sleeve, my dear. Now, what is it that's brought you oh so hesitantly to my office?” The humor in her voice was obvious, but her eyes were stern and unyielding.

“I've overheard something you need to know about, Headmistress,” Millicent said, rather formally. “I hope you will forgive me, but...” She trailed off as she reached for her wand and turned to the door. Casting both a silencing charm and a locking charm, she made sure to put her wand away before turning back to face the Professor.

McGonagall watched her with a calm expression, though she did nod. “Fine work, Miss Bulstrode. Why don't you sit down and tell me what's on your mind?”

Taking the offered seat, Millicent looked down at her feet and fidgeted for a moment. She started to pick a piece of lint from her robe, but stopped herself and clenched her fist. Looking up at the Professor, she took a deep breath to calm her nerves and told McGonagall what she'd overheard.

When Millicent was finished, Minerva sat back in her chair and gazed at the student thoughtfully. “You were right to bring this to me, Miss Bulstrode. What I don't understand is why you are so nervous.”

Millicent shook her head, but kept her gaze on McGonagall. "You don't understand, Professor. I'm a Slytherin...or I was until we came here. Harry Potter knows that and, no matter what he may say, old prejudices die hard. I hope you believe what I've told you. But whether you do or you don't, it's Harry who must be convinced."

"My family has always been neutral in this war. That was known before my family was rescued. What Harry doesn't know is, from the moment he saved my parents, my neutrality ended. My parents can do what they like. As for me, I've thrown my lot in with Harry and will do everything I can to help him. The problem, however..."

"You don't think he'll believe you," Minerva said quietly.

"Yes," Millicent said simply, her shoulders sagging once more. "Professor, I killed Ron Weasley."

When McGonagall began to interrupt, Millicent kept speaking. "Oh, I know most think it was an accident, but it wasn't. I knew what would happen when I opened that wall. I *knew* the Acromantulas would kill him. I'd seen them close to the back of the greenhouse not five minutes before Weasley came in. I've tried to not feel guilty over what I did, but I can't. He would have killed Neville and I wasn't going to stand by and watch. But I couldn't get a clear enough shot at Ron to stop him! When he hit Neville with that curse, I knew I had to do something. So I lowered the wall and..."

"And Ron Weasley died because he was intent on killing a student. You couldn't have stopped him any other way," McGonagall finished softly when Millicent trailed off.

Seeing the shock Millicent's face and the tears beginning to gather in her eyes, Minerva stood and walked around her desk to kneel before her. Pulling a handkerchief from her pocket, she gave it to the young woman and smiled. "Yes, my dear, I do believe you. I always have. I knew what Ron Weasley had become, just as I knew Albus Dumbledore had no intentions of trying to turn the boy from his path."

"It is a heart wrenching situation we supposed adults find ourselves in, Millicent. When children must kill to save their own lives, or the lives of others, it is the adults who must bear the brunt of the guilt. That we have let it come to this..."

The Headmistress sighed and stood up once more. "Ron Weasley died due to his own actions, Miss Bulstrode," she said firmly. "Harry Potter is aware of the situation and he, too, believes you had no choice. He will not hold that against you. However, he does need to be made aware of what you have overheard. I know it is late and that you undoubtedly have homework to do, but I'd like for you to remain here while I notify him of the situation. He may wish to speak with you tonight."

"Of course, Professor."

Pulling her wand from her sleeve, Minerva transfigured another chair into a desk and smiled at her student. "As this may take some time, why don't you take your chair to the desk and study?"

Having gotten Millicent settled, Minerva scribbled a quick note to Harry and sent it off with one of the Haven School house elves. While she waited for a reply, she opened another file on her desk and continued with the routine business of running such a large school.

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### **Elven Express (When you care enough to send the very best)...**

Most were unable to hear the small popping sound in the dining room at Padfoot Manor, but both Harry and Hermione did. Turning in his chair, Harry raised an eyebrow at the small Haven School elf standing between him and Hermione.

"I is sorry to interrupt, Sir, but Mistress McGonagall wished for me to give this to you. I is to wait for a reply."

"Thank you...ah, what's your name?" Harry asked.

"I is Fittle, Sir," the little elf said, standing up straighter. No human but the school Mistress had bothered to ask his name before. Dobby, strange as he was, was right. Mr. Harry was different.

"Thank you, Fittle. I'll be quick," Harry told him as he opened the parchment and scanned it. "Hmm. Please tell the Headmistress we will be there shortly."

"Thank you, Sir," Fittle said and, with a quick bow and a small pop, he disappeared.

"What is it?" Hermione asked quietly.

Harry gave her the parchment and scanned the table quickly. "Draco?" he called, seeing the blond at the far end of the dining room. "Would you come here for a moment? I've just been made aware of something you might find interesting."

With a puzzled look, Draco shrugged, pushed away from the table and stood. He joined Harry and Hermione a moment later. "Is something wrong?" he asked.

"I don't know," Harry replied as Hermione passed the parchment to Draco. "But I've sent Professor McGonagall a message saying I'd be there as quickly as I could. I'd like for you to join me."

"Do you want me to come?" Hermione asked, already putting her napkin on the table.

Harry thought for a moment, then shrugged. "No. There's no sense in both of us missing dinner. I'll fill you in when I get back." He stood up, kissed



her on the top of the head when he saw her disappointed look, then nodded to Draco. "Let's go."

Exiting the manor a few minutes later, both young men set a brisk pace for the school.

"Any idea what's happening?" Draco asked.

"All I know is what McGonagall wrote in her note. Millicent's overheard something she thinks is important, and the Headmistress agrees. I don't know Millicent well and for the first five years, the only interactions we had were...well, they weren't very pleasant. But I do know she saved Neville's life...and that I owe her a favor," Harry concluded, his eyes shining with mischief.

"A favor? Why?"

"That's something between Millicent and I," Harry said with a small smile.

"I hate it when people do that, Potter," Draco grouched.

"I know," the green eyed man said smugly, then stopped suddenly, gazing off towards one of the experimental greenhouses. "The lights are on. Neville must be working late. I wondered why he wasn't at dinner. Come on," he added as he changed directions. "Let's take him with us. He and Millicent have become friends, and we may need him."

"For what?" Draco asked, puzzled.

"I've no idea, but I'm learning to cover all my bases."

Shaking his head at his friends odd behavior, Draco followed.

Opening the door to the greenhouse, Harry stepped inside and looked around. "Nev, you around?" he called.

"Back here, Harry. Give me a minute," Neville called out. "If I don't finish this at the right time, I'll lose it all."

Following Neville's voice, Harry and Draco moved through the greenhouse cautiously, careful not to touch or get too close to any of the plants. Rounding the corner of a long counter top loaded with Pygmy Borneo Strangler, whose tentacles reached for them hungrily, they spotted Neville. Harry moved towards him, while Draco watched the struggling tree's tiny arm-like appendages writhe in anger as it was unable to snag its pray.

"Why on earth would anyone want something as grotesque as this, Neville?" Draco asked, his voice full of loathing.

"What?" Neville asked, looking up from the flower in front of him and spotting the blond. "Oh, the Strangler. Unlike most trees, its arms are loaded with blood, not sap. We break the arms off the trunk and drain them for blood replenishing potions."

Draco blanched and backed away from the still writhing tree. "I could have lived my whole life without knowing that."

"That will teach you to stop asking foolish questions," Harry replied, grinning.

"No question is ever foolish," Draco said with a sniff and he joined the other two.

"If you're going to stay, then kindly shut up," Neville told them bluntly as he bent back over the flower. "I have to get this planted quickly or I'll lose it."

A few minutes of patient care saw the plant settled into a new pot of warm soil. An unmistakable sigh was heard...coming from the plant. Both Harry and Draco backed up several steps, watching it carefully, and Neville chuckled.

"It's an African Evening Primrose. It can only be transplanted and harvested in early evening. If I'd been unable to finish in time, the plant would have died."

"Yes, but the thing sighed, Neville," Draco said, his eyes wide.

"This plants normal life expectancy is only three months, Draco. Professor Sprout and I have managed to keep it alive for two years. It's relieved, that's all."

"But," Draco began.

"The answers will only disturb you, Draco," Harry told him. "Why dig the hole any deeper?"

Draco closed his mouth and glared at him, but Harry only chuckled.

"So what brings you to the greenhouse?" Neville asked, wiping his hands on a towel and turning towards both men.

Harry passed him the parchment from McGonagall and waited until Neville looked up at him, his expression confused.

"You and Draco know Millicent better than I do, so I thought I'd bring you both along," he said simply.

"Well, I'm done here and I'm sure I've missed dinner. We can go whenever you're ready."

"I'm certainly not going to stay in this freak show any longer than I have to," Draco said as he turned around and headed for the exit. "This place gives me the creeps."

"You were never interested in Herbology," Neville commented as he turned off the lights in the greenhouse and closed the door.

"Most normal people aren't, Neville," Draco said loftily.

"Oh really? Let me tell you something, Draco..."

Harry walked towards the school, enjoying the light bantering going on between the others, and wondered just what Millicent had overheard to cause the Headmistress to summon him.

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## A New Ally...

Seated in Professor McGonagall's office, Harry looked around, trying to beat back the feeling of being summoned for punishment or a lecture. One couldn't go through over five years of classes with the formidable transfiguration Professor without some things rubbing off.

After casting silencing, locking and anti-eavesdropping charms, Minerva returned to her desk. "Gentlemen," she began, "I'm glad you could come on such short notice. Miss Bulstrode has brought me some interesting information that I thought you should be made aware of. I realize it's late, but I felt this couldn't wait. Miss Bulstrode? Why don't you begin by informing them of what you overheard?"

Sitting back in her chair, she then eyed the faces of the young men before her as Millicent told her story. Draco was scowling, Neville's eyes were scrunched up in concentration, but Harry's face was expressionless. Minerva began to frown in concern, but Harry turned to face her and her eyes widened instead. Expressionless his face may be, but his eyes blazed.

"Harry," Millicent said as she wound up her tale, "I know you have no reason to trust me. We've never been friends, and I've done some things I regret, but you have to believe me. I'll take Veritaserum, submit to Legilimency, whatever is necessary to gain your trust."

"Why?" Harry asked quietly.

When she simply gaped at him, he waved a hand irritably. "I don't mean why would you be willing to submit to such things. I mean why are you willing to help me? Your family is neutral. If anyone finds out you're doing this, that will end," he informed her.

"It already has, at least for me. When you rescued my family, my days of fence sitting were over. I knew it then, but wasn't sure what I could do to help. When I overheard the students talking, I had no choice. You had to be made aware of it," she told him.

Harry nodded, but said nothing more.

"Who were the students?" Draco asked, his eyes intent.

"Jack Palmer and Mindy Joyner," Millicent replied.

"Hufflepuffs!" Draco exclaimed loudly as he leaned back in his chair. "Fifth years who've never stepped a foot out of line! Lucius never mentioned either family serving old snake-face. Are you sure about this, Millicent?"

"Positive," she said firmly, her gaze steady.

"I thought perhaps a Slytherin. Yes, fine, ex-Slytherin then," he said in annoyance when Neville began to correct him.

Draco bit his lower lip in thought, then scowled when he realized he'd picked up Granger's annoying habit.

"It fits," Neville said quietly, his eyes unfocused as he stared over Millicent's head.

"Fits?" McGonagall asked.

"Hmm? Oh, yes." Neville turned and met her eyes. "Most of the students in Hogwarts who had Death Eater parents were pretty obvious about it. Sorry Draco," he said with a small, apologetic smile, "but you know it's true. Most of you made no secret of the fact that your parents thought Dumbledore was a doddering old fool and that they wanted Harry out of the way. There was only one reason for that. It's not like he was a brilliant student who was dragging down your scores, like Hermione. Oh, sorry Harry. Didn't mean anything by that." Neville blushed profusely.

"Even though he's just horribly insulted us both, he's right, Draco," Harry said, his lips twitching.

Draco's eyes narrowed. "But why wouldn't Lucius have mentioned their families? He was forever going on about keeping the dark families close to each other, though mostly to keep an eye on them. Why do you think I hung around with lumps like Crabbe, Goyle and Parkinson?"

"You're assuming Lucius knew about them," Harry said. "Voldemort doesn't tell his minions everything, Draco. No matter how high your father may be in old lizard lips' council, I'm sure he wasn't told everything. And if the other students didn't know about Joyner and Palmer, there was nothing to alert the Hogwarts staff of the need to keep an eye on them, was there?"

"Devious bastard," Draco muttered, then blushed when McGonagall scowled at him fiercely. "Sorry Professor."

"So you believe me?" Millicent asked.

Harry turned to her and she flinched as she met his gaze. His eyes blazed and bored into hers for a moment before they softened. "I do," he told her and she sagged a bit in relief.

"The question," he continued, "is what to do about it?"

"Don't drop the charm," she said quickly.

"No, it has to come down, and I've already taken steps to protect the manor. I meant what should be done about the students."

"They'll have to be watched," Draco said.

"Wouldn't it be better just to send them back? It's obvious they haven't given up allegiance to their families as they said, so why not kick them out of Haven?" Neville asked.

Minerva made a tsking sound as Draco shook his head. "No, if we send them out, we give up the chance to gain more information," the blond told him.

"Keep your friends close, and your enemies closer," Harry quoted quietly and Draco nodded.

"Draco, you're not going to be able to spy on them. You're not attending school anymore and it would look odd if you hung around the grounds," Neville said.

"Not me, no. But maybe Luna, or Ginny... no, they're leaving after their OWLS." Draco trailed off, thinking quickly.

"You're all missing a valuable asset sitting right in this room," Minerva told them. "Miss Bulstrode attends this school, is known to be neutral to those in the...darker families, and has already proved she can be useful in this."

Millicent stared at her feet while the three young men looked at the Headmistress.

Minerva shook her head in exasperation. "That the three of you attended my class for almost six years and never learned to pay attention to details causes me no end of shame," she told them in her sternest professor's voice.

"Sorry, Ma'am," Harry, Draco and Neville all replied at once, then all three blinked in astonishment as they realized what they were doing.

"How very Slytherin of you, Professor," Draco said, grinning impishly. "For a moment there, I thought I was back in school."

"Me, too," Neville said, shaking his head. "I wonder how long that habit's going to be around."

"Bill Weasley's still doing it, Nev," Harry told him, though his eyes were on the Headmistress. "I don't think it ever goes away."

"Nor should it, young man," Minerva said firmly, though her lips were twitching. "However, the point of this is..."

"That Millicent, if she's willing, could keep an eye on the students," Draco interrupted.

When those in the room turned to Millicent and waited, she looked up and met Harry's eyes. "If you'll trust me, I'd like to do it."

He smiled at her. "It looks like I own you two favors now."

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Ballincollig, County Cork, Ireland (May 22nd)...

"Are you sure you're up to this, Charles?" asked Dumbledore in a kindly tone.

"Yes, Professor. You've helped to refresh me on my Occlumency, and you've warded me against mind control spells. I think it's time we find out what it going on. This is my family we're talking about here."

"Very well, Charles, but I want you to be very careful. We do not know what level of control is being imposed on your family or anyone else," Dumbledore said.

"Yes, yes. I understand, Professor, but this is really our only option. We didn't learn anything about what Harry was doing at Castletown other than the fact that he was there. And we've not been able to catch up to him any time he's visited Stonewall Lane. We're running blind here, Sir, and until I get inside, that's not going to change," Charlie said hotly.

Dumbledore sighed heavily and nodded at the young redhead. "All right, Charles. You know who to send your reports to and you have an emergency portkey that will bring you to one of the Order's safe houses here in Ireland, should anything untoward happen. But please be careful. You will be our only operative inside of Haven."

"I'll be careful," Charlie said as he finished packing his rucksack.

Standing, he shook Dumbledore's hand before turning and leaving the small apartment. Once on the street, he quickly walked into an ally and apparated away.

Charlie reappeared in an ally behind the muggle pub where he was supposedly going to meet his family. Walking around to the front of the building, he was surprised to find they had picked a popular tourist pub in which to meet. The Prancing Pony was an old business, having been passed from father to son for nearly ten generations. In that time, it had gained in popularity with locals and tourists and saw a steady stream of customers.

Charlie opened the door and was immediately bowled over by the fiddles playing and the shock of his head in amazement that anyone would want to meet in such a noisy place. He stepped into the pub and looked around for the tell-tale red hair, only to be surprised to find that a good third of the customers sported red hair like his own. He grinned and waved when he spotted his father sitting at a table and never noticed the two Aurors who were watching his every move.

"Charlie!" exclaimed Arthur, who then bounced from his chair and grabbed his second oldest son in a tight hug.

Charlie hugged his father, then turned to see a small red blur streak into his arms. Charlie wrapped his arms around his sister and fought to control his own emotions as he held her again. She had grown quite a lot since he had last seen her.

Arthur led him over to a table where he had a couple pints ready for them. He was surprised to see Ginny had her own pint, although it didn't look like she was drinking much from it.

"I know you expected me earlier, but I had to see about Mum," Charlie said, just loud enough to be heard over the din in the pub.

Ginny's eyes widened as she realized he'd risked a trip to England.

Arthur nodded. "I suspected something along those lines. Did you find her?"

Charlie frowned. "No, I didn't find any sign of her. I checked several places. Great Aunt Milly is still in her place at Seaton, but most every other place I checked was deserted."

"Milly's still alive in her place?" Arthur exclaimed. "Well, we'll have to put her on the list then."

"Charlie, where have you been all this time?" asked Ginny.

"Gin, he just said he was looking for your Mum," Arthur reminded her gently.

Ginny shot her father a reproachful glance, but subsided. Something didn't quite ring true to her about her brother's story but she wasn't sure what it was. Her eyes narrowed as she looked at him closely, and the feeling of wrongness grew.

"Charlie, you've heard about Haven, haven't you?" asked Arthur.

"Yes Dad, I read about it in the Dublin Daily," Charlie replied.

"Excellent. Then we'll enjoy this fine lunch and, when we're done, we'll take you to our home there. I think you'll like what we've done with the place. It's not the Burrow, you understand, but it's rather homey." Arthur smiled at his son, his eyes bright with feeling.

Charlie nodded and smiled back. Then he glanced at Ginny and noted her expression. For the first time in his life, he had to admit there was something intimidating about his sister's gaze, and that bothered him.

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## **Padfoot Manor...**

Harry sighed in relief as he slipped into the tub. He had spent the last four hours working with Eocho, who had proven to everyone that he was more than just ghost when he took over several ground floor rooms of the manor, converting them into training areas. Harry remembered learning about it the hard way.

*Eocho had come to Harry just after lunch and beckoned him to join him in his rooms. He also summoned Hermione. The three had spoken for a while before he sent Hermione into another room to work on translating several texts into something everyone could understand. Harry, he sent to the other side of the room and started hurling curses at him.*

*Harry's leg turned lame less than thirty minutes into the exercise, and Eocho had stopped the match. He floated over to where Harry stood, leaning against the wall, massaging his leg.*

*"Let me examine thy leg, Maglios."*

*Harry glanced up at him, then nodded and rolled up his pants leg, revealing his damaged calf muscles.*

*"Alas, that thy healers lack the ability to heal wounds such as this is unfortunate. This limits thy mobility and will make fighting difficult. I know a few spells that thou canst use to extend thy mobility, but they cannot be used with impunity, Maglios. I will teach thee those spells but thou shouldst only use them when thy need is great. Now, tell me, why didst thou waste time in our battle? Why art thou hesitant in thy choice of spells?"*

*Harry looked at Eocho and grinned sheepishly. "I didn't want to hurt you, revered Teacher."*

*Eocho crossed his arms and looked at Harry incredulously. "Maglios," he said in a gentle tone, "I am dead these past fifteen hundred years. Howcanst thou possibly hurt me more?"*

*Harry blinked in surprise. That was a thought that hadn't occurred to him!*

*A pair of chairs appeared and Eocho waved him towards one. "Sit, Maglios, and we shall talk of war. Thy leg will not permit further fighting today."*

Echo took the other chair and, as he did, the lights in the room dimmed. "War, Maglios, it is the ultimate form of justice, where one must assume the role of both judge and executioner. Our ultimate mission is to be the final arbiter in war. But our primary goal has ever been to try to make sure that war does not happen. Sometimes we may talk a foe out of war. Other times, a selective assassination can prevent a war or sometimes we could even pay to avoid a war.

"But when that war comes, we show no mercy. It is our way. If one doth leave a foe wounded on the field of battle, he might heal and come again at thee, when thou least expect it.

Thy selection of spells were all designed to confuse and disable thy opponent, when thou shouldst have been trying to kill from the outset. Tell me, Maglios, will thy enemy try to stun thy mate, or will they try to kill her outright?"

Harry frowned. "They will try to kill her."

Suddenly, in the dim light, Hermione appeared with a squawk. Across the room, two black robed Death Eaters appeared and snarled, seeing Hermione. Both raised their wands and cast killing curses at her. Harry surged to his feet, transfiguring a brick wall in front of the surprised Hermione, then he cast a heavy blasting hex at the two Death Eaters.

The killing curse crashed into Harry's wall, shattering it. His hex hit one of the black robed men, who exploded with such force he knocked out his fellow Death Eater. Seeing that both men were down, Harry turned and hobbled over to Hermione as fast as his leg would allow him.

He grabbed her in his arms and glared at Echo. Across the room, the two Death Eaters faded from sight.

"Most excellent, Maglios. This is the kind of combat thou doth face, and the kind of combat thou must bring to thy foes. This is no child's game. The winner of this war is the one left alive. This is the kind of combat which thou must teach to thy brothers and sisters."

"I understand, revered teacher, but did you have to bring Hermione into this?" Harry said in an angry tone.

"It was the only way to make thee understand, Maglios. Thou doth hold little value for thy own life, but thou doth hold hers as the most important in the world."

Hermione swiveled in his grasp and glared at him and Harry winced inwardly. Echo turned to look at Hermione and he smiled knowingly. "Thank you, my daughter. Thy help is always appreciated."

Hermione broke free from Harry's embrace. She looked at Echo for a moment, then nodded, understanding the message he was trying to tell Harry. She turned to Harry then and clearly gave him a look.

Harry sighed and nodded. "Yes, Hermione, we'll talk about it later."

The pair watched Hermione leave the room before resuming the lesson.

And now, Harry lay in the bath, knowing full well that an unhappy Hermione waited for him in their bedroom. Sighing, he sunk lower in the tub and began to knead the muscles in his leg. The heat of the tub sunk to the bone, making him drowsy and the room began to fill with a heavy mist coming off the tub. He jumped when Hermione called his name softly.

"Harry?"

He sighed once again and looked down at his hands in the water. "Look, Hermione, I'm sorry about what happened this afternoon. I didn't know Echo was going to toss you into the middle of a fight like that."

She smiled softly at him and began to undress. "I spoke to him about it. I wasn't in any danger. It was all an illusion, even the killing curses cast by those Death Eaters. Echo just wanted to see if you'd release your inhibitions about killing."

"I don't like killing. Sooner or later there has to come a point where I'd be no better than Voldemort," he said quietly.

"No one in their right mind likes killing, Harry. Shortly after we arrived here in Haven, I asked myself if I could kill and I couldn't come up with an answer. I know you've killed, just as I know it hurts you each time you have to do it. It hurt you to kill at St. Mungos, it hurt you when you killed to save my parents, you even hurt after the incident at the Ministry. You'll do what you have to, to survive and to give others the chance to survive. I'd like to think I'd do the same, but until I've been put in that situation, I can't really say.

"Look, it makes me feel very good to know you think I'm the most important person in your world, but you have to realize that I feel the same for you. You have to place a higher value on your life. If you care about me one iota, you have to work on changing that."

Harry watched her as she undressed and climbed into the tub. "I'll try."

"No, Harry, you won't try. You'll do it because losing you would devastate me. If you care for my happiness at all, you'll start putting a higher value on your own."

He pulled her into an embrace. After all a wet, naked Hermione was something that should never be passed up. "I promise to try. That's all I can do."

She relaxed in his grip. If Harry promised to do something, he'd die trying to accomplish it.

"So, what else did you and Echo talk about?" she asked, curious now.

"He showed me a few spells that I can use on my leg to give me full mobility for few hours, then cautioned me to use them only when absolutely necessary. He said that once the spell wore off, the effects would be 'unpleasant'. Then he talked a bit about the history of the Brotherhood and how he intended to transfer his memories and fighting techniques to me, directly."

Hermione turned her head to look at him and he shrugged. "I don't understand it entirely myself, Hermione, but he is training me in a manner similar to Occlumency. He said that once I master the ability to commune, he would be able to transfer memories directly."

Hermione broke free from his grasp and moved a little away from him. "He's teaching you to commune?" she asked incredulously.

"That's what he said."

"Did he say anything about teaching the rest of us to commune?"

"He said that he was going to teach one of each couple to commune, and they would teach their partner."

Hermione's expression broke into a huge grin. "Harry, I worked on two texts he supplied today. One dealt entirely with communing. If we can do it, we'll be able to share memories, share feelings, and share power. Communing is similar to that power sharing ritual we performed, but more personal. With it, you can tell if someone is telling the truth, see their memories. It's more powerful and more personal than Legilimency. It's an incredible skill to learn!"

He smiled at her exuberance. "Well, I'm supposed to teach you the technique. Echo also wants me to start teaching everyone to fight, once the memory transfer is completed," he said, then he paused and his expression grew thoughtful. "Wait a moment. Hermione, this communing thing. It doesn't set up permanent links, does it?"

"Oh, no. It's something we have to want to do. From what I translated today, it sounded like the Brotherhood often used communing to interrogate prisoners, or to communicate with animals directly. I'd have to say it is probably close to something Luna does, or would do once she learns to control her skills better."

He nodded thoughtfully, then reached for a bar of soap. She could see he was trying to piece together what she had told him. Lathering up his hands, he started to soap up her back, then paused again.

"So I'd be able to talk to an animal? Like Hedwig?"

"I'm not sure if talking is the right word for it," she said, then sighed as he proceeded to massage her back. "I think we'll have to wait and see exactly what Echo can show us."

Smiling to himself he rinsed off her back. "Turn around. It's time for me to deal with the front."

She turned in the tub and smiled impishly at him. "You do know I'm perfectly capable of doing this myself, don't you?" she asked with a grin.

He shrugged. "Yes, but do you want to do it yourself?" he asked running his slick, soapy hands over her breasts.

"No, not really," she whispered, arching her back.

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## The Weasley House, Haven...

Arthur settled into bed for an uneasy sleep. He was pleased with the way today had gone. Bill and the twins hadn't been available to go with him and Ginny to the Prancing Pony to pick up Charlie, and there had been an uneasy tension between Ginny and Charlie that he had trouble understanding.

When they had arrived back in Haven, Arthur and Ginny had shown Charlie around the town. Charlie seemed suitably impressed, especially when he saw the Goblins erecting a Gringotts branch office next to the town hall. The town had been undergoing many changes as people prepared for the removal of the *Fidelius* charm at the end of the month.

After seeing the town, Arthur was surprised when he moved to take Charlie up to the manor house and Ginny told him that he couldn't. Charlie wasn't on the list of people allowed to visit the house and until that changed, he couldn't go there. Arthur was unused to his daughter asserting herself, but she had become more decisive since the ritual, nearly two weeks ago. Charlie was surprised to see his sister telling their father that he couldn't do something, and even more surprised to see his father back down. According to his father, he was an assistant deputy for the Ministry in Exile.

Arthur relaxed and drifted for a moment. His family was just one of the problems he had to deal with it. Tomorrow he'd be meeting with O'Dalley to finalize the plans for the constabulary and the dropping of the charm. He also had to arrange for Harry to attend a town meeting. There were some nasty rumors floating about in regard to dropping the charm and only Harry could dispel them.

And finally, there was Melinda. Melinda McKinney was a widow, a competent healer, and a good deal younger than he was. And despite all that, she made him feel like he was back at Hogwarts again. He wasn't sure exactly what he was feeling towards the woman, or she towards him, but he hoped they'd be able to find out.

Arthur drifted off to sleep knowing that despite the problems, things were moving forward. Perhaps not as smoothly as he'd like, but they were

moving.

From the bedroom two doors down, Charlie had just finished his nightly journal entry. It was a habit his mum had introduced him to more than twenty years earlier. It was something that his family was used to seeing him do. He had kept a daily journal all through his Hogwarts years, and when Ginny came home from her terrible first year at Hogwarts, he had been there to help her overcome her fear of using a journal.

He paused as he completed his description of Haven, its layout and the people, then went into his impressions of what he had seen, what people had told him. He paused when he got to his impressions of Ginny. She represented the only truly unusual thing he had experienced since arriving in Haven. For one thing, she wore a cloak with an embroidered emblem of a Celtic cross on the breast. That, in itself, wasn't unusual, but her bearing and manner were not in line with the little girl who had cried in her sleep that horrible summer following her first year. She had matured far beyond her age and there existed some tension between them that he couldn't define. She looked at him as if she were measuring him, weighing his words and looking for truths beyond what he was telling her.

As far as Charlie was concerned, as he explained in his journal, this was clearly evidence that she was being manipulated or controlled. It confirmed his fears.

In a book many miles away in Ballincollig, Charlie's words appeared as if he were there writing them himself.

Albus Dumbledore sat reading this first entry and smiled to himself. The information wasn't especially useful, but it was a start.

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### **Haven School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, Girls Fifth year dorm...**

Ginny looked up from the notebooks that were scattered all over her bed. OWLS and NEWTS would start tomorrow. Luna bounced through the curtains around the bed, landing in the midst of the Ginny-created mess, causing several notebooks to fall to the floor. Ginny sighed and summoned the books back to the bed.

"Ginny, if you don't know the material by now, no amount of study is going to help with the exams tomorrow," Luna said, her voice airy.

"I know, I know. It's just that I took some time off today to go with Dad to get Charlie and I wanted to get some last minute transfiguration study in," she replied, then sighed. "I suppose you're right. No amount of studying is going to help at this point. I mean, the exams are tomorrow."

"So, is Charlie alright? Why did he take so long to arrive here?" Luna asked.

Ginny blinked in surprise. She was still getting used to this Luna. Between the effects of her mixing her soul with Draco and what the Brotherhood was doing to her, Luna was turning out to be quite capable of focusing on people and events. She could hold a conversation without mentioning three toed Snarfsters or the fabled Sable Bloomslang of Central Asia.

She frowned. "Physically he's fine, Luna..."

When the blond looked at her, Ginny found herself shuddered back from the feelings of intense curiosity and concern for her that Luna was broadcasting.

"But?" prompted Luna.

"I don't know. That's the problem, Luna! His story made sense and he seemed like the Charlie I know and love, but at the same time, I felt uneasy. It's as if something isn't right and I can't put my finger on what it is. Dad wanted to take him to the manor and to the Operations Center, but I told him he couldn't because Charlie wasn't on the list. He isn't on the list, but something tells me that maybe he shouldn't be..." Ginny said pensively, then she wrapped her arms around herself and shivered slightly.

Luna eyed the girl for a moment longer. Her talents were coming into focus and, like Harry, she could see magic auras when she wanted to. Her abilities with auras was less capable than Harry's, and she lacked the experience he had with it. What she could see was that Ginny was developing a talent, though she didn't what it was. That didn't surprise her. Everyone in the Brotherhood was undergoing a similar process. The interesting thing was they all seemed to be either refining existing talents or developing wholly new ones. Ginny's talent was just beginning to manifest itself and Luna wondered if this distrust she had for her brother was a result of it.

"Maybe I'm just stressed from all these rituals and the upcoming OWLS," offered Ginny.

"Maybe," offered Luna. "But you'll have a chance to reacquaint yourself with Charlie when the OWLS are over. In the meantime, you should get some sleep. I am turning in early also."

Ginny nodded to Luna as the blond slipped from the bed.

Padding to her own bed, Luna scribbled a quick note and added it to the one from Millicent. A few minutes later, Toby appeared.

"Hello, Toby. How are you tonight?" Luna said, smiling at the elf.

Toby beamed up at her. "We is fine, Mistress. Master Draco sends his love and a note for you to read."

The little elf handed her a small leather case. Luna opened it, removing the parchment, then inserted her note to Draco about Ginny and Charlie, along with the note from Millicent. It amused her no end that her fiancée used her as a letter drop to get his 'spy stuff' from the school. But maybe he'd find her note about Ginny and Charlie of interest. If not, there was the other note that she thought he'd like. It described, in great detail,

something she'd like to do to him while he was tied to the bed posts. And if that didn't make him happy, maybe Millicent's note would.

"Here you are, Toby," she said, handing the small case back to the elf.

"Thank you, Mistress. Sleep well!" the little elf squeaked before vanishing.

Crawling into bed, Luna pulled the blankets up around her shoulders and wished for morning to arrive. Once her OWLS were done, the pain of being separated from Draco every night would end, and she very much looked forward to it.

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### Author's Notes:

This is the part you dread. It means you're down at the bottom of the file, scrapping the bottom of the dung heap. The end, the last bits and bytes, well you get the picture. This is the section where we trot out our responses to some of the reviews and morons like that *Ambiance15* who's petty actions got us kicked off of fanfiction.net.

Is Molly dead? We can't tell you without giving away spoilers. You will just have to hold your water and wait and see.

Magic, like medicine, can't heal everything. Don't look to the brotherhood to magically cure every ailment people might suffer from.

Why is Charlie looking so hard for Molly? Wouldn't you look for your mother if she vanished without a trace?

The power benefits from the Brotherhood will vary considerably. Harry will see refinements in his abilities, but no new abilities. Everyone will learn new magics and see benefits of some sort.

Draco isn't Q, Draco is M. The twins make up Q branch, as we see here in this chapter.

The *Fidelius* charm will be lifted at the end of May in our time line. That it will take Haven that long to train up its constabulary is coincidence. The preparations for lifting the charm are what drives when it gets lifted.

People keep asking that we kill off Dumbledore already. That is not going to happen anytime soon. Dumbledore provides an alternate plot line and villain besides Voldemort, so don't look for him to die anytime soon.

Yes, Dan is an enchanter. In our vision of the Potterverse there are wizards and then there are wizards with talents. Enchanting isn't a very rare talent, but it is a highly respected one. Every wizard can place a temporary spell on an object, but you need someone who can enchant to make it permanent.

No, Harry will not be driving a souped BMW from Q branch. Although I won't discount the possibilities of souped up brooms. Snicker.

And now for a new feature of our Author's Notes:

Welcome to "This would be a really nice story that we'd like to recommend but the author has fallen into a coma and hasn't updated in at least sixty days" Hall. Or simply called the **UPDATELESS LIST !!**

*The Father* .

<http://www.fanfiction.net/s/1749622/1/>

Here is a wonderful story, Harry/Hermione pairing. Well written, believable plot line. Even manages to redeem both Snape and Draco. Unfortunately it hasn't seen an update since September of 2005.

The Father earns the first entry in our on **UPDATELESS LIST !**



*Bobmin*  
*FanficAuthors.net*

# Sunrise Over Britain

## Chapter 6 - Far Reaching Decisions

### Standard Disclaimer:

The curtain fell back to reveal a scaffold on the stage. Two men armed with swords pushed Severus Snape onto the stage and up onto the scaffold where he was tied to one of the posts. There was a long moment of silence, then the Sheriff of Nottingham walked onto the stage and climbed up onto the platform.

“Say the words for yon Authors Severus Snape and I will release thee!” snarled the Evil Sheriff.

The sheriff scowled as two men wheeled a wooden carving of him onto the stage. The carving was perfect, down to the scar on his cheek.

“The authors of this mockery of literature wish to make it abundantly clear that they in no way claim any rights to that blasted Gryffindor Harry Potter, his slut Hermione Granger or any of the other items in the Potter Universe! Those rights belong entirely to JK Rowling and the authors are doing this merely because they are masochists,” Snape said in a bored tone.

The Sheriff looked to Bob who was seated behind Harry and Hermione in the audience. Bob nodded in reply to the Sheriff and he grinned evilly. The Sheriff then turned and pulled out a large spoon from his pocket.

“Tacky Bob, very Tacky,” commented Alyx.

“Yeah, but at least I don't have Hermione's head in Harry's lap this time.”

Harry pulled his head out from under Hermione's skirt and looked at Bob and Alyx curiously. “What?” he asked.

“You're a pig, you know that don't you?” Alyx asked Bob.

“Yes dear.”

“Watch now, here comes the gory part.” commented Bob.

“DIE!!!” screamed the sheriff and he lunged forward with the spoon.

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### Sunrise Over Britain

#### Chapter 6

#### Padfoot Manor (May 22rd)...

Draco sat back in his chair, reading over the dispatches he had received today. His work with Miles in training the elves was paying off, but he had ended up building two intelligence groups instead of the one he had originally envisioned.

He had one group, specially trained to go into Britain, and another group to deal with matters in Haven. That group included more than just house elves. He chuckled and shook his head when he thought about Millicent Bulstrode. The large girl had managed to help Harry on a couple of occasions and was now helping to keep an eye on the older students in the school.

And then there was the twins. Insane, there could be no doubt about that, but brilliant nevertheless. Caleb was already singing their praises. The Night Vision Glasses and Flash Bang Nullifiers had been field tested with everyone coming away happy. The Fairy Flier was a little on the touchy side and someone had to be trained to use it, so they hadn't had a chance to test it yet. The twins had a number of projects going that Draco thought would help a lot...if they could work the bugs out of them, literally in some cases.

When the door opened, Draco looked up and watched as his mother and Bertrand Lovegood walked into the study. They often spent their evenings together, chatting over the events of the day. Narcissa and Bertrand had become close over the past few weeks, but it was only a friendship. Bertrand's relationship with his wife made him incapable of anything more. Draco felt a little sorry about that. His mother could use a man in her life who cared for her. But if friendship was all she wanted right now, Bertrand was supplying it.

“Oh, Dray, I thought you'd be done by now,” said Narcissa in a disapproving tone.

“I thought so as well, Mother, but it seems the amount of dispatches and papers I have to read increases every day.”

“Don't worry about it son,” Bertrand told him with a smile. “I'm sure Luna will be more than happy to act as your assistant when she's done with her OWLS.”

Draco frowned. “With all due respect, sir, Luna is far too capable to be given the task of secretary. I'll welcome her help, but I am not going to have her doing that sort of menial work.”

Narcissa beamed a broad smile and Bertrand nodded approvingly as well. “Well said. Why don't you run down to the school and let Minerva know you would be willing to hire some studious new graduate to act as your assistant?” Bertrand suggested

Draco stared at Bertrand stupidly. He had never considered the idea of actually hiring people.

Narcissa's eyes twinkled. "Close your mouth, dear. It's alright for us to know you have perfect teeth, but you don't need to advertise it."

"I could hire on more people," he whispered, half to himself. Toby, his lead house elf, popped into the room, distracting him from thoughts of paperwork free evenings, and gave him the leather case he used for dispatches to and from the school. Accepting the case, he nodded and the little elf vanished again.

"Love letters from Luna?" asked Narcissa with a sly smile.

Draco opened the case and shot a scowl at his mother. He had explained to her what the notes were all about, but she still thought it funny to tease him once in a while. In a way, he privately admitted she was right. Being raised a Malfoy with an over rated opinion of himself and his family left him ripe for ego bashing. Since Christmas, when she filed the divorce papers and asked Harry, as the head of the Black family, to annul her marriage, she had been slowly weaning Draco of his Malfoy heritage. Luna had accelerated the process beyond what Narcissa was capable of.

"No, Mother," he replied stiffly, trying to maintain his crumbling dignity. "These are dispatches from my sources at the school." He would never admit that she was getting to him.

He quickly read through Millicent's note, detailing a list of names she had come to suspect were forming a new blood based opposition within the school. He made a note of the information and another note to ask Toby if they could get the cooperation of the Hogwarts House Elves now working at the new school.

The note from Luna was more disturbing and he made a note to send a notice to Harry about it, first thing in the morning. The bit about Ginny's developing talent was interesting, but her feelings and comments concerning Charlie were a bit alarming.

Placing those two notes to the side, Draco turned to the final note from Luna, while Narcissa and Bertrand watched. His eyes widened dramatically and only the presence of the two adults kept his reaction in check, barely.

Luna's letter went on to describe certain things she would probably be doing to herself while he read her letter, and exactly what she would be thinking about while she did them. It further described, in exacting and loving detail, her desire to have him with her there and what she wanted to do.

Draco shifted in his chair trying to get more room in his pants as the available real estate vanished. He swallowed heavily several times and knew if he stood right now he would clearly advertise the contents of the letter. Then he promised himself that he'd see she got the opportunity involving the silken ropes and the headboard.

He looked up and was surprised to see Bertrand smiling knowingly at him. "Her mother was quite expressive in her letters as well."

Draco blushed and cursed his parents for his pale complexion that made blushing so obvious.

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## Pranking Tonks...

Remus climbed up the stairs and walked the last few steps to his bedroom. He had returned to the manor late this evening after repaying Hagrid a favor by playing Werewolf for his Care of Magical Creatures class all day.

Remus didn't mind much helping Hagrid and, in this particular case, according to Eocho, he needed to spend at least eight hours a month in his werewolf form. It was the only requirement remaining from his Lycanthropy.

After the Ritual of Summoning, Tonks had insisted that Remus undergo a complete physical from Danni. The healer was shocked to discover that Remus was free of the deadly disease. She suspected that there was a good chance the ritual had converted his disease from an illness to a trait that could be passed to his children. He had one hundred percent control over the change, without the need for the potion, and the transformation was no longer the painfully debilitating process it once was.

Stepping in front of the bedroom door, he paused. His sensitive nose could pick up Tonks' scent from within and he could also tell she had recently bathed. He smiled at the scent of the sandalwood bath salts that he had introduced to both Harry and Hermione. Right now the scent Tonks was giving off was one of being clean and being angry. Very angry.

Remus stepped into the room to find his future wife still wrapped in a towel, wading through clothing strewn all about the floor.

"Tonks?" he asked cautiously. He knew she was mad, but mad enough to empty the closets?

Tonks whirled to glare at him and she thrust out a double handful of ladies undergarments at him. "This is your fault!" she said angrily. "You filled his head with tales of Marauders and the exploits of his father."

Remus held up both hands and took a step back. "What did he do this time?" he asked, trying hard not to laugh.

"He changed all my clothing! Every last piece I own is too small for my normal body. And my underwear... my underwear..." she trailed off, sputtering and incoherent in her anger.

Remus looked at the clothing in her hands, noting that every one of the undergarments looked as though they'd come from an lingerie outlet, a very risqué lingerie outlet. Thoughts of Tonks dressed in such garments was enough to cause his brain to hiccup.

"Oh, I don't know. Some of them look interesting..." he stopped talking. The look she gave him said quite clearly he was just moments from a painful death.

Tonks whirled and began to paw through her clothing again. Remus watched her for a moment before deciding to try to calm her down again.

"You know, this never would have happened if you hadn't taken Hermione's form and tried to trick Harry with it," he said in a soft voice. "You tried to play a prank on him and he caught you at it. Pranking back is a time honored Marauder tradition."

Tonks sighed and sat on the edge of the bed causing the tightly wrapped towel around her body to loosen noticeably.

"It seemed like such a good idea at the time. Now that I can change mass as well as form, I thought I'd practice being others, in case I had to stand in for one of them one day. Then when Harry walked into the room I couldn't help myself," she said with a bit of a pout.

Remus chuckled, remembering the event well. Harry had walked into the room and found a Hermione slinking up to him, practically purring with desire. Harry frowned and flipped her upside down, hanging her from the ceiling. Remus came running when he heard Tonks' indignant yelling.

"Sweetie, you of all people should have known better. Harry can see auras and that's the one thing you can't change. He knew it wasn't Hermione as soon as he saw you. Actually, his reaction was quite restrained," offered Remus.

Tonks frowned at him. He knew she prided herself on her ability as a metamorph. He also understood that being told that someone could see through her disguises was a bit of a blow to her ego.

"Look love, Harry is just about the only one that can see through your disguises, although it wouldn't surprise me to find that Luna can as well. That girl doesn't see things the way we do," he said, then he shook himself slightly. "I'm getting off the point here. You're looking at this completely wrong. The very fact that Harry is willing to prank you back tells you an awful lot about how he feels about you. He wouldn't prank you like this if he didn't care about you."

Tonks' expression grew thoughtful as she reviewed her relationship with Harry. It hadn't always been as good as it was now, and there was that time that she nearly got Remus killed and Harry had tore into her over it. If she had to classify their relationship she would have forced to admit she had fallen into the role of big sister. It was cordial, there was even love there, which surprised her to no end. Finally, she nodded to herself and looked up at Remus.

"Alright then, so how do I make peace? I seem to have started a prank war and I wasn't ready for the consequences of it," she asked.

"How about I go make peace with Harry for you, since you seem to be... ah... having problems finding something to wear?"

Remus grinned and ducked a pillow thrown in his direction as he headed for the door.

She bent down and picked up a blouse off the floor, then she sank wearily back onto the edge of the bed and tried to adjust her size to match the clothing she held, but it was of no use. As she shrank to match the size, the clothing shrank again. Growling to herself, she threw the blouse to the floor. It was a small consolation that the towel didn't change sizes as well.

Tonks sat for a few minutes wondering how well Remus was making out when all the clothing strewn about the room shimmered briefly. She looked down at the blouse she had thrown to the floor and saw it was back to normal size again. Picking it up, she spotted her underwear beneath it and grimaced to see that, while it had changed to the right size, it was still embarrassingly skimpy. Sighing, she realized that Harry had accepted her peace offer, but this was either payment for the initial prank, or perhaps a gift for Remus. Then she started to laugh. Remus, she knew, would definitely appreciate her new underwear.

*And he'll have something to enjoy tonight,* she thought to herself.

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### **Weasley Residence, Haven (May 25rd)...**

"How did this happen?" Melinda asked as she examined Charlie Weasley's obviously infected leg.

"I was attacked by a muggle in London. He shot something at me. What was it again, Dad?" he asked as he looked down at his leg and the healer kneeling before him.

"A gum, from what you described," Arthur said, pacing the study of the Weasley cottage, obviously upset about his son's injury.

Melinda bit her lip. "I think you mean a gun," she corrected.

"Yes, a gun. Nasty things, or so I've read. Why in blazes was he shooting the thing at you, Charlie?" the Weasley patriarch asked, clearly upset.

"Why do muggles do half the things they do?" the younger redhead asked, his expression guileless.

His father scowled at the non-answer. "Muggles may be strange, Charlie, but they have reasons for what they do. Perhaps he thought you had batteries, or maybe a plug or two? Muggles so enjoy such things, and I'm sure if you'd only talked to the man, you would have found his reasons perfectly harmless."

"Well, I've found the source of infection," Melinda said quietly, interrupting what sounded like the beginning of an argument. "There's a lump of lead in your leg. I can only assume it's what the muggle shot at you. When you healed the wound, you left the lead inside and it's become infected. It will

have to come out and I'm afraid it will be painful, since you refuse to take any pain relieving potions."

"They make me muddle-headed," Charlie told her with a frown. "I'd rather keep my mind clear."

"Son, I really think you should take the potion. There's no reason to be in any more pain."

"I refuse to be drugged by anyone, even a healer, Dad."

Melinda shook her head. "It's your choice, Mr. Weasley. But as you insist on doing this, I must insist that you keep your screaming to a minimum. It makes me ill-tempered," she told him, her smile all teeth and little warmth. She disliked the macho-types as, in her opinion, they screamed louder and with less cause than a child getting a shot.

Charlie looked at her, a bit alarmed and she stood up and pointed her wand at his leg. Any chance he may have had to change his mind however, ended when she murmured an incantation and pain hit him in waves. Refusing to cry out, he ground his teeth together and closed his eyes tightly.

He felt a slight pressure on his shoulder.

"Calmly, Mr. Weasley," Melinda McKinny's soft voice said through the fog of pain. "The lead has been removed and the wound has been cleaned and healed. It's over now. But you must control your breathing or you'll hyperventilate. That's it, slow, deep breaths. Just like that."

When Charlie finally opened his eyes, he found himself staring into a pair of concerned, green eyes. He smiled weakly, before sitting up straight in his chair. His leg throbbed, but the agony of it was gone.

"Thank you, Mrs. McKinny," he told her, his voice hoarse.

"You're welcome." She stood up and smiled at him. "I'm sorry if I seemed a bit harsh. While I understand your reason for refusing the potion, I hope you understand that no healer likes to see her patient suffer needlessly. Next time, do this poor healer a favor and take the potion."

"As I don't plan on having a next time," he began, smiling.

"And now that you've jinxed yourself well and good, I think that's my cue to leave," she said, laughing.

"Oh, don't leave," Arthur said. "The rest of the family will be here soon for lunch. I was hoping you would join us."

"Thanks for the offer, but I don't want to intrude." She finished packing her supplies and stood up. "Make sure to keep an eye on that injury," she told Charlie. "You shouldn't have any problems but if you do, contact me, or one of the other healers, immediately."

"Yes Ma'am," Charlie said with a salute. "However, Dad's right. You should stay for lunch."

The front door opened with a bang and loud voices were heard in the den. "Dad! Where are you?"

"We're in the study," Arthur called, then grinned at Melinda. "Too late. The clan's all here and you'll not make your escape now."

"Dad, what's going...Oh!" Ginny Weasley said as she skidded to a stop in the doorway. "Hello... Mrs. McKinny, isn't it?"

"It is. And you must be Ginny," Melinda replied. "It's nice to meet you. Your father has told me so much about you."

Ginny blushed to her roots. "It's nice to meet you, too. Oh, Charlie! How's your leg?"

"Better. Healer McKinny's healed it up for me, good as new." He stood up and flinched slightly from the pain. "Dad and I were just telling her that she's welcome to lunch with us."

Ginny's eyes widened for a moment, then she nodded vigorously. "Yes, that would be lovely," she choked out. "Excuse me a moment."

She bolted from the room and the three adults frowned at each other. What they didn't hear was the whispered conversation between her and the twins in which she informed them that Inga had been correct, their father was dating Mrs. McKinny.

With a shrug, Arthur escorted their visitor to the den and introduced her to Fred and George, who wore nearly identical expressions of glee. Ginny, looking rather innocent for one who'd just rudely rushed from the den, stood behind them.

While the twins entertained their guest with amusing stories of their time at Hogwarts, Arthur and Charlie began lunch. A few minutes later, the twins excused themselves.

"How bad was Charlie's leg?" Ginny asked as she watched the twins disappear.

"Nothing that couldn't be fixed, but I'm glad he didn't hold off any longer than he did. He was suffering from lead poisoning, and the source of the poison was still in his leg. I removed it, cleaned up the infection and leached out the poison before healing it. He should be fine, though it will be a bit painful for awhile," Melinda told her.

The front door banged open once more and Bill entered the den.

"Hey short stuff, how are you?" he asked as Ginny flew into his arms. "I hear OWL's were a pain."

"They're not over yet and that's all I have to say about them," she mumbled into his shirt. "I haven't seen you in awhile."

"That's because you spend all your time with Neville," he teased, pulling her ponytail lightly.

She slapped his arm playfully, then turned and pulled him further into the room. "Come, meet Mrs. McKinny, or do you prefer Healer McKinny?" Ginny asked.

"Either will do," Melinda said, standing. "Though I prefer to be called Melinda. You must be Bill Weasley. It's nice to meet you."

"A pleasure, Melinda. So you're the one who's to heal our Charlie, then?" he asked.

"She's just done so and he's already up and about," Ginny told him.

"Was it bad?"

"Nothing too serious," Melinda began, only to be interrupted by the re-entrance of the twins. She sat back down and watched the siblings interact. They were a boisterous group and obviously cared for each other and their teasing good humor was infectious. When Charlie called them into the kitchen for lunch, Melinda had been accepted as part of the group and they entered, laughing together.

The laughter continued through lunch. As the meal ended, Arthur sat back in his chair and scanned his family, feeling a small pang for his missing sons. Oddly, the gentle sorrow he usually felt when thinking of Molly was gone and, as his eyes settled on Melinda, he thought he knew why.

His reverie was interrupted as George stood and tapped his spoon on his glass.

"Attention, attention! In honor of this gathering of the Weasley clan, and to congratulate Dad on accepting the the post of Deputy Minister..." George trailed off, looked at his twin and raised an eyebrow in question.

When Fred stood and grinned cheekily, Arthur tensed and leaned over to Melinda. "Hold on to something," he murmured quietly, watching the twins as one would eye a poisonous snake.

Melinda frowned, unsure of what he was talking about, but soon found herself gripping the edge of the table as Ginny's eyes widened and she moved her chair back from the table.

"And to Healer McKinny, as a friendly warning about what she may be dealing with in getting involved with a Weasley, we present this gift," Fred continued, pulling a small package out of his pocket and carrying it to his father. Setting it down, he pulled out his wand and un-shrunk it. It was large, very large, and was pushing plates off the table.

Bill, being quicker than the rest, managed to save the plates and floated them gently into the sink before turning back to watch the show.

Charlie was staring at Melinda, his eyes narrowed. Ginny covered her mouth with her napkin and tried desperately to stifle her laughter.

"Go on, then. Unwrap it," George said encouragingly. "Fred and I have been working on it for a few days now."

Touched by the gesture, but cringing at what the twins may have thought up for a gift, Arthur had no choice. He unwrapped the package slowly, delaying the inevitable. Tearing away the last bit of paper, he stared down at the enormous book for a moment before the title registered.

*The Complete Chronicles of Contraceptive Charms  
And  
The Illustrated Guide to Sexually Pleasuring Your Witch*

*Combined by Fred and George Weasley and gifted to their father, Arthur Weasley, on the occasion of his promotion to Deputy Minister.*

Not happy with that, the twins had set the title in large, red, *blinking* letters, ensuring that every eye in the room was drawn to the book.

While the twins beamed with pride, Bill snickered. Arthur shoved wrapping paper over the book, hiding the title as best he could, then buried his face in his hands.

Charlie stood, scowling. "I don't understand."

"You don't?" Fred asked, surprised.

"Perhaps Dad will let you borrow his book then, to study up," George quipped.

"That's not what I meant," Charlie all but growled. "What has Healer McKinny to do with your bloody gift?"

Seeing Melinda's embarrassment and his father's discomfort, Bill stood. "I don't think it's any of our business, actually."

"Of course it's our business," Charlie spat. "He's our father and he happens to have a wife!"

"Ex-wife," Ginny reminded him.

"Aye, ex-wife, and she likely the cause! Where's your husband, *Mrs.* McKinny?"

Her face pale, Melinda raised cool eyes to meet Charlie's. "He's dead, Mr. Weasley."

The quiet statement silenced the room quicker than any shout for calm could have. Into the silence, a quiet, angry voice was heard.

"You will apologize to Mrs. McKinny," Arthur said, his eyes boring into this son's.

"I won't. Her husband's death gives her no right to break up a marriage," Charlie retorted, still glaring at the Healer.

"I divorced your mother months before I met Melinda, and you'll not accuse her of such a foul thing again. Now, apologize, or leave my house." Father and son stared at each other, while the other Weasley's looked on in shock.

"Enough," Melinda stood, her hands trembling and her complexion still pale, though her voice was firm. "I will not come between a father and his son. Mr. Weasley, should your leg begin to bother you, I suggest going up to the hospital and having another healer tend to it." She looked at the other family members and smiled shakily. "It was nice to meet you all."

Turning to Arthur, her smile slipped and she shrugged a bit helplessly. "I'm sorry."

He pushed away from the table, stood and took her arm. "Come, I'll escort you out." When she tried to resist, he pulled her closer to his side and began walking towards the front door. There was a scuffling noise behind them, but neither turned back.

At the door, Arthur turned her to face him. "I'm the one who's sorry, Melinda. I should have expected something like this."

"How could you have?" she asked, not meeting his eyes.

"I know my boys. I knew the twins would do something, though I didn't think it would be this public. And Charlie, well, he's had a hard time accepting the divorce, though I didn't put all the signs together until now. I'm sorry you were caught up in it."

"I meant what I said, Arthur. I won't come between you and your family."

"You won't. It's time that my children understand that they do not dictate what I do with my life."

"But..."

"But nothing. They are adults now and they can like it or lump it. I'm not willing to give up someone who makes me happy just to please them," he told her fiercely.

When she looked up at him with wide eyes, he smiled and kissed her gently on the cheek. "I'll come by in a few days and we can talk more, alright?"

She nodded. "All right. I'll see you then."

Back in the kitchen, Bill and Fred had physically restrained Charlie when he'd tried to follow their father to the door. After wrestling him into his chair, he relaxed only after they threatened to immobilize him if he didn't.

"How long has this been going on?" he ground out, glaring at his siblings.

"Dunno," Bill said. "This is the first I've heard of it, though I'm not surprised. Dad's a young man. There's no reason he shouldn't date."

"No reason!" Charlie exclaimed.

"No reason at all," Fred said, leaning back against the counter and glaring at this older brother.

"Things have changed, Charlie. You'd be better off accepting than fighting it," George added.

"Or you can leave," Ginny said. "After all, you haven't made much of an effort to fit in here, have you? It's almost as if you're here to..." Her eyes narrowed as she trailed off.

"Here to what?" Charlie asked her furiously. "See my family? Make sure they're safe?"

When no one said any thing, his hands balled into fists. "Am I the only one who sees something wrong with this situation? Dad divorces Mum and takes up with some little slut who's young enough to be his daughter?"

The slap caught Charlie off guard and his eyes swung to his enraged sister in shock.

"Don't you EVER say something like that again. She saves you from lead poisoning and you call her a slut? What an ungrateful piece of shit you've become!"

When Charlie stood and raised his hand to strike her, Bill, Fred and George all drew their wands, though they need not have bothered.

Ginny, seeing her brother's intention, instinctively raised both hands, palms out. Light burst forth from her upraised hands and struck Charlie in the chest, causing him to double over in pain. She grabbed him by the hair and forced his head up and his eyes to meet hers.

"Never threaten me or anyone else in Haven. Brother or no, I'll not stand for it," she told him quietly. "Things have changed, Charlie. Accept that, or leave. Those are your only options."

She let him go and stepped back. The twins and Bill moved to stand beside her and they all waited for Charlie's answer.

He glared at them for a moment and remembered Dumbledore's warning about the possibility of his family being under some dark, controlling magic, and realized he may have just found the proof of it. His sister was much more powerful than she'd ever been, or even shown any hint of being, and his brothers did not look surprised by her abilities. Unwilling to be forced from Haven, he swallowed his rage and looked at his feet.

"I guess I have no choice," he said quietly. "It's just that things have changed so quickly for me."

Bill sighed, put a hand on Charlie's shoulder and gave it a comforting squeeze. "We know that. We'll help you as much as possible, but you really should apologize to both Dad and Melinda. In truth if they are dating then this was date number two or three Charlie."

"Do you think she'd accept it? I know Dad will, but I don't know the healer very well," Charlie admitted, raising his head only after he was sure he had his expression under control.

"Oh sure, she's a nice one, she is," Fred told him.

"And she'll be good for Dad, you'll see," George added.

Ginny said nothing, only continued to watch Charlie closely. He was lying, she knew it. She just couldn't figure out why, or what he was lying about.

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### **Haven School of Witchcraft and Wizardry (May 27th)...**

Minerva rubbed the bridge of her nose tiredly and looked down at the pile of parchments on her desk. NEWT's and OWL's were over for the fifth and seventh year's, but the other students were still finishing up end of year assignments. She wasn't looking forward to the grading that still needed to be done and was trying to find an excuse to put off her own routine paperwork as Headmistress.

Finding nothing to distract her, she slipped her glasses back on and reached towards the pile, but froze when a knock sounded on her door. Looking up, she breathed a silent thank you to whomever was looking out for beleaguered Headmistresses.

"Come!" she called, firmly shoving her paperwork away from her.

The door squeaked open and Millicent Bulstrode slipped into the office. Minerva smiled as the young woman shut and locked the door, then cast a silencing charm.

"Miss Bulstrode, it's good to see you."

"Hello, Professor. I'm sorry to interrupt, but there's something I need to talk to you about," Millicent said as she approached the desk and sat down in the chair McGonagall waved her towards.

"Nonsense. To be truthful, I was hoping someone would come along and save me from the drudgery of routine paperwork. What can I do for you?"

"I have a bit of a problem, Ma'am. School will let out soon, and I need to find a reason to stay here."

Minerva frowned. "Stay? Are you having problems at home, my dear?"

"Oh, it's nothing like that, Professor," Millicent replied, leaning forward a bit in her chair. "It's just that Palmer and Joyner will be staying at the school this summer, won't they? Neither has family in Haven, so they really have no place else to go."

"They and several other students will be staying here at the school over the summer, yes. Oh! I see what you're getting at. It would be difficult for you to keep an eye on them if you're off in Haven, wouldn't it?"

Millicent nodded, the relief in her eyes evident. "I'll need a good reason to stay behind, Professor. Not just for the students, you understand, but for my family, as well."

"You've not told your family what you're doing, then?" Minerva asked, concerned.

"Of course not. The fewer to know a secret, the more likely it is to stay one," Millicent said firmly.

McGonagall's lips twitched. "I see Slytherin is still alive and well." When the young woman began to bristle, Minerva waved a hand towards her and made a tsking sound. "That wasn't an insult, Miss Bulstrode. Slytherin had many fine qualities that most in that house let fall by the way in recent years, discretion being one of them, as I believe Mr. Longbottom pointed out at our last meeting.

Now, a good reason to keep you here over the summer." Minerva leaned back in her chair. "It just so happens," she said, her eyes falling on the stack of paperwork awaiting her attention, "that I am in need of an assistant. Your transfiguration scores are high enough to warrant the position and I really could use the help."

"Thank you, Professor. I never expected something like this, but it's perfect. And certainly more pleasant than what I feared I may have to do to stay," Millicent said enthusiastically.

"Tell me that after helping to grade first year transfiguration essays." Minerva's eyes danced. "Well, now that we've settled that," she continued, "I'll just write up a request to your parents for your assistance this summer. Have them sign it, then return it to me and we'll be set."



## Padfoot Manor (May 29th)...

Harry and Remus walked into the study, both were engaged in an animated discussion. The rest of the room was filled with members of the Brotherhood and a few key people whom Harry considered essential. Luna and Ginny both wore exhausted smiles on their faces. Today had been their last OWL and, once it had been completed, the two girls had rushed back to their dorms, packed and moved their stuff to the Manor. Neither had any intention of staying at the school any longer than necessary. Minerva had grudgingly gave her consent to the move.

Remus sat in a chair up near the front of the room while Harry stood, surveying everyone present and considering what he was about to say. In one corner of the room Eocho misted into view. He nodded at Harry and stood watching carefully.

"Thank you all for coming. Before I begin... Luna? Ginny? You two get everything moved alright?"

Both girls nodded happily at Harry. That they were tired was obvious, but Neville and Draco would take care of them later.

Harry smiled in reply. "Good enough, then. Now, we've all been running around without any real direction for nearly a month and that has to stop."

He waited while a murmur rippled through the room. "Eocho is teaching one person from each couple to commune. He tells me that with a little luck, that process should be done soon. In the meantime, each person should be starting to teach their partner. This is critical. Everyone needs to learn this skill.

"Once everyone can commune, Eocho will pass knowledge to each person. For example, he will teach me fighting techniques, which I will pass to everyone. From what I understand, Eocho can transfer knowledge to a person, but it's a dangerous process and can only be done once to each person. So while I learn the combat magics of the Brotherhood, I have to learn the Rune Magic the old fashioned way. Each of us will become a teacher to the rest. Hermione will learn Druidic Rune Magic. From what I understand, it's very different from what was taught in Ancient Runes. Once she knows that, she will teach it to the rest of us.

"Luna, Eocho says he wants to teach you something called Large Field Magics. It's some sort of derivative of Rune magic and warding, I think. You'll teach that to us once you've absorbed what Eocho has given you."

Harry glanced over at Luna and she nodded with a dreamy smile. Inwardly, he shuddered when he considered the concept of Luna teaching anything.

"Some of us will work as couples. For example, we'll take Dan and Emma and Terry and Susan. Susan and Terry will work with Amelia, coordinating the Ministry and the Brotherhood's efforts. And because the Brotherhood has to work within the confines of the both the Wizarding and Muggle worlds, Dan and Emma will work towards bringing it up to modern standards as an organization."

Terry looked up in surprise, then he gave Harry a tight grin. He had been a bit upset when he learned that the Brotherhood meant he'd have to drop out of Auror training, but this sounded even more interesting in the long run, and it had the added advantage of working closely with Susan and her aunt.

Harry nodded at Terry, then turned his attention back to the others. "Draco tells me he's getting swamped. Ginny, you'll be helping him, along with Tonks. Tonks will be taking over the Elves from Draco so he can concentrate on the pure intelligence aspects of his job. Tonks, you'll also be working with Miles so that he understands what we represent."

Dan Granger frowned for a moment. "Just what do we represent, Harry?"

"That's a good question, so let me explain exactly what we are. The Brotherhood has a long and distinguished history that we are only now becoming aware of through Eocho's teachings. But in our current situation we will be the ones to deliver justice to Voldemort. After the war, the Brotherhood will become a living entity. Members can remain active after Voldemort's defeat, or be placed on inactive duty, but the Brotherhood will always remain for one purpose. We are arbiters for justice. Remus and I have talked extensively with Eocho about this. The Brotherhood has a defined role in times of peace to lead by example.

"The Brotherhood isn't about a lifelong commitment to an organization, it's about a lifelong commitment to the ideals of justice. In Eocho's time, justice was more brutal than it is today, but the ideals are the same. Our primary job after Voldemort is to modernize the Brotherhood and bring it into line with modern values," he said, shooting an apologetic look towards Eocho.

Eocho crossed his arms and scowled at Harry for a moment before nodding for him to continue.

"Some of us will be right in the thick of the fighting, others will be a little further back. All of us need to learn to fight and protect each other. That's why everyone will be learning the fighting techniques and combat magics, as well as the healing magics. The Aurors that Miles is training? They have the job of weakening Voldemort's machine. You all have the job of covering my back while I take on old snake face."

Harry stopped and looked at his friends and family expectantly.

Terry looked up from whispering in Susan's ear. "Harry, I'm not trying to make waves but do we want the Brotherhood to coordinate with the Ministry so openly?"

Harry shrugged. "The Brotherhood isn't a secret organization, Terry. While some of our operations may be secret, the existence of the Brotherhood isn't going to remain a secret, nor should it. After Voldemort, we will be extremely public in what we do. It can't be helped. Bringing down Voldemort will push us all into the spotlight. Part of what Dan and Emma will be doing is planning on taking advantage of that publicity. We can't prevent future Dark Lords from arising, but we can take steps to make it harder. That's going to be one of our primary goals."

"This is a thing most strange," offered Eocho in a heavy tone. "The code by which we lived must change. I like not the reason for it, but Dan hath told me about the powers of the muggles. In my day, they didst not have such power. Or such numbers. The Maglios is correct, we must needs change our laws to meet the present day, but we mustn't forget from whence we came."

Harry gave Eocho a respectful bow. "We are trying, honored teacher. The gulf between your time and ours is great, but we can bridge it. I know it in my heart."

He glanced down when Hermione placed a hand on his arm, but she was looking at Eocho.

"Honored teacher," she said in a soft tone, "we all pledge to do our best for the Brotherhood, and make you proud of us."

Eocho looked at her for a moment. He moved to stand closer to fireplace. "It is ever thus with new initiates, my daughter. Now other tasks await thee this day," he said, fading from view.

"I am never going to get used to that," quipped Emma Granger.

"Magic," snickered her husband.

Emma shot Dan a disgusted look. "I'm getting tired of you using that as an excuse for everything these days. It rains, you blame it on magic. I lose a shoe, you blame it on magic."

The two ignored the others around them, while everyone else watched with a fair amount of amusement. Hermione grinned at her father, she knew he was teasing her mother. She felt a tug at her blouse and she looked at a worried Harry.

"Is that going to be us in twenty years?" he asked in a concerned whisper.

She realized that Harry was misreading her parents playful bickering. He didn't have many role models for a successful relationship and was interpreting her parents teasing for a fight. She shook her head and smiled at him to ease his concern.

"They aren't fighting, Harry," she whispered back.

Harry glanced over in time to see Emma wave her wand, tying Dan's shoelaces together.

"If you say so," he said dubiously.

Hermione looked at Harry's concerned face and broke into a fit of laughter. Dan retaliated by changing Emma's comfortable trainers into calf high combat boots.

"Ha! Magic!" Dan chortled, grinning at his daughter who he thought was laughing along with him.

Harry shook his head. "I have other meetings to attend to today before tonight's town meeting."

With that he stood, leaned down and kissed Hermione on the cheek, then left the room and two ex-dentists turned enthusiastic wizards.

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## The Ministry in Exile, Haven...

Amelia leaned back in her plush chair and contemplated how opulent her office was compared to her old office as head of the Department of Magical Law Enforcement. The office wasn't nearly as plush and opulent as what Cornelius had put together, but it was more comfortable than she was used to dealing with. Harry and Bertrand Lovegood had insisted on making it this way. Bertrand called it an 'image issue', and Harry just felt she deserved something more than that spartan office she had set up in the Operations center.

She glanced out the window of her new office, looking into the main square of the town of Haven. It had been decided to relocate the Ministry in Exile to the town, away from the Operations Center, which would remain under the *Fidelius* charm along with the manor house. The new, three story brick building had been built in record time, thanks in part to the large number of elves assisting in the building. The new building was located next to the town hall, and the new Gringotts branch.

She was about to reach for another report stacked neatly in her in-box when a head appeared in the doorway.

"Mr. O'Dalley is here, Minister. He apologizes for not letting you know in advance, but he asks for a moment of your time," said the young woman.

Amelia dropped the report gratefully back in her in-box and waved to the young woman to send O'Dalley in.

"Michael! Come in, have a seat. I admit I wasn't expecting you until later tonight when we held the town meeting, but I'm always happy to see you." She stood and shook his hand before he sat down.

"Yes, well, I have sort of an interesting request for information from my government, Madam Minister."

Amelia arched an eyebrow at his formal tone. Taking her seat behind her desk, she straightened in her chair. "How can we be of service?"

O'Dalley leaned back in his chair and looked somewhat embarrassed. "It's two requests, actually. As you are aware, our own intelligence service believes that Voldemort managed to put over a hundred Death Eaters into Northern Ireland before Lord Potter erected his ward. Unfortunately, we

are drawing a blank in finding them. Our boys are a little too well known by the local criminal element, which makes it nearly impossible to do any kind of undercover operation..."

Amelia nodded and jotted down a few notes on a pad, then she looked up. "So you're hoping to borrow one or two of our lads for an undercover operation?"

O'Dalley nodded vigorously. "Yes, although to be honest, if possible, we'd really like to borrow Ms. Tonks. Other volunteers would be welcome, but her metamorph abilities are without peer. There are so few metamorphs to start with and, of those, even fewer still go into law enforcement. Ms. Tonks would be ideal for this operation."

Amelia frowned. "Now that is a bit of a problem, Michael. Nymphadora Tonks is still listed in our Auror ranks, but she's on permanent detached duty to Lord Potter and his Brotherhood of Druidic Knights. We can ask her, but I am no longer able to consider myself her superior and order her on an assignment."

"That's what I told my boss, Madam Minister, but I was told to make the request official," O'Dalley said seriously. Amelia nodded. She understood that the Death Eaters in Northern Ireland posed a serious threat to the Irish Government and they were understandably nervous about them.

"Let me send her a message asking her to join us if she can, Michael. Then you can present your request in person," offered Amelia.

O'Dalley smiled in agreement, as this was much more than he expected to get out of this meeting.

Amelia scribbled a note and called for an elf to deliver the message, then she turned back to O'Dalley.

"You said you had two requests?" she prompted.

"Yes, this one comes from several departments. It seems there have been a few public sightings of someone resembling Albus Dumbledore. Most notably he has been spotted in Cork and in Stonewall Lane."

Amelia scowled.

"My government requests clarification of why Albus Dumbledore is not assisting your efforts."

"Albus Dumbledore is wanted by the British Ministry in regard to a number of charges. He may have once been the leader of the light, but he has fallen from that path," Amelia said stiffly.

"Wanted!" exclaimed O'Dalley.

Amelia nodded grimly. "Dumbledore is wanted for theft, conspiracy, and a host of other charges, mostly perpetrated against Lord Potter. I will be honest with you, Michael, it was only my promise to Harry Potter that has kept Harry from killing Dumbledore. I intend to see Albus Dumbledore prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law.

"When Harry learned of the scope of what Dumbledore had done to him, he was very angry. Had I not promised to investigate the case, Dumbledore would be dead, Potter would be in Azkaban and Voldemort would be now be working on taking over the rest of the world," Amelia finished softly.

O'Dalley expression was troubled. It was like learning that Father Christmas was really an arsonist. "Madam Minister, would you be willing to share at least some of the evidence you have against Dumbledore with us? You must understand. From our position, we have no knowledge of these charges, and he did kill the last Dark Lord. Only this morning my own Minister was touting the public relations coup that could be had if Harry Potter and Albus Dumbledore were working together."

Amelia nearly choked at the thought of Harry and Albus in the same room, let alone working together! Scowling, she realized the request was not only valid, it was necessary. "I will make our evidence available to you and someone in your prosecutor's office. It is also my intent, since he seems to be roaming about your country, to formally inform your Government of his fugitive status."

Amelia glanced up as the door opened to admit Tonks and she waved the younger woman to a chair rather tiredly.

Turning back to O'Dalley, she continued. "We are not requesting that you pick him up just yet, Michael. If you could keep an eye on his movements for now however, we would be appreciative. Right now we simply do not have any place to put him. And considering what happened the last time someone tried to arrest him, I doubt that your men would be able to take him without a lot of help."

O'Dalley nodded and made a note in a small notebook.

"Dumbledore's finally shown up?" asked Tonks quietly.

Amelia nodded.

"Lord, don't let Harry find out," murmured Tonks and Amelia's lips tightened.

"Just what did he do to Lord Potter?" asked O'Dalley.

Tonks turned to face O'Dalley. "Michael, there isn't enough time in the day to go into it all. But Albus Dumbledore was the one who decided what happened to Harry after his parents were killed. He circumvented his parents will and recorded wishes and placed Harry into an abusive environment, all the while systematically stealing money every year from Harry's trust vault.

"Harry arrived at Hogwarts knowing nothing about magic and having been physically and mentally abused. He has worked hard to rise above the legacy of his childhood and I think he's succeeded, to a large extent, but I think he'll spend the rest of his life healing from the experience. Dumbledore was responsible for that and other things that happened to him after he started attending Hogwarts.

"When I first learned about it, I wanted to lead the team that would have arrested him. But Amelia instead decided I would more useful by helping Harry."

Amelia watched the two. She knew that Tonks would go far if she stayed in Government service, but she also knew that the younger woman had broken one of the cardinal rules of law enforcement - she started to care about her charge until she turned from bodyguard to big sister. Amelia didn't really hold it against Tonks. She was, after all, still young, only six years older than Harry himself, and she was legally his guardian. There was also a certain undefinable aspect about Harry that pulled at a person's heart.

"Yes, well, now that we've talked about Dumbledore, let's discuss why I sent for you, Tonks," Amelia interrupted. "Michael has something he'd like to ask you. I informed him that you're on permanent detached duty, and therefore I couldn't order to you take a new assignment. So Michael? It's your question," she said with a grin.

O'Dalley nodded and proceeded to lay out the problem for Tonks and what the Irish Government would like to do about. He also laid out, in greater detail, what they'd like Tonks to do, supplying her with information he hadn't told Amelia.

When he was finished, he sat back and waited.

Tonks sat in her chair, thinking hard. It would mean putting off some of the training she would be doing for the Brotherhood. On the other hand, all they were asking for her to do was find the Death Eaters, then get out and let them know where they were hiding.

"I'm going to give you a tentative yes, Michael. I need to clear it with both Harry and Remus, but I don't think there will be any real problem," she said thoughtfully. "Harry, in particular, will recognize the importance of finding these Death Eaters, especially with the wards coming down tomorrow."

O'Dalley grinned, the relief evident in his expression. They had been searching for the Death Eaters for a month and had come up empty handed. Tonks and her abilities should help matters.

Tonks excused herself and left the office to return to the manor house. Both Amelia and O'Dalley watched her go before O'Dalley stood to take his leave.

"Michael," Amelia said softly before he had reached the door. O'Dalley turned in surprise.

"Nymphadora Tonks is an extremely valuable agent and asset of my government, but even more importantly, Harry Potter loves her like she's his big sister. Please make sure you take all possible precautions to bring her back safely. If anything happens to her, you'll be the one that will have to tell him and Remus both."

O'Dalley swallowed nervously and nodded his understanding. "We'll do our best, Amelia, and pray that Lady Luck is on our side for the operation."

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## Parliament Building, London...

Lucius Malfoy was pacing in his office. It had been surprisingly easy to gain control of the country. Keeping control was another matter. There were reports of food riots and uprisings from all over the country and the military was using every man they had trying to keep things under control. There had also been a massive influx of wizards rushing to Voldemort's banner, but that slowed to a trickle after the Irish Ministry released details on the Line of Death Potter had put on the country.

Lucius paused in his pacing and stopped to shake his head. The amount of power required to ward an entire country! It both astounded and frightened him. Not for the first time did he wonder if he had made a mistake in joining Voldemort. His own son had joined forces with Potter and, if rumors were to be believed, was becoming a force to be reckoned with in his own right. That he lost Narcissa as well only angered him. She was lousy in bed, a cold, frigid woman. There had never been any love between the two of them, and as Lucius progressed in his passion for Voldemort's cause, all feelings for Narcissa died away. She was merely a brood mare to sire his heir off of.

Someday, he'd have the pleasure of killing her slowly, maybe while Draco watched. Then he'd kill Draco for defying the master.

Glancing down at his desk, he spotted the letter from Dolohov, who was safely outside of England. Lucius wasn't sure whether he should be envious of him or not. Dolohov reported that he was holding his men close to their base and keeping their efforts to a minimum for the moment. Sooner or later he'd have to report Dolohov's actions to the master, but he thought he'd wait a day or two longer in the hope that Dolohov would have something more positive to report.

A knock at the door tore him away from his thoughts.

"Come!"

The door opened and a Death Eater entered the room. The man smiled expectantly at Malfoy, who had no patience for his games today.

"Well Hammersmith? I haven't got all day, you know."

The man paled. "Sir, I have someone I would like you to meet. We found him hiding," he said, then he waved to a man at the door. Two men entered. Between them they dragged a very frightened Dudley Dursley.

"My Lord, I have the pleasure of introducing you to Dudley Dursley, formerly of Little Winging, Surrey," said Hammersmith proudly.

Malfoy grinned broadly. "Dudley Dursley? Where did you find him?"

"He was hiding out in a food mart in Dorking, my Lord."

Lucius nodded. "Very well, leave him to me for now. Dudley and I need to have a little chat."

The two men holding Dudley unceremoniously dropped him and he fell to the floor with a groan. Lucius stepped around his desk, one hand holding his wand. He eyed the rotund youth who lay panting on the floor.

"I'm pleased to see you're still alive, Dudley," Lucius in a deceptively calm tone.

Dudley looked up at Lucius, loathing filled his eyes as he spotted the wand. "Bugger off, you fucking freak!" he spat. "I don't talk to your kind."

Lucius smiled thinly. "Ah, but I'm afraid you really have no choice, my boy. You see, I have plans for you which require you to be alive, and cooperative. I wanted to use your father, or even your mother, but unfortunately neither of them survived their prolonged lockup without food and water."

Dudley growled deep in the back of his throat and he lunged up from the floor, only to collapse once again under the effects of the Cruciatus curse.

Lucius allowed the curse to linger for a few seconds, then he released the boy. "Now then, let me explain the facts of life to you, boy. You have your life, for now... If you do not do what I tell you, you will lose even that. There are methods I could use to control you, but they are detectable by wizards."

Dudley groaned on the floor and looked up at the pale blond wizard, his expression one of terror.

"Do as you are told, boy and you will be rewarded. Fail... and you'll spend your days screaming in more pain than you can imagine."

"I'll do anything," whimpered Dudley from the floor.

"Yes, I think you will. I can't imagine how a sniveling worm like yourself could be related to Potter. Well, no matter, we'll get you squared away," Lucius said, then he turned back to his desk.

"Hammersmith!" he yelled. A moment later the door opened and the wizard entered the room again.

Lucius looked at the wizard for a moment, then he grinned maliciously. "Take this muggle out and see that he's trained to do what we discussed..." Lucius said in a harsh tone.

Hammersmith nodded eagerly and gestured for the two men waiting in the doorway to pick up Dudley. When he turned to follow them from the room, Lucius stopped him.

"One moment, Hammersmith. I know you enjoy using the Cruciatus curse. Feel free to use it in training him. But I want him alive and sane! If you damage him, I'll see you get kissed," Lucius said with a sneer.

The man paled and bowed low. "Yes, my Lord." he replied shakily, backing from the room.

Lucius sat in his lush chair and leaned back comfortably. *Yes, life as the number two man to a Dark Lord is good enough for me*, he thought. He could finally put his plan in motion to get Harry Potter. The master would reward him well.

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## Harry's study, Padfoot Manor...

Harry shook his head and threw down the parchment on the desk. He knew it was his job to kill Voldemort, but every time someone wanted a decision about something, they were sending him requests. No one ever told him that being the supposed savior of the Wizarding world required drowning in a sea of paperwork!

The door to the study opened, admitting Dan and Emma, followed by Remus and Tonks. He scowled at them. It was petty, it was childish, and he knew it. It even annoyed him that their interruption was annoying!

"Uh oh, I know that look," murmured Remus.

"What look?" asked Tonks.

"That look," exclaimed Remus, pointing at Harry. "Note the eyebrows pushed together, the narrowing of the eyes and the tightness around the lips? That's James' annoyed look."

The four stood there snickering as Harry slowly relaxed after deciding it wasn't worth the effort to kill them all.

"So what has you all upset, cub?" asked Remus after he stopped chuckling.

"This!" Harry said in exasperation and he pointed at the in-box filled with papers. "Look at this stuff! For some reason everyone seems to think I'm the one to make the decision on all this!" he exclaimed, then he pulled some papers from the pile. "Look, Miles asking for more appropriations to

cover the expense of reinforcing the walls of the test area used by Fred and George. Oh, and here's a request from Minerva asking if it's alright to include the school in an inter-school Quidditch tournament the Irish run every year. She wants to know if next year would be alright with me! Here's another from Olga Johansen reminding me that I haven't shown up to any of the weekly dances, and she says a nice boy like myself... argh!!! She knows I'm engaged!"

Tonks doubled over laughing and Harry shot her a venomous look. He thought seriously of shrinking her clothing down to nothing right there in front of Dan and Emma, but decided against it.

He shook his head angrily and stood up.

Remus raised his hands, "Easy, cub. It's just paperwork that's gone to you when it shouldn't have. I thought I had stopped most of it from getting through."

"Harry, what you need is an administrative assistant. Most of this is too trivial for even Remus to deal with," offered Emma.

"An assistant?" echoed Harry.

"Yes, someone to look through the papers that do reach you and decide which you need to deal with personally and which you can defer to someone like Amelia," Dan said, then he paused for a moment before adding, "In fact, I think that Hermione would be pleased as punch if you asked for her help in organizing this stuff."

"But she's busy with her research," protested Harry.

"Only because you haven't asked her for her help. This isn't a full time job, after all. She could do it for you every morning with time to spare," Dan replied smugly.

"Just how is this stuff getting to you, Harry?" asked Remus. He had been intercepting Harry's owls so he knew it wasn't arriving that way. The only owl that went to Harry directly was Hedwig.

"Elves, Remus. Every morning they deliver these requests and reports to me."

Remus frowned. "Elves? Well, point of fact, that's why we're here. We need to talk about the elves."

Harry winced. "Great. Look, before you rope me into anything new, I think I'll ask Hermione to join us. The last thing I want to do is make any decision about the elves without her input."

Emma leaned towards Dan. "He's learning quicker than you did," she said softly. Dan shot her a grin while Harry scribbled off a note. He summoned a house elf who immediately saluted him upon arrival. Harry groaned inwardly, but he returned the salute and handed the note to the elf to give to Hermione. Then he turned back to Dan.

"Do you know one of the elves called me Brigadier the other day? I know you didn't mean for this to get so out of hand, but the elves are running around bestowing ranks on people. Hermione's a colonel!" he said, throwing up his hands.

Dan smiled smugly. "I always knew she'd do well!"

Harry's eyes narrowed as he examined his future father in law. "She will, despite hanging out with me. You, on the other hand, I'm not so sure about. Especially if I have my way. The blasted elves are confusing the wizards in town. They just aren't used to military elves!"

"Who is?" Tonks murmured, a bit too loudly.

As Remus tried to subdue his snickering, Harry smiled sweetly at his guardian and asked if she wanted another new wardrobe.

The debate over clothing size was cut short when Hermione and Eocho entered the room. Harry blinked in surprise, then he stood. "Honored Teacher, I apologize for disturbing your lesson with Hermione, but I need her advice concerning an issue with the elves."

"I understand, Maglios. Thy mate has a keen intellect and it would be churlish of me to deny her advice to thee on such important matters. Might I stay and observe? The situation of the elves intrigues me, as we had no such relationships in my time," said Eocho.

"I would be honored to have your advice, as well," Harry replied formally.

Harry and the others had tried on several occasions to see if Eocho would respond to a more casual tone of conversation, but he appeared reluctant to do so.

Hermione took a chair next to Harry's desk and looked around. "Remus, I believe you were about to tell us about some problem with the elves that doesn't have anything to do with their military bearing?"

"It's really simple, Harry. With the exception of the Hogwarts elves, who are bound to the school, and Winky, who's bound to Hermione, all of the other elves are not bound to anyone or any thing. This means that the usual strictures about keeping our secrets doesn't apply. It also means that an elf like Kreacher could conceivably come to work here, causing similar harm."

He scowled at Remus, but said nothing. He knew where Remus was heading with this conversation and he had decided that he was going to defer to Hermione on any issue concerning the house elves.

Harry turned to Hermione. She noticed his glance and winced inwardly. Her bonding with Winky had turned her from a depressed, drunken elf into a vivacious, friendly little creature. She had had several heart to heart conversations with the little elf and had come to realize that house elf bondage needn't be a cruel thing, and it was, in many ways, beneficial to the elves.

She was about to make a comment when Remus jumped on Harry because of his glance.

"Harry, this is important. I realize that you want Hermione's input on this issue, but we can't afford to wait while she decides if house elf servitude is morally acceptable," he said in a chastising tone.

Harry blinked in surprise and Hermione bounced from her chair in anger. "That's unfair, Remus! As much as I despise the slavery of the elves, I've learned it doesn't need to be a cruel thing. If bonding the elves will save us, and them, then let's bond them."

Tonks nudged Remus. "Maybe we should get Winky a gift for changing Hermione's mind," she said with a wide grin.

Hermione glared daggers at Tonks while Harry stared at his girlfriend in disbelief. Hermione looked at him and sighed. "Oh, really Harry. It's a girl's prerogative to change her mind, you know."

"Change your mind about the color of a room, or about what to serve our guests, yes. But something as altering as a fundamental belief?" Harry asked stupidly.

Hermione narrowed her eyes and stared at him. Emma leaned over to Dan. "That was a really bad move on his part." she said, loud enough to be heard.

"I'd say so. But it was quite profound, nonetheless," he agreed. Emma narrowed her eyes and stared hard at Dan.

Tonks leaned towards Remus, but before she could say anything, Remus held up a hand to stop her. "Don't say it, Tonks. This is one fight we're not joining in on."

Harry glanced at Tonks and Remus and started to laugh, then Hermione followed suit, a moment later her parents were also laughing. Tonks was still pouting over the lost opportunity.

"Alright," said Harry. "If we have to bond them, I think we should first offer to allow any elf to bond to any family who's willing accept them in Haven. After that, I'll accept some and suggest that each family take a few to help with their properties. Those that are left over maybe we'll bind to the town?" he asked, looking at Remus for confirmation.

Remus nodded.

"But Harry, most of us don't own any properties," protested Emma.

"Not now, perhaps. But the war won't last forever and I can practically guarantee that will change," he replied smugly. Hermione glanced at him sharply. He knew something and wasn't telling them.

"While I have everyone here, I've been asked by Amelia and the Irish to help their Aurors with an undercover operation," Tonks said quietly.

"What? When?" asked Remus, surprised and concerned.

"Amelia only asked me about an hour ago, Remy. I told them yes, but that I'd have to clear it with both you and Harry first," Tonks said meekly, trying to avoid his hurt gaze.

Harry leaned back in his chair thoughtfully, then he reached into drawer and pulled out a small bracelet. "Portus," he murmured over the bracelet, then he cast several concealment charms on it before standing and walking around his desk to hand it over to Tonks.

"I can't say I like it, but I've learned that sometimes it's necessary to send the people you love into danger. Wear this, don't even let the Irish know you have it. I'll feel better knowing you have a portkey on you at all times and I think Remus will too," he said seriously.

Remus' eyes were bright with unshed tears and he nodded, not trusting himself to speak. He really didn't want her risking herself like this.

"My child, I will visit thee later this evening. I know of a shield charm thou canst cast without a wand and I will teach it unto thee," Eocho said solemnly. He had been told about Tonks' job as an Auror and he wholeheartedly approved of it.

Harry and the others shot him a grateful look while she had eyes only for Remus. He looked at her for a long time. "I can't stop you from going on this mission. Tonks, but after we're married, you and I are going to have a long talk about this. I don't want our kids left without a mother because she volunteered for some mission at the Ministry," he said in a low, husky voice.

Tonks blinked back the tears that appeared in her eyes. "Fine then, I guess you'll just have to set a date if you want that kind of input in my life," she said with a smirk. Although they were engaged, they had not really given any serious thought to when they wanted to marry.

Remus grinned at her and glanced over at Eocho, who nodded at him with his own smile. "Well, I'm sort of glad you mentioned that. I've been talking with Eocho and he suggests that we take care of that little problem during the festival of Lughnasadh. It took me a while to figure out exactly what and when he was talking about. But we're basically looking at August first to handfast everyone using the Brotherhood rite. I've looked up the history of this particular festival and it is the traditional Celtic time to hold handfastings."

Harry smiled at Remus and he murmured, "That's a very convenient date."

Tonks looked at him and frowned. It meant Harry would be of age and he would not have to go to her for permission. Harry returned her look and then turned to Hermione.

“Well, Hermione? Does August first agree with you?” he asked impishly. He just couldn't help grinning.

Hermione looked at her mother, grinning. “Well, Mum? Do you think we can get the gown and the caterer set up in time? That's barely two months away.”

Emma pulled out a small notebook and began to take notes. Then she looked up at her daughter and grinned sheepishly, realizing that Hermione was teasing her when both Dan and Harry broke into laughter.

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## **Hogwarts Castle...**

“Report,” Voldemort said calmly.

The Death Eater groveled for a moment longer, then pulled out a parchment from under his robe.

“My lord, our buyer in the United States claims to have found a dealer capable of obtaining the cauldrons you wanted, as well as several other items. The buyer says he has already purchased two cauldrons in your name and has had them shipped via the usual route. They should arrive within the week.”

“And? Is that all?”

The man scrapped the floor again. “No, my lord,” he stammered. “I have a report from Akers, in which he states that he thinks Lucius may be running several operations that he hasn't received your approval for.”

“Lucius,” sneered Voldemort. “He always was an ambitious bastard, but I know how to keep him in line. Inform Akers to maintain his watch on him and see if he can find out more.”

The Death Eater nodded, then gagged as a particularly foul odor wafted through the Great Hall where Voldemort kept his throne and held his audiences.

Voldemort frowned. “That damned poltergeist! What about the search for a new Necromancer?”

The Death Eater gagged a few more times and he struggled to get himself under control. Peeves had been seeding the castle with rotting meat and other items that were making duty at Hogwarts a hellish job. Several more staircases had collapsed, killing other Death Eaters, and there were no longer any stairs to the Seventh floor. It had to be abandoned entirely when the last staircase collapsed.

“We are trying, my lord,” said the Death Eater. “But we haven't found any in Britain and so far none have answered our calls for a Necromancer from outside the country. We even tried kidnapping the one employed by the French Ministry, but they had an Auror guard on him.”

Voldemort was about to reply when the Hall echoed with the sound of uncontrolled flatulence. Peeves floated across the room mooning the Dark Lord. His pants were down around his knees and he was facing away from the Dark Lord, bent over. Clouds of gas were erupting from his buttocks at high velocity and several Death Eaters started coughing as the clouds hit them.

“Lizard wizard! Got no lips! Got big hips!” shouted Peeves.

Voldemort growled and cast a curse at the pesky poltergeist. The spell hit Peeves square in the ass and he fell to the floor, where his body exploded into a wave of purple goo covering a full third of the hall. The goo steamed and a foul odor wafted through the room.

The Dark Lord screamed in frustration and his fist crashed down on the arm of his chair. He reached out and grabbed a Death Eater by his robe.

“Go out and find me a necromancer or I will skin you alive and use you for a rug!” he growled.

He pushed the terrified Death Eater away from him and scowled at the other assembled servants who were all cowering in their robes. From behind him he heard the sound of a raspberry and he wondered if other Dark Lords had problems like this.

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## **The Town of Haven...**

Charlie Weasley walked slowly up the lane towards the center of the town. He was becoming very frustrated. Everyday his father and Bill vanished into the new Ministry building and the twins disappeared to some place he couldn't find.

And Ginny! He growled softly in his throat as he once again planned to tear apart the boy Ginny was supposed to be marrying sometime this summer. His father had tried to explain things to him, but hadn't done a very good job of it. And what had she hit him with that day in their father's cottage? Her power was unbelievable, and no one had been able to explain it to his satisfaction. Vague details about special training up at the manor with some new teacher hadn't done anything to calm his fears about some outside source controlling his family.

Arthur had downplayed the situation between himself and Molly in an attempt to make Molly look better than she was for Charlie's sake. Bill and the others had planned to pull him aside at a later date and set him straight, but they had been too busy. As a result, Charlie was still left with the feeling of wrongness about the issue, and was sure he was missing some key element his family was hiding from him. With the subtle twisting by



Dumbledore, he was sure that element was something dangerous.

Bill was helping Arthur deal with the influx of volunteers due to arrive next week from the United States. Charlie had probed as gently as he could, but neither would confirm the numbers. Rumor, however, had them ranging anywhere from a hundred Aurors and their families to ten thousand crack hit wizards.

He had chuckled at that, and guessed that it was a lot smaller, but there was no denying the fact that there were a large number of house elves working on expanding and adding homes to several of the small roads that branched off the main street in town.

Haven was another frustration for him. Here was a brand new town, full mostly of Wizards, but also containing a small population of Muggles and, for the most part, everyone he had talked to spoke of Harry Potter as if the boy had personally saved them. Of the dozens of people he had asked, only one could honestly say they had spoken with Harry Potter, and yet all of them were convinced he was their hero.

He hoped to find out more tonight at the town meeting. Harry was supposed to come to town to talk about what measures were being taken to ensure their safety now that some of the charms around the town were going to be dropped. It was a big step and people were nervous about it.

Charlie had been sharing his views about Haven with Dumbledore via their notebook. Dumbledore had been very excited to hear the *Fidelius* charm was going to come down, as it would give him access to the town itself. He had also mentioned Ginny's new abilities, her level of power and the mysterious new teacher up at the manor. Dumbledore had been concerned about it, but knew he could do nothing from a distance, and had advised caution. He had also confessed that he didn't know anyone named Melinda McKinny or what influence she may have on Arthur.

Charlie paused in his ruminations and spun on his heel, but he didn't see anyone behind him. He shook his head and wondered if he was becoming paranoid, or if someone was really following him. Turning back towards town, he continued walking...and never noticed the elf shadowing him.

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### Harry's study, Padfoot Manor...

"Remus, Hermione, have either of you ever heard anything about a Chaos cauldron?" asked Harry. Their meeting had covered several other topics since dealing with the Elves and the handfasting, now Harry asked about something he had read of only that morning.

"I can't say that I have," said Remus. Hermione shook her head.

Harry frowned and rifled through the pile of parchments in his in box. "I know I saw it in here. Ah... here it is. This is a copy of a note sent from the Hogwarts ghosts. As you know, I set them up with a way to be able to send us information about what they might overhear in the castle. Draco and I both get copies of these messages. But this one has me stumped.

"According to the Bloody Baron, the castle is due to receive something called a Chaos Cauldron. Two of them, actually. Also, the ghosts tell me that Snape is being held prisoner in the secondary potions lab where he spent several weeks attempting to make a potion. Miles wanted to know if we wanted to mount a rescue mission to get Snape out of there, but I put a stop to that. With his dark mark we can't get him out of Britain, even if I wanted to rescue him."

"What does Draco's research department say about this cauldron?" asked Hermione.

Harry blinked in surprise. "Draco has a research department?"

Hermione huffed a few times at him. "Honestly, Harry, he told me he sent you a notice days ago that he was increasing the size of his staff to handle the myriad jobs he has."

"Funny you should mention that, Hermione," said Dan. "We were just discussing earlier how you might be able to help Harry by reviewing the papers he's been getting every morning. Most of them he doesn't need to even see. The problem is he's been getting swamped with paperwork."

Hermione looked surprised and she turned to look at Harry. He looked back a bit sheepishly. "I could use your help with this stuff. Merlin knows you're more organized than I am."

Her eyes glowed and she grabbed the large stack of parchments in his in box and started to sort through it, shaking her head at some of the requests she was seeing.

Both Emma and Dan chuckled over their daughter's behavior, but she ignored them. Dan turned serious, glancing between Echo and Harry.

Harry caught the look. "Dan? Is there something else you want to bring up?"

"It's not so much as wanting to bring it up as needing to bring it up. Echo and I have had many a conversation about modernizing the Brotherhood, but we have one sticking point which bothers me a lot. To put it simply, Echo and I are on opposite sides of the coin when talking about crime and punishment."

Harry looked over at Echo, who nodded in grim agreement. "A dead thief cannot steal again." he said solemnly in an uncompromising tone.

Everyone in the room winced at Echo's pronouncement. Sometimes Druidic justice meant victims were buried alive in peat bogs, or hung, or pitted. It was a brutal form of justice at best.

Harry frowned for a moment, then his eyes widened. "Let me see if I have this straight," he said, turning back to Dan. "Right now, we imprison a thief for however many years depending on the crime committed, right?"

Dan nodded in agreement.

“Our Honored Teacher here advocates a strict form of justice which, by today’s standards, is harsh and unworkable in either the Muggle or Wizarding worlds. Correct?”

Both Dan and Eocho nodded.

“Now, neither of you has a problem with the fact that I have to kill Voldemort, and neither of you seems to consider my killing him as a crime. Why is that?”

Dan glanced at Eocho and motioned for him to speak first.

“It is not a crime to be the instrument of justice, Maglios. Thou are compelled to the deed by necessity and by prophecy. Thy foe hast killed for evil purposes and must be stopped at all costs.”

Harry glanced over at Dan who shrugged. “I’ll agree with that,” he murmured.

“Alright, we have someone who has killed on numerous occasions and who is obviously deserving to be punished, but is currently beyond the reach of any legal authority who can punish him.”

He paused and watched as everyone thought about what he was saying. He recognized the look on Hermione’s face and wasn’t surprised to see it echoed on Emma’s just a few seconds later.

The silence dragged on for a moment longer. “Then the solution is to ignore the crimes that regular government can deal with and just deal with those people who have moved themselves outside of the law?” asked Tonks in a perplexed tone.

It took another minute as people pondered that thought and Harry watched as they all started nodding.

“Precisely. The Brotherhood will have many roles to fulfill, but serving as judge and executioner should only happen when it’s fallen outside of the bounds of regular society. At least, that’s how I saw this particular problem,” he said, slightly embarrassed.

“Harry,” Hermione said softly, “don’t be embarrassed by that idea. It even took me a moment to catch up to where you were heading with it.” She turned them to look at her father and Eocho. “I’m curious however. How come neither of you thought of that idea?”

Dan and Eocho managed to look suitably embarrassed.

“Sometimes, my daughter, the fight over a thing is more fun than the thing itself,” Eocho said, wrapping the tattered remains of his dignity around himself while Hermione rolled her eyes.

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## Haven Town Hall...

Harry walked onto the stage and took a seat near the podium that had been set up. The hall had been expanded magically for tonight’s meeting and it looked as though the entire population of Haven was planning on attending. He sat next to Amelia and Ragnok, both of whom looked far more comfortable than he did. He smiled as Michael O’Dalley took a seat next to him.

In the front row sat Hermione, Remus and Tonks and the rest of the Brotherhood. For tonight, Harry had insisted that all of those in the Brotherhood wear their now customary costume of the light tan concealment cloak with the Celtic Cross on the breast. The cloaks had been modified to include a much larger cross on the back. Eocho had not insisted on any sort of costume for the Brotherhood, but he highly approved of the cloaks as part of their formal dress.

Harry stopped daydreaming when Amelia stood and approached the podium. Casting *Sonorus* on herself, she began to speak. “If every one can please take a seat, we can get started.”

She smiled at several people in the audience while the crowd settled down. “Thank you all for coming here tonight. We called this meeting because we wanted to address some concerns in regard to dropping the *Fidelius* charm on the town of Haven. Now, before begin, I want to say that the charm will come down tomorrow morning for the entire town only. This does not include the school, Operations Center or the Manor House.”

As the crowd moved restlessly, Harry scowled. His original plan had been to drop the charm on everything but the Manor and the Operations Center, but Millicent’s information about the students at the Haven School had necessitated adding the school to the list. It would make it that much harder for those students to cause mischief if they couldn’t owl their parents so readily.

His thoughts cut off abruptly as the noise level in the hall rose.

“You people are setting us up as targets for a Death Eater attack!” someone shouted from the back of the hall. Several voices echoed his concern and a number of people stood, shouting back and forth at each other. It was only a matter of time before curses were flying.

Harry frowned. The meeting had barely started and it was already developing towards a full scale riot. He leaned over to O’Dalley. “Signal your men, Michael.”

O’Dalley blinked in surprise at hearing the order so soon, then he nodded in agreement. He waved at his head constable, who smiled grimly and nudged the man next to him. Within moments the lead constable had the attention of his men.

Forty men spread out along the walls of the hall and lifted their wands. As one, they cast the cannon blast spell, which momentarily deafened and silenced everyone in the hall.

Amelia shot a grateful look at O'Dalley and turned back to the crowd. "Now, if you are finished complaining, you can sit down and relax while I explain why this action was necessary and what steps your government has taken in order to ensure your safety.

"First, I will ask Mr. Harry Potter to explain why we needed to drop the charm in the first place."

Amelia stepped back from the podium and Harry stood. There was a moment of silence, then someone started clapping. Before he could reach the podium, only a few short feet away, the clapping had spread throughout the hall, embarrassing him greatly. He stood at the podium and the sound of the clapping washed over him. Finally, he held up a hand, his expression practically begging people to stop.

Slowly the tumult began to die down. Hermione shot him a comforting look and he tried to relax. He amplified his voice with his wand, then let it slip back into its holster.

"Thank you, my friends. I am not used to speaking in public, so I'll ask you to bear with me. As of this morning, the town of Haven and its school boasted a total of four thousand nine hundred and sixty residents, most of whom are British subjects who have escaped the troubles back home. Haven is a safe harbor from those troubles, but as a town we have failed to achieve one critical thing; a working economy.

"Haven has Ollivanders and Weasley Wizarding Wheezes, although I believe they are closing their shop in order to dedicate their services to taking back our home..." he said, then paused as a ground swell of applause for the Weasley twins surged through the hall. Both twins bounced from their seats and waved wildly to the audience before sitting again. When the applause died down, he continued. "When I invited Gringotts to open a branch office here, it was correctly pointed out that so long as the town remained hidden from the rest of the Irish Wizarding community, we could never achieve a working economy.

"As part of my negotiation's with Gringotts, they have agreed to offer long term, low interest loans to anyone wanting to start up a business here in Haven. They are willing to offer reduced rates on business accounts and business services until your business gets off the ground.

"We have three times the number of people who lived and worked in Hogsmeade, but there isn't a single pub or robe shop or bookstore in Haven. There are dozens of empty storefronts and we have the ability to add dozens more. For those who aren't interested in running their own business, the businesses will be hiring people. So will the Ministry and other industries which will be moving into this area.

"No doubt some of you have heard about the large building being erected behind main street. That building will be the new home of Granger Publications, the only wizarding publishing house that combines wizard and muggle materials. They will be hiring in the next few weeks, as well."

Harry ignored the stunned looks from Dan, Emma and Hermione. That would be a conversation for later, and not here in front of everyone.

"The charm needs to be taken down so that we can breath life into our town and so that people could find jobs. We aren't taking it down in order to make you targets. Far from it. We have taken extra steps to protect you. I am going to steal a little of Amelia's speech and let everyone here know that a few days ago I placed a line of death around Haven just like the one I put around Britain. No one with a dark mark will survive crossing that line, and no one with a black aura will cross it with becoming truly ill."

Harry stepped away from the Podium and took his seat. He motioned for Amelia to take over. There was moment of stunned silence followed by another round of thunderous applause.

Amelia stepped up to the podium and amplified her voice again. "Thank you, Mr. Potter. I'd like to remind everyone that afterwards we will open up the floor to a question and answer session, now as to the other steps we have taken in order to ensure everyone's safety..."

Harry tuned Amelia out. He had heard about these steps dozens of times over the last month. He looked out over the hall and had to admit to being impressed by the large number of people. Then, as usual, his eyes sought out Hermione. No matter how much time they spent together, he still searched for her when they were apart. She was the brightest spot in his life and, like a moth to a flame, he was drawn to her. He watched her, calmly listening to Amelia, and thought about how empty his life had been before she'd become a part of it.

Hermione shifted uneasily in her seat for a moment then she turned her head, searching. Spotting Harry, she smiled shyly. There were times when he could look at her and make her feel weak in the knees. He was sitting up on the stage, not really staring, but he was looking at her with his heart in his eyes. He smiled gently at her when she smiled at him. She suppressed the urge to giggle because Harry's look could only be described as moonstruck.

Finally he turned his attention back to Amelia before her parents, or worse, Remus, spotted him staring at her.

The meeting quickly moved onto the question and answer phase. Harry was a bit surprised at how many people asked the same question in different ways, but Amelia stressed that the constabulary wasn't the only resource Haven could call upon if they needed more manpower. The large Auror force from the Ministry Operations Center would be available and, of course, there were the incoming Auror volunteers from the Americas that could help in a pinch, if need be.

One question, however, did catch Harry off guard.

"I saw Albus Dumbledore in Stonewall Lane last week! Why isn't he helping us?" came the shouted question.

Harry paled and resisted the urge to stand. Amelia glance over at him with a calming look.

"At the time of the fall of Britain, the true British Ministry considered Albus Dumbledore a wanted fugitive. He is wanted for questioning on a number

of possible criminal charges. Frankly, we were unaware, until today, that he had managed to escape from Britain. But the simple fact is, the man is wanted in connection with a number of crimes. We have informed the Irish Ministry and other Ministries around the world of his fugitive status.”

The hall descended in a murmur as neighbor spoke to neighbor about the great Dumbledore. Muggles, not knowing any better, were filled in by their Wizarding neighbors.

Amelia held up her hands. “I know this comes as a great shock to many, but the evidence we have in this matter will stand up in a court of law. In fact, until Archibald Richfield assumed the post of Minister and gave the country to Voldemort, I was in charge of the investigation against Dumbledore.”

There was a long moment of silence following Amelia's words, then some woman at the back yelled out, “We've still got Potter!”

A collective sigh of relief ran through the audience and it seemed by unanimous approval the meeting was over. People started standing and heading to the food tables that were being filled by the kitchen crew and several dozen house elves.

Amelia glanced warily at Harry, thankful that people hadn't asked for additional clarification on the charges. He sat stonily through the last of her statement, but she could see the anger smoldering behind his eyes. She walked over to him and placed a hand on his shoulder. He glanced up at her curiously.

“I promised you we'd bring him to justice, Harry,” she said softly. “I intend to keep that promise.”

He relaxed a little and nodded. “I know, Amelia. It just caught me off guard. I thought he was part of my past and wouldn't trouble me anymore.”

“We'll try to see he doesn't bother you anymore, Lord Potter,” said O'Dalley. The Irishman, now in charge of the constables of Haven, smiled at Harry, offering his support. Amelia stepped back, releasing his shoulder.

“I think I know exactly what will liven up your mood, Harry, and here she comes now.”

Harry stood and looked at Hermione who stared at him with an expression of worry. He took two steps and embraced her tightly.

“I'm alright, love. It just caught me by surprise, that's all,” he whispered. Then he turned when he heard the sound of music coming from the far end of the hall. A number of elves were clearing away the chairs and a group of towns folk had started playing music. Couples were already taking advantage of the music and the cleared space.

Harry looked back at Hermione and chuckled at her expression. “Perhaps tonight I should get Olga off my back?” he asked with a smile that made her weak in the knees again.

“How so?”

“Let's go dancing,” he said impishly.

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### Author's Notes:

TAAAA DAAAA! Once again you've hit the bottom of the file. The end of the line, the last chance for gas. Yes, it's the dreaded Author's notes, which shouldn't be confused with the Author's Noses which is disgusting and snot a nice thing.

To our ONE reviewer complaining that chapter five was too long, we decided to ask some of our other readers. At the time of this writing one hundred and ninety six people responded to our question of “Are the chapters getting to long?”

Zero people responded to the answer of “Yes my brain hurts trying to read so much.”

Ninety Five people responded to the answer of “No, I read War and Peace in a single sitting.”

And one hundred and one people responded to the answer of “I don't care as long as you keep posting.”

There you have it gentle reviewer with the short attention span. The masses seem to have no problems with the size of our chapters. So we're throwing a Bronx cheer out to all those with the short attention spans. And you have our pity. The people have spoken.

No Harry will not be driving an Astin Martin, a BMW or even the ever popular Super Yugo.

We've decided to comment on all those people that think it's cool to leave descriptive reviews consisting entirely of punctuation characters. So here is our comment.

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Enough said.

About the Updateless list. It is my intent to first bitch about all those stories which I happen to like. After I run out I'll be seeking candidates for the list.

For those of you wanting a Harry/Dumbledore face to face rumble, it's coming. First we have to open up Haven so that others can find it.

There seems to be a lot of concern over Charlie and why he's following Dumbledore. Remember that Charlie was found by Dumbledore. He was

wounded at the time and seriously exhausted. Dumbledore cared for him and plied him with carefully crafted 'truths'. Some people have trouble believing that he wouldn't be so blindly believing of him. But in our version of the Potterverse he hasn't had everything explained to him, and because Dumbledore got to him first, things are going to see... off to him.

Eventually Harry will learn about Ginny's feelings towards Charlie. But for now it's enough that Draco knows, and that Charlie and Harry haven't been brought in close contact yet.

Fawkes abandoned Dumbledore in Sunset, and no, we will not be seeing Fawkes returning to this story.

Fawkes is currently vacationing in the Disney World Tiki hut where he can be seen in twelve shows daily.

And now....

#### THE UPDATELESS LIST!

The Cleansed Power by Doreedo.

<http://www.fanfiction.net/s/2438537/1/>

This little three chapter Gem hasn't been updated since September of 05. The author has some really interesting ideas and a concise, easy to read, writing style. Unfortunately The Cleansed Power seems to have run out of steam.

**Sunrise Over Britain**  
**Chapter 7 - And so it begins**

**Standard Disclaimer:**

We've run out of Alan Rickman movies. Face it Ladies, he's not exactly a Harrison Ford you know. We thought about having guest appearances from other stars, but we thought people might get confused. So without any further explanation from us. We proudly present Alan Rickman on Ice!

A spotlight appears in the center of the ice rink and a solitary figure shakily skates up to stand in the center of the spotlight.

"Ahem... The authors of this story have invited me to sing the national anthem..."

The figure paused as someone whispered something at him from beyond the light.

"Oh... alright. The authors of this miserable excuse for literature beg to remind you oh magnificent readers who have access to donuts and refuse to share, that they do not own anything relating to Harry Potter. They further ask that I remind you all that Harry is currently single and perhaps gay in canon having dropped a hot red head for the silliest of reasons..."

Alan stopped in mid-sentence and looked in consternation as a herd of Elephants started sliding towards him on the ice.

"Help!" he gurgled before being hit by a sliding pachyderm.

The spotlight swung wildly and settled on Harry holding the gates to the ice open while Hermione shot stinging hexes at the backs of the rampaging elephants.

Hermione looked up at the spotlight. "He is most certainly not gay!"

"Was that really necessary?" asked Alyx plaintively.

"No, but it was fun," replied Bob. "Besides, I got Alan Rickman to insult Harry."

"You're going to piss Harry off you know." Alyx pointed out.

"Nah, He'll survive, besides, if he wants to keep getting laid he'll leave me alone."

Harry stopped short of hexing Bob and slowly backed away.

"Behold the power of the Author. The pen is still mightier than the wand!" quipped Bob.

"I need a new husband, someone more normal," moaned Alyx.

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**Sunrise Over Britain**  
**Chapter 7**

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**Weasley Residence, Town of Haven, evening of May 29th...**

Arthur Weasley sat on the edge of his bed and sighed heavily. Tonight's town meeting and impromptu dance had been a smashing success, but he now found himself exhausted. Amelia's proclamation about Albus Dumbledore had come as a shock to a great many people and he had personally spent most of the night explaining to people that yes, the charges against Dumbledore were sound. Many people hadn't wanted to believe it and his own son, Charlie, was among them.

Arthur smiled briefly as he recalled managing to steal away from the crowd for a few moments of time with Melinda. He had even managed to drag her out, rather reluctantly, onto the dance floor for one dance. He recognized she was still grieving over the loss of her husband and that it would take time before she was ready to let him go, but for now he was content to be her friend.

After the dance, he had returned to the crowd, noticed Charlie scowling at him from a corner, and realized he'd have to speak to him soon. His son really was a good man, but he was working with incomplete facts. The problem was those Weasleys who knew the facts about what the family had done to Harry felt deep shame and didn't want to talk about it. No one had told Charlie about the theft of Harry's money and the payments going to Ron, or the fact that Molly and Arthur had known about the abuse, but had ignored it at Dumbledore's request. In retrospect, Arthur realized it was a mistake to have not explained those facts to Charlie.

He laid back on the bed, pulling the covers over him and listened to the soft murmur of voices as people left the town hall and passed the cottage, laughing and joking. His house wasn't far from the hospital, so it wasn't uncommon for there to be sounds all night long. It was in the dark, during times such as these, that he admitted to himself that he was lonely. He thought of Molly and smiled in the darkness, his mind traveling back in time to a younger, beautiful Molly Prewett dressed in her Yule Ball gown. That was the way he wanted to remember her.

While Arthur fell asleep, Charlie was awake in his own room, writing in his charmed journal.

*Having just come from tonight's town meeting I find myself troubled to think that so many are being taken in by this ruse. There had to be three thousand people in the magically enlarged hall, and yet they ate up every word spoken by Amelia Bones, Harry Potter and some Irishman named Michael O'Dalley.*

*According to Minister Bones, at least that's the title she's claiming now, Albus Dumbledore is a wanted fugitive of the British Ministry of Magic in Exile and his fugitive status is now known to the Irish Ministry, as well as other Ministries around the world.*

Charlie looked up from his journal in annoyance. In the light of a nearby gas street lamp he spotted several people laughing and singing. They were coming from the direction of the town hall - obviously late night party types. Frowning, he turned back to his journal.

*I am positive this is a grave mistake on the part of everyone here, but the 'Minister' is quite clear on the subject. Albus Dumbledore is wanted on serious charges. Given the look by this O'Dalley character, there is no doubt in my mind that he would attempt to arrest him should he show up in Haven after the Fidelius charm is lifted.*

*The biggest surprise of the evening was Harry Potter. I don't recall him being so well built or so tall, but then I haven't seen Harry since his participation in the Tri-Wizard Tournament. He talked about erecting a ward around the town similar to one he put around Britain. I don't claim to understand all the details, but putting a ward on an entire country seems to me to be an outrageous claim. The power required is astronomical, and he's just a boy still! Anyway Haven is warded, there is a designated apparation point and the town is supposedly under an anti-apparation ward. I haven't tested it, but it wouldn't surprise me to find the town warded like that.*

*Another thing that bothers me is Ginny. She performed an incredible feat of wandless magic the other night on me. Tonight, she and several others attended the town meeting in which they were all wearing a similar cloak. If I didn't know better, I would say it was some kind of uniform. It's scary. She's not the little sister I remember. Every time I see her or one of her friends walking about Haven, I see people treating them with respect. Even the Constables seem to think Ginny and her friends have some sort of unwritten authority. She makes me feel uneasy. It's like she is seeing into my mind and judging me. I think I'll speak to my Dad soon about finding work here and maybe getting a place of my own.*

Charlie leaned back and rested his hand. He hadn't done this much writing since leaving Hogwarts. Through his window he saw that the party goers had vanished, leaving only the lights of the Hospital shining in the distance.

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### **Johansen's Residence, Haven (June 2nd)...**

"Where are the children?" Melinda asked as she sat down at the Johansen's kitchen table. She was off duty from the hospital and had wandered over to the Johansen's home as they were one of the few families she knew in Haven.

"Oh, most are out with Sven, helping in the fields. The twins are with George and Fred and the others are playing, or have been put down for their naps," Olga said as she poured tea for her guest and sat down across from her.

Melinda stirred her tea for a few moments before looking at Olga. "I'm not sure I thanked you or Sven properly for taking the children in," she began.

"Tsk! There is no need. We always wanted more children, Sven and I, but after Johan, I was unable to conceive again. The children, they are a joy to us."

"How are they doing?"

"Many had nightmares for some time, but they are getting better. They know they are safe here and part of our family. The youngest seem to be bouncing back the quickest, but the older children are beginning to trust again."

Melinda sipped her tea before replying. "I'm glad to hear it. I've been worried about their adjustment after all that's happened to them."

Into the silence that followed, Olga looked at her guest carefully. Now that she had been reassured about the children's welfare, the older woman could see the tension in Melinda's stiff posture and white knuckled grip on her teacup. With a mental shrug, Olga did what she had always done in situations such as these.

"Now that you've been reassured about the children, why don't you tell me what else has brought you here today?"

Melinda looked up, startled, causing Olga to laugh softly.

"It's obvious to anyone with the eyes to see, girl. Something else is bothering you."

Melinda shook her head a bit ruefully. "I should have known I'd get nothing past you."

"Perhaps you weren't trying to, hmm?"

"Perhaps not," the dark haired woman agreed as she picked up her teacup. Her eyes drifted to the kitchen window and became unfocused.

Olga took a quick sip of tea and said, rather casually, "I noticed you and Arthur Weasley dancing together in the town hall a few nights ago."

Melinda's eyes swung back to Olga sharply, but she remained silent.

"Ah. I think I see where the problem lies."

"And probably more clearly than I," Melinda replied, placing her cup carefully on the table.

"Oh, I doubt that," Olga said. "You see the problem, you just can't see the solution through the pain. Now, tell me and we will see what we can do, hmm?"

Surprised, Melinda found herself doing just that. She explained what had happened while at Arthur's cottage, including how Charlie had reacted to the twins' mistaken assumption that she and Arthur were dating, and the family fight that followed. She had, thankfully, missed most of it, but Arthur had told her about it a few days later when he'd stopped by to see her and apologize once more for the way his son had acted towards her.

Now she found herself torn. She didn't want to cause problems in the Weasley family, but she enjoyed the time she spent with Arthur. However, finding pleasure in his company caused her pain because she felt as though she was betraying Michael's memory.

"I feel like I'm being pulled in three different directions and I just don't know what to do anymore," Melinda concluded as she slumped back in her chair.

"The first thing to do is relieve some of the pressure you feel."

"It's not that easy."

"Oh, but it is that easy," Olga said firmly. "First, the responsibility you feel for the problems in the Weasley family are admirable, but misplaced. If what you say is true, most of the children like you and have no problem with you and their father dating..."

"We're not dating!"

Olga rolled her eyes. "Fine, then. Not dating. As I was saying, most of his children do not mind that he is... 'not dating' you. The problem lies with Charlie, not you. He and Arthur will work things out in their own time, or not. You may be the excuse for it this time, but if Arthur gave in to the demands of his child, it will not end with you, and he is a smart man to see it. Let them work it out between them and take your cues from Arthur."

"He said something very similar to me," Melinda said as she refilled her teacup. "But after spending so much time with the children at Mother Wilma's, the thought of causing a break between father and son is horrifying to me."

"You would not be the cause, my girl, just one of the symptoms," Olga told her.

Melinda thought over all that had been said, and then nodded. "You're right," she said quietly, meeting the older woman's eyes.

"Of course I am!" Olga exclaimed, her eyes dancing. She stood then and moved to the counter. Removing a dish towel from a pan, she cut two slices of very rich-looking chocolate cake and, taking forks from a nearby drawer, returned to the table. Placing one of the small plates before Melinda, she sat down and told the girl to eat before turning to her own plate.

When only crumbs were left, Melinda pushed her plate away and sighed. "I really need to learn how to cook!"

Olga collected the plates and took them to the sink, laughing. "Why bother when you can come here?"

"Hmm, very true. All of the calories and none of the work. But it doesn't seem very fair," Melinda said, grinning.

"But that won't stop you, will it?" Olga asked. "You know I love to cook for those who enjoy it."

When Olga began to fill the sink with soapy water, Melinda drew her wand and cast a quick cleansing charm on the dishes and then levitated them back into the cabinets.

Olga clapped merrily. "Come over for a meal anytime, my dear girl! I'll be happy to cook for you, if you'll do the dishes for me."

"Deal," Melinda told her, smiling as the older woman came back to the table and sat down next to her.

"It must be a fine thing to be a witch," Olga said.

"It does have its moments."

Olga stared at the witch for a moment, then shook her head and sighed. "I believe we have one more thing to discuss today, yes?"

"And what is that?" Melinda asked curiously.

"The feelings of guilt you have when you spend time with Arthur," Olga said, watching her closely.

Melinda looked away from the shrewed eyes watching her and closed her eyes for a moment. Standing suddenly, she wrapped her arms around herself and bit her trembling lip. "I know, it's foolish. Michael's gone and I need to accept it."



"Oh, child, there is nothing foolish about grief," Olga told her softly. "Nor is there a right or wrong way to mourn those we've lost.

"Acceptance will come in its own time, and with it will come the willingness to let go of what might have been. My mother used to say that when one door closes, another opens. She was right and, when you're ready, you will step through that door and move on."

"What if I don't know how?" Melinda asked quietly, tears slipping silently down her cheeks.

Olga stood and wrapped her arms around the younger woman. "When the time comes, child, you will."

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### **Armagh, Northern Ireland (June 2nd)...**

Antonin Dolohov looked up in surprise as Evans slapped down a newspaper on the table. Peering down, his eyes widened when he saw the headline.

*Harry Potter Unveils Whole Town!*

*In a move designed to help the refugees from the troubles in Britain, Amelia Bones, the Minister of the British Ministry of Magic in Exile led this reporter and others on a guided tour of a town built by Harry Potter to house the refugees from the disaster that befell their country.*

*While precise numbers weren't available, the town of Haven boasts both a primary and secondary school, the complete library of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, the seat of the Government in Exile and a hospital containing over three hundred beds.*

*"The Haven School of Witchcraft and Wizardry contains all we could salvage from Hogwarts before we had to evacuate. Minerva McGonagall, the Headmistress, hopes that by the start of next term we will be able to open our doors to Irish children as well as the children of the refugees," said Minister Bones.*

*Bones, who accepted the position after the evacuation from Britain, refused to say more about large numbers of Aurors in the town's population, except to say that the British Ministry would continue to lead the fight against Voldemort, even from this location.*

*According to Bones, the town now contains a branch of Gringotts bank and is working to bring in new businesses...*

*For Apparation Coordinates and Haven Directory, see page 3a.*

Dolohov placed the paper down on the table again and thought furiously. He didn't have a lot of men, barely a hundred, including himself, and another forty who had yet to be marked or trained, and the town was undoubtedly warded to some extent.

He looked up at the man who'd given him the Daily Dublin. "Evans, gather up five men. I want to find out more about this 'Haven' so we can report back to the Master about it. Do not enter the town. It may have wards similar to those around Britain. No, better yet, take a few of the recruits who haven't been marked. Use one of the recruits to check out the town."

Evan nodded and walked from the room. Dolohov watched the door close behind him before going back to reading the paper. *Perhaps I'll finally have some news to report to the Master after all,* he mused.

Meanwhile, just a few miles away, a middle aged man checked into a rundown hotel. The man had spent most of the morning wandering about the city. It wasn't hard to find the Wizarding part of the town once one knew what to look for. And Tonks knew what she was looking for.

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### **Padfoot Manor, Harry's Study (June 3rd)...**

Harry reached over his desk and grabbed his cup of tea. With Hermione's help, he had just finished setting up for their daily morning meeting. Hermione had jumped into the job of being Harry's chief of staff concerning the war and Haven growth with a passion and Harry wasn't sure how he had muddled through without her help before. Every morning she went through the pile of incoming papers and whittle the pile down to just a few that he had to look at. She also came up with the idea of a daily breakfast meeting, in which major problems could be dealt with.

This morning the meeting was being attended by Miles, Draco, Michael O'Dalley, and Bill Weasley, who had assumed a leading role in the running of the town of Haven itself to help his father. Other mornings, Amelia would attend, or Minerva. Attendance varied, depending on the needs of the day. Surprisingly, Remus opted for a less visible approach. As Harry's chief of the household, and one of the lead researchers for the Brotherhood, he spent most of his time with Eocho and Hermione. He normally caught up with Harry in the evenings.

"... and Millicent is currently working her way through the list of blood purists at the school. She's basically set herself up in the same role as Pansy used to occupy. With Luna now gone from the school, she's using a more direct method to send me dispatches. Also, with Minerva's permission, we have asked the school elves to keep a closer eye on things than they did at Hogwarts. That information is forwarded to Minerva first, then sent to me if she deems it necessary," Draco said, while referring to his notes.

"What about Haven itself?" asked Bill Weasley.

Draco sighed and pulled another parchment from his folder. "Haven is more problematic. Few of the families had house elves back in Britain, so few are taking advantage of them here. We've put many to work in roles that would have been performed by municipal employees, doing this such as street sweeping, lamp lighting and so on. We have a few possible hot spots in town, but we do not have enough evidence to take action against anyone," Draco replied, then his eyes flickered to Bill warily. He was not about to go public with Ginny's suspicions until he had hard evidence on

Charlie.

"And the twins?" asked Harry with a bit of a grin. He loved hearing what they were up to. He kept promising he'd visit with them, but so far hadn't found the opportunity.

Draco smiled in response. "Ah, yes. Well Q branch is experiencing some growth difficulties, but they continue to turn out items that have been used successfully by Miles' people. The demand for new products has increased the size of the twin's operation, but other than the occasional explosion, few people in the Operations Center even know they exist."

Miles winced at Draco's description. The last explosion had shifted the entire building six inches to the north and collapsed half the wards.

"On the international front, you know about the cauldrons Voldemort's looking for. We have people looking into the issue, but so far they haven't found anything. On a more disturbing note, we heard from the Norwegian Ministry. As it turns out, Durmstrang was hidden in Norway, though anyone who hadn't attended the school was unable to find it. Anyway, several high level members of the Norwegian Ministry made mention of their letters to their children going unanswered. So an Auror group was dispatched to the school to see if anything was wrong.

"The report goes on to say that all of the sixth and seventh year students are missing, along with most of the faculty and the school library. The students who were left behind were under a compulsion not to reply to any owl posts."

Harry leaned forward and placed his elbows on his desk. "So we're talking about what? One hundred students and perhaps ten teachers having gone over to Voldemort?" he asked with a frown.

"I'm afraid it's more serious than that, Harry," Miles said with a frown. "Durmstrang was a more popular school among the pure bloods. The school actually had a much larger student population than Hogwarts, despite Hogwarts having the greater prestige. The number of missing students is closer to two hundred and fifty, along with nearly forty teachers."

Harry scowled at the news. "Are we certain they've gone to Britain?" he asked.

When Miles and Draco both nodded, Harry sighed and lowered his head to one of his hands. He scrubbed his face tiredly with the other before looking up at them again.

"Miles, I want our people safe. I don't care who's holding a wand on them. We have enough experience with student aged Death Eaters. Let your people know they are authorized to use deadly force to safeguard themselves and their missions," he said in a weary tone, thinking of Dean Thomas, Pansy Parkinson and Theodore Nott.

Miles nodded again and scribbled a quick comment in notes. "Will you speak to Amelia about authorizing this, Harry?"

Harry waved a hand at him. "Yes, I'll talk to her about it. I don't want someone hurt because a sixteen year old got jumpy. I don't like our side using Unforgivables, but I don't see any other option... What else have you got for me, Miles?"

"Hmmm... Well, as you are aware, the number of rescue missions has dropped dramatically. All of the school families have been rescued... those who wanted rescuing, that is. Now our missions are more in the role of intelligence gathering. We have several operations that we're considering, but we need hard intelligence before we can do any of them.

"The American contingent arrived two days ago. I have to say they seem like a noisy bunch of chaps, but they do know their business. We'll begin joint training sessions with them in a few days. I planned on holding off until the Canadians showed up. Their group is supposedly larger than the American group. Several other Commonwealth nations have pledged sizable forces as well. Between Canada, Australia, New Zealand, India and the U.S., we're looking at over one thousand Aurors all totaled before the middle of the month. Add to that our Aurors and trainees and we're looking at a fighting force of nearly fifteen hundred.

"The European nations say they will be sending contingents later in the month, but the word out of Washington is that some of the nations may be less than forthcoming. Apparently, the French tried to dictate to the U.S. what their level of involvement would be among the muggle governments. The U.S. Government did all but threaten nuclear war if the French didn't back off.

"The American Department of Magic managed to put a stop to that, but the French are pretty upset about it. As a result, their Ministry is willing to help, but they are less than enthusiastic about it," Miles said.

Harry's expression grew distasteful and he made another note in his book. "I'll speak to Amelia about this also. I know nothing about international politics, but it's in no one's interest for the French and the Yanks to be fighting right now. And we certainly don't want anyone talking about their bigger weapons. I think we've seen too many of them as it is."

Miles smiled thinly and nodded to Bill Weasley.

Bill smiled nervously. His work with Gringotts and his abilities as a curse breaker meant he could have fit into many places. Instead, as a favor to his father, he had accepted the task of helping get the town's economy on track.

Harry started to chuckle at his nervousness. "Don't worry, Bill. This isn't like talking to Minerva."

Bill blushed and fumbled with his papers. "Damn Weasley complexion" he muttered under his breath and everyone chuckled.

"Alright, then. As everyone knows, the *Fidelius* Charm on the town came down three days ago. Amelia and Minister Mallory escorted the press around, showing off the town the same day. Since then, I've fielded requests to open several businesses, both from inside Haven and from outside."

Bill consulted his notes before continuing. "We have requests for frontage space for a clothing shop, a book store, two pubs, one restaurant and a toy shop. Of the requests so far, three are from local people. We also have two manufacturing companies that are looking to expand into Haven and take advantage of the space we have. Quick Quality Cauldrons is looking for a facility that will probably employ close to one hundred people, and Applebee's Apothecary Supplies is looking into the possibilities of opening up multiple greenhouses. Applebee's would only employ about twenty-five people, but I've been talking to them about moving their mail order processing here, as well. That would add another seventy-five employees. Finally, there is Granger Publications," Bill concluded, looking at Harry with a grinning.

Hermione scowled at him before turning her scowl on Harry, who smiled benignly back at her. Granger Publications was Harry's idea. He had hired someone to organize the basic structure and run the company for Dan and Emma. Dan would produce a version of his little book for each school year that would then be duplicated and sold as a study aid world wide. They were also exploring the possibilities of using the same format for Healer and Auror training.

The night that Harry had publicly announced Granger Publications at the town meeting, the Grangers, and Hermione had jumped all over him when they'd returned to the manor. It had taken some fast talking on Harry's part, but he had managed to make them understand the need for the company. The majority of the company was owned by the Grangers, with the minority in Harry's hands. That discussion had been one of the hardest Harry had ever had with his future in-laws and it was one he hoped to never have to have again.

"Yes, do tell about Granger Publications," commented Hermione in a dry voice.

Everyone snickered. It was common knowledge that Harry had sprung the company on Hermione's parents as a surprise. Bill coughed and looked nervously at Hermione before continuing.

"Well, moving on then. The Americans have moved in and are settling in nicely. The number of children has strained our capabilities somewhat and I've spoken to Minerva about that in regard to next year. Between our own capabilities and offers from the Irish, we should be fine when next September rolls around."

Bill shuffled through his papers, then turned his attention towards Harry again.

"Good news there, Bill. Keep on top of the school problems though. I suspect that Minerva will need to hire additional staff for September," Harry said after a moments thought. "Michael? Do you have anything for me?"

"Not really, my lord," said O'Dalley.

Harry frowned. He had been unable as yet to break O'Dalley of the habit of using that honorific.

"We've had a few cases of drunken rowdiness, but that's about it. Most everyone approaching the town is either coming up the road or using the designated apparation point. We've had a fair number of sight seers, but nothing we can't handle. As to the other matter, I've been reliably informed that your agent has made it up 'north'."

Harry nodded thoughtfully. "Thank you, all," he said, checking his watch. "Now if you'll excuse me, I still have some time before I have to meet with Echo for my morning session."

As a group Miles, Bill and O'Dalley stood and filed from the room. Hermione turned to Harry and studied him for a long moment.

"You know Mum and Dad are still annoyed about what you did with Granger Publications," she said softly.

Harry leaned back in his chair and closed his eyes for a moment. "Yeah, I know. But it couldn't be helped. Granger Publications will ultimately be one of our largest employers for Haven. I had to get it off the ground without interfering with what your parents were doing too much. That's why I brought in an outside manager and put your parents in charge overall. I don't want them angry with me, Hermione, but I need that company up and running. Your Dad has the product and can make new ones. From there, it's out of his hands except to accept the profits. Personally, I still think his idea is brilliant. I wish I'd had one of his study aids back in my first year."

Hermione sighed. "Don't take this wrong. Your idea was good, Harry, it was the surprise that angered them."

Harry cracked opened his eyes and stared at her for a long moment. Hermione held his gaze. She was one of the few who could. "Hermione, you and I both know your parents didn't have the financial resources to start that company. They would have fought tooth and nail against my handing them a bag of money and telling them to go start it. All I did was start it for them, then hand it over."

Hermione smiled briefly, acknowledging that he was right. "But what about the part about keeping it secret from me? Your own fiancée?" she asked, curious to see how he would answer.

Harry chuckled. "You? You would have fought me just as hard, if not harder. You are your parents daughter in all ways," he replied with a laugh, quickly ducking the throw pillow she aimed at his head.

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### Haven Operations Center, Q Branch...

Helga and Inga opened the door to their office and were surprised to find it strangely silent. The two blonds exchanged a worried glance. Fred and George had increased the size of the office staff recently and to enter the office these days and find it silent was worrisome if not downright frightening.

"What do you think?" asked Helga in a worried tone.

"Let's look in the lab before we start to panic," offered Inga.

The two dropped their cloaks on a chair and approached the door to the large laboratory and testing area. The sign on the door admonished people to enter at their own risk. Opening the door they could clearly hear the sound of several people laughing at the far end of the large room. Curious now, the twins walked over to a small crowd of people.

Ginny, Fred and George's sister, was sitting on the floor, holding her sides and laughing, while Fred and George sat, staring sadly at the work bench looking at the antics of their latest creation. Standing next to Fred and George were several of their new staff members, all laughing as well.

Sitting on the bench were three, six inch high people who were busy pummeling each other.

"What is going on here?" asked Inga in a stern tone.

Fred hastily waved his wand and the three figures froze, while George stood up and turned to face the girls. Most of the staff hurried back to their own work stations, but Ginny remained on the floor, giggling. The Weasley twins shot her a murderous look before turning back to their girlfriends.

"Oh... um... nothing really. We were just trying out an idea that you'd mentioned once, but it didn't seem to work," George said sadly.

"One of our ideas? Which one?" asked Helga.

"The talkie walkie things. But it didn't work quite the way we planned," said Fred with a lost expression on his face.

Helga and Inga suppressed the urge to laugh at Fred's look. The Weasley twins hated to admit they hadn't succeeded in doing something. The duo looked as if someone had told them their puppy had died.

"So, show us. Maybe we can tell you where you went wrong," offered Inga with a smile.

Fred nodded and waved the girls closer to the table. He waved his wand and all three figures straightened up and looked at him expectantly. Ginny climbed up from the floor and stood at the end of the work bench where she could watch. Each figure seemed to be dressed in a white T-Shirt with a name on it, and a pair of pants.

Fred looked up as Inga read off the names on each figure. "Larry, Curly and Moe?"

"We needed to give them names of some sort. Amy suggested the names after seeing them in action," offered Fred apologetically.

"Now, our idea was to create something to carry messages, like those talkie walkie things," George said proudly.

"Walkie talkies, George," Helga said, smiling at her boyfriend.

George stopped for a moment and looked at her, then nodded. "Right, Walkie Talkies. So, anyway, the idea is to give the message to the Walkie Talkie and it would travel to another Walkie Talkie, pass the message along and then return."

"Moe," said Fred, "tell Larry that we need more Aurors."

Moe nodded and started to walk towards Larry, but he fell when Curly tripped him. Moe leapt to his feet and Larry ran over and poked Curly in the eyes. Curly immediately ducked down howling in pain. Moe moved to hit Curly, but instead hit Larry when Curly ducked. In just a moment the three were rolling around on the table, fighting. Ginny hit the floor again laughing and the twins' faces contorted in amusement at the sad expressions worn by Fred and George as they watched Larry, Moe and Curly.

"I think we need to explain Walkie Talkies better," suggested Helga.

Moe slapped both Larry and Curly in a single swing. Curly pulled a bowling pin out of his pocket and hit Moe in the head. It made a surprisingly loud thwapping sound.

Inga nodded, wide eyed. From behind them came a scream as someone fell through a hole in the floor. Both Fred and George looked over with interest.

"Look! They got it working!" shouted Fred, then he turned and bolted towards the hole in the floor with George in tow.

Helga and Inga followed behind them, never noticing Ginny freezing Larry, Curly and Moe and sliding the three figures into her pocket.

Helga ran after the two red heads. "Got what working? I swear I can't keep up with what you two are working on anymore," she complained.

Fred and George leaned over the perfectly round hole in the floor. The interior of the hole was pitch black and far away screaming could be heard emanating from it, as if coming from a great distance.

Fred looked up at one of the men nearby. "You used Amy as a test subject?"

The man nodded. "Yeah, I pushed her in," he replied with a grin, which Fred and George returned.

Inga pointed at the hole in the floor. "What the devil is that?"

George looked up at Inga. "This? It's a portable hole. It's really only about seven feet deep, but the illusion is that you are free falling forever. We

think it will make a great trap for the Aurors. A person will remain in the hole until someone flips it over.”

Fred ran a few diagnostic charms on the hole, then turned to the man who had pushed Amy into the hole. “Can you whip up a dozen of these for Miles' people to play with in the field?” he asked intently.

“I'll have them ready in a few days.” came the reply.

“Excellent! Now let's go back into the office and talk about this Walkie Talkie business,” said George linking his arm with Helga and pulling her towards the office.

“But... but... what about Amy?” sputtered Inga as Fred dragged her towards the office.

“Oh, someone will let her out sooner or later,” Fred said with a shrug.

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### **Padfoot Manor, Harry's Study...**

Harry limped back into his study after his lesson with Eocho. Each lesson began in the same manner. They spent a short time communing, during which Eocho would pass key elements of the lesson to him, then they would put elements to practical uses for the remaining two hours. Brotherhood fighting techniques were brutal on his leg, but Eocho insisted that, as Maglios, it was up to Harry to learn these techniques.

Harry's mobility hadn't significantly increased, but his stamina and his ability to go for longer periods before his leg turned lame had increased, much to his pleasure. Eocho had taught Harry several spells that assisted him in dealing with his leg afterwards. One such spell he had warned Harry only to use in dire emergencies. The spell would give him nearly all of his old mobility back, enabling him to duel without the possibility of the leg going lame. But with the good, came the bad. The downside of the spell, according to Eocho, was that when the spell wore off, the disability of his leg would be increased, permanently. With repeated uses of the spell, it was possible for the leg to become a useless appendage, unable to sustain his weight for even short distances. The pain would be chronic, and permanent as well.

Harry sat in his chair and cast a spell which gently tightened his pant leg and warmed it around his calf, massaging his aching leg and providing him relief. It was probably one of the best spells Eocho had taught him. He sighed in relief, then considered carefully his next meeting, due to start at any moment.

Two small pops alerted him to the fact that his visitors had arrived. Looking up, he smiled at Dobby and the other elf and motioned for them to take a seat in the chairs he had conjured for them. Dobby scrambled into his chair, but the other elf looked scandalized by the notion of sitting.

“Please, Pappy, sit. I would like to talk to you both and I would personally feel more comfortable if you would sit down while I do,” Harry said in a kindly tone.

The old elf looked up at Harry for a long moment before carefully positioning himself so he was sitting, just barely, on the edge of the seat. Pappy, or 'the Pappy' as the other house elves called him, was the oldest living house elf among those in Haven. It was the closest thing one could find in a position of authority among house elves.

Harry tried to smile reassuringly at Pappy, but he knew he couldn't break years of treatment as an inferior in a single meeting.

“Pappy, I know this sort of meeting is unusual, but it is very necessary. I have asked Dobby to attend this meeting, despite the fact that most elves think Dobby is an unnatural elf. Dobby has been very helpful to me and can help us here,” Harry said, trying to carefully frame his opening remarks.

“Dobby is not right in the head,” said Pappy firmly. Dobby's ears drooped and his eyes flashed with a touch of anger.

Harry made a motion to Dobby, preventing him from speaking. “Dobby is my good friend and part of my family. Regardless of what the other elves may think, Dobby is a Potter. I value his advice and his help in dealing with the other elves has been invaluable. For the duration of this meeting I will ask you to not insult my family,” Harry said in a hard tone.

Dobby looked up at Harry and beamed, while the Pappy shivered under Harry's hard gaze.

“Now, moving along. I have a problem and I need to deal with it as quickly as I can. I need to prevent another Kreacher.”

Dobby looked startled and Pappy looked confused.

“Dobby, perhaps you can explain to Pappy about Kreacher?” Harry suggested. He really wanted to help Dobby mend some of the fences between himself and his own kind.

Dobby nodded vigorously. “Kreacher was evil elf. He belong to house of Black. He committed ultimate evil for which Dobby and Winky punished him for Master Harry.”

Pappy looked horrified. “Kreacher betrayed his master? Maybe Dobby isn't so bad after all.”

“I need to avoid another Kreacher incident,” Harry said, interrupting the two elves. “Kreacher betrayed Sirius Black and lied to me, which resulted in Sirius' death. We have many elves here in Haven. I need to make sure that none of them will betray us.”

Dobby nodded in understanding, but Pappy looked horrified at the idea that any elf would betray them.

“Pappy, other than the Hogwarts Elves, and a few here in the manor house like Dobby and Winky, none of the other elves are formally bound to

anyone and therefore not under the strictures of the Master/Elf bond," Harry reminded the old elf gently.

"We would be happy to bond with you, Master Potter. In fact, we need to bond soon anyway," Pappy told him.

Harry nodded thoughtfully. "Yes, I am aware of the limitations on your kind. What I would like to propose is this. I will give every elf time to find a family in Haven who would take them in. Those elves that cannot find a family, I will accept either as a personal bond or as bonded to the town of Haven. Is this acceptable?"

"Whatever you want, Master Potter. It's not for house elves to decide such things," said Pappy.

Harry sighed, knowing full well that trying to convince Pappy that he could make his own decision would be a useless gesture.

"Alright, then. Dobby? How many elves had joined in the war effort?" Harry asked curiously.

"There be five score helping Master Draco and another ten score waiting for their turn to help," replied Dobby.

The three talked for a few minutes longer before Pappy asked for permission to go alert the other elves of the changes.

"Master Harry?" asked Dobby after Pappy left.

"Hmmm?" Harry was still lost in thought considering the number of elves wanting to help the war effort.

"Was you saying the truth? Dobby is a Potter?" asked the little elf in a hopeful tone.

Harry broke away from his thoughts and smiled at his friend. "Dobby, back in my second year, you tried to save me from Tom Riddle and you did save me from Lucius. We are bonded by something stronger than the Master/Elf bond. I owe you a life debt. You are my friend and part of my family now, and for as long as the Potter line continues."

Dobby's eyes welled with tears and his lower lip quivered slightly. "Dobby will proudly carry the name of Potter and make my family proud of me," he declared.

"I know you will, Dobby. I've always been proud to be your friend, and am even happier that you are part of the family," Harry replied with a smile. Dobby nodded and vanished, leaving Harry chuckling to himself.

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### **Padfoot Manor Grounds (Later that evening)...**

Finding Harry tonight was easier than she thought it would be. She stepped onto the back porch and could hear the strains of his tin whistle playing in the distance. Following the sound of the music, she walked away from the manor and into the woods.

She didn't have to go far before she found Harry sitting with his back against a tree. Several piles of peanuts were strewn about the forest floor nearby and several squirrels were snacking on them. One squirrel, however, seemed to be particularly bold and was perched on Harry's shoe, its tail twitching in time to the music.

Harry's eyes lit up, spotting her, and he motioned for her to sit next to him. Hermione moved slowly closer, as she didn't want to frighten off his audience. Several squirrels chattered loudly at her when she got too close to one of the piles of peanuts, but most ignored her. Sitting next to Harry, she grinned when he smiled around his instrument and started a lively tune, causing many of the squirrels to twitch their tails in unison. Hermione had to suppress a laugh when she saw the dozen squirrels twitching in time to his music. When he was done, he leaned his head back and closed his eyes. His hand seemed to slip all by itself into hers.

"Are you alright, Harry?"

"Yes, I think I am," he replied, a soft smile on his face. He still had his eyes closed and wasn't looking directly at her. "I spoke with Dobby and the Pappy today," he said softly.

She frowned for a moment. "And?" she prodded.

"I had thought that bringing up Kreacher and Sirius when I explained the problem to the Pappy would be painful... but it really wasn't. I still miss Sirius, but it doesn't hurt as much now. I don't feel like I have a huge gaping hole in me anymore when I think of him."

"You're healed and moved on then," she said.

"I suppose I am," he replied thoughtfully, "but I should warn you one of our kids will be named Sirius."

She leaned into his shoulder and he wrapped an arm around her. "I think I can live with that. So who are your friends?"

Harry cracked his eyes open and looked to see her gesturing towards the squirrels. "Oh, them... Nutters and company. I haven't named them, I just bring them peanuts every couple days."

Hermione laughed softly, then turned to peer intently at him. "What did you tell Dobby today? I've never seen a house elf that happy. He's practically walking on the ceiling."

Harry chuckled at the thought. It was something he wouldn't put past the little elf. "I told him today that no matter what happened, as long as the

House of Potter lived, he would be a Potter.”

Hermione pushed away from him slightly and she stared at him with wide eyes. “You called him a Potter? Oh, Harry, you gave him the greatest compliment he could have ever hoped for.”

Harry shrugged. “I meant it. He's saved my life at least once, twice if you count him catching that Razorback spider. Dobby is a lot like me, Hermione. He's the odd man out. His own kind fear and dislike him. Making him a Potter gives him a sense of identity that transcends being just an Elf. He wants to be free, but he also wants to belong to something. It's a feeling I can identify with.”

His comments surprised and shocked her a little. “Do you really feel like you don't belong anywhere?”

Harry tightened his arm around her shoulder for a moment, then he turned and watched the antics of his furry friends as they scampered around the piles of peanuts.

“I used to, Hermione. Before Hogwarts, I thought I was completely alone. Then I discovered our world and thought I had finally found home. That changed for a while last summer, and then changed again as our relationship grew. I have my place, Hermione. I'm a Potter, and a Black and I have a wonderful woman that completes my life. Someday, when our jobs are done and we grow up enough, we'll raise a family and you'll teach the little ones to read and I'll teach them to prank and play Quidditch. We're different people, but we're like two halves of a whole. We balance each other out and rely on the strength of the other to help with our weaknesses.”

Inwardly, Hermione was shocked to find Harry so serious and yet so focused. She looked at him with a fond smile, then decided it was time to lighten the mood.

“I know how you feel, Harry, but you have more weaknesses than I do. It's the flaw of being male,” she said primly. She moved to smooth her skirt as if she hadn't said anything out of the ordinary, then squeaked in surprise when he tackled her and began to tickle her.

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### **Government House, Haven (June 5th)...**

Michael O'Dalley looked over another report and swore that if he had to look at another domestic violence report, he'd scream. His Constables had only been active for a few days and already there was a clear pattern of problems within the Haven community.

Amelia and Harry were aware of the problem and were working diligently to fix it, but it basically boiled down to too many adults with too much free time on their hands. Everyday more and more people were being put to work as businesses started up, or moved into town, but there was still a sizable number of people who needed employment.

O'Dalley shuffled through the report on his desk until he found the projection report provided to him by Bill Weasley. According to the report, nearly a third of the adults would have some sort of work available to them by the month's end. Others were fanning out from Haven, looking for work within the Irish communities. The Irish Ministry had bent over backwards to provide work permits for anyone looking to find work in Wizarding Ireland. They also offered a fast track to full citizenship for anyone looking to immigrate permanently from Britain.

In the meantime, O'Dalley had to admit that the three or four cases his men had to deal with every night weren't all that bad. No pubs had opened yet in town, although that was supposed to change within a week, so liquor was still in short supply. And, of course, he had come up with a novel way of punishing anyone that got excessively out of hand.

Every morning the Elves that took care of the garbage pickup found they had a disarmed wizard volunteer to help remove the refuse. Usually a single day of picking up garbage was enough to keep anyone from getting too rowdy on his watch.

O'Dalley put Bill's report back on his pile and glanced out the window of his office. He'd had a long, intense conversation with his wife last night and the thought of that conversation was enough to distract him from work. He had brought up the idea of moving to Haven. There were plenty of cottages and homes available, and they were bigger than where he and his wife were living now. Haven was growing and he was frank enough to admit to himself that he enjoyed being part of it. His children would have Wizarding children to play with, and he could live like a wizard, rather than hiding among muggles, as he did now.

He shook his head and jumped from his chair when a small wall map began to chime. A hand appeared, pointing to one area on the northern outskirts of the wards. Rushing to the door, he opened it and called to the group of five Constables.

“We have intruders. Section North six, outer ward. Get everyone over there. I'll join you as soon as I alert the backup squad leader.”

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### **Training and Ritual Room, Padfoot Manor...**

Harry dodged a flying knife and conjured another set of small shields, which he then sent spinning down the platform.

“No, no, no! You must concentrate! Your opponent will see your shields and send his weapons over them! You must conjure them where you want them in the first place!” shouted Eocho, who demonstrated what he meant by pelting Harry with bursts of pebbles. The pebbles wouldn't injure him, but they would sting.

Harry nodded as Eocho banished Harry's metal shields. “Now begin again!”

At the far end of the platform, a series of knives appeared and flew towards him. Harry raised a hand and conjured a wall of solid ice. Deep thumping sounds were heard through the room as the knives sunk deep into the ice.

“Good! Good! Now multiple...,” Eocho trailed off as Harry’s eyes flared with power. He held out a hand and his staff appeared within it.

“There’s been a breach in the wards,” Harry snarled just before he vanished.

Eocho floated alone for another moment, smiling. “The Maglios keeps his duties,” he said to the empty room, then he, too, vanished from the room, leaving only a melting wall of ice pitted with knives.

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### **Haven outer ward, section North Six...**

Harry apparated into chaos. He quickly cast a shield just in time for several *Reducto* r hexes to splash harmlessly against it. He was confused for a moment. Several men were down and he wasn’t sure who was fighting who.

“MY LORD!” came a shout and suddenly Harry pitched to his knees as someone tackled him from behind. Harry rolled out from under the person and pulled himself up to his knees. Deciding to put an end to this as quickly as he could, he used a wide field version of the *Stupefy* hex that Eocho had taught him.

“*Stupefy* prolixus agri!” he shouted.

There was a flash of light from the crystal orb atop his staff, followed by the sound of several wizards apparating away. He blinked his eyes furiously from the flash of light and could see the slowly fading shield left behind by the wizards who had just apparated away.

Standing, he looked around. Nearby was one dead Death Eater who had crossed the ward, and another man was down on his hands and knees, vomiting. Two of O’Dalley’s Constables lay nearby, one stunned, the other badly wounded and bleeding heavily.

Harry took two steps and knelt next to the injured Constable. He looked up as O’Dalley knelt across from him on the other side of the man and started to apply several healing charms.

Harry reached over and unclipped the man’s badge. “Portus,” he murmured and the badge glowed blue for a moment. Then he laid the badge down on the man’s chest.

“Take him to hospital, Michael. I’ll take care of our guest,” Harry said.

O’Dalley nodded gratefully and touched the badge on his injured comrade. A moment later, the two vanished.

Harry turned and stood. “Enervate,” he said, pointing at the stunned Constable. The man blinked his eyes for a moment, then rolled over and climbed to his knees.

“Ambush! Everyone find cover!” he shouted.

Several of the Constables standing next to their prisoner started to chuckle at their friend.

“That’s Charlie for ya!” shouted one Constable. “Slow on the uptake, but he always knows what’s going on.”

Laughter broke out among the Constables again. Harry couldn’t help but admire the resiliency the men, going from an attack to cracking jokes and teasing one another in just a matter of moments. One of the men then noticed Harry, who stood off to one side, smiling, and nudged his fellow Constable. The other man looked carefully, then swallowed nervously and braced to attention.

“I’m sorry, m’lord. We didn’t notice you there,” began the Constable.

Harry waved the man to silence. “It’s alright, Constable, stand easy.” He then surveyed the scene. “It looks like we have one unmarked Death Eater wannabe who try to cross the wards,” he said in satisfaction as he watched the man in question become more violently ill. “And one marked Death Eater also made the attempt, judging from the body parts strewn around.”

“Cor! He’s a wannabe? I thought maybe someone hit him with a curse,” exclaimed a Constable, pointing to the moaning man on the ground who was still trying to retch up his guts.

“Oh, he was hit by a curse alright. The same ward that will kill a Death Eater, will turn anyone with a black aura very sick. Right now our jolly fellow here is wishing he could die ,as every bone in his body feels like it’s breaking as his stomach ties itself into knots,” Harry said with a tight smile.

The other Constables looked wide eyed at Harry for a moment, then sternly down to their prisoner. The others exchanged a look. “Begging your pardon, m’lord, but what is the procedure with something like this? I know this was mentioned, but no one ever described the procedure.”

Harry thought for a moment. “Well, when I put the ward around Britain in place, I made an agreement with the Irish Ministry about this. The prisoner would be questioned before being given an antidote. That questioning should be done with at least one Irish Auror present. I suppose the smart thing to do would be to disarm him, strip him of any equipment he might have and move him to one of the holding cells at the Operations Center until we can get an Auror and the antidote there...” Harry trailed off and stared into the nearby tree line, suddenly tense. Someone nearby had cast a spell!

Harry raised his staff high above his head. “Patefacio meus os,” he muttered and the staff glowed as the nearby trees turned transparent. There was a popping sound and he had a brief image of an old man apparating away. Swearing, he turned to the Constables.



"Get the prisoner to the holding cells and alert the Irish. Tell Michael I want an update on his man's condition, as well as a report on the interrogation of the prisoner," Harry said angrily, his eyes flashing dangerously.

As one, the men nodded, and many saluted for good measure.

With one last look towards the trees, Harry vanished from sight.

"COR! Did ya hear that? He didna make any sound!" exclaimed an awestruck Constable. The others nodded and shivered just a little before turning back to clean up the scene and move the prisoner.

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### **Padfoot Manor...**

Harry appeared in the main foyer of the manor. His magic was flaring to match his anger. He was certain he had spotted Dumbledore, and so close to a Death Eater attack! Had the old man finally crossed the line that should not be crossed? He didn't know, but he did know one of his people had been hurt and he had arrived too late to be of any help.

The manor rumbled as his anger warred with his common sense and Harry knew he needed to get himself under control. He turned and walked purposefully towards the training/ritual room that they used for training sessions with Echo. As he did, his magic distorted the very fabric of the manor. He could only hope that the room was empty.

Approaching the room, the door bulged inwards alarmingly before snapping off the hinges. Entering the room, he barely took note of the fact that Echo was in session with Hermione and Luna, except to shield all three of them. Then he conjured a series of stone obelisks and directed his anger and frustration at them. He smiled grimly as they exploded soundlessly, one after the other.

Echo drifted through Harry's shield and hovered behind him, waiting for him to pause. When Harry ran out of obelisks to destroy, he spoke.

"A most impressive display, Maglios, but do you not think you might channel your anger better?"

Harry paused and turned to look at Echo. He seemed startled to see his mentor, though he had unconsciously shielded him when he'd entered the room.

"Anger is a powerful feeling," Echo said softly. "Properly applied, you have power to move mountains, Maglios. But this uncontrolled, unbridled display is most unseemly. Especially when you interrupt my lessons."

Harry glanced over at Luna and Hermione, both of who smiled encouragingly at him and he felt suddenly embarrassed. "I apologize, Honored Teacher. I was angry and not thinking properly," he said, looking down at his feet.

Echo stared at him hard for a long moment. "Yes, there is great anger in you, Maglios. And even greater power. The two make for a difficult mix. Go to the corner and center yourself, while I finish my lessons. Then we shall speak of how to use your anger properly."

Harry bowed slightly to his mentor and walked over to the corner, dropping the shield he had held on the two girls. Once in place, he stripped out of his shirt and shoes, then began to work on his Ti Chi sets.

Echo drifted back to two girls, smiling at them both.

"Honored Teacher, is he alright?" asked a worried Hermione.

"Yes, my child, he will be fine. Your chosen has a great temper, which he must learn to control. I thought I could wait to teach him, but it seems I must start today. He saw something I know not, but it disturbed him greatly and caused his magic to slip from his control, something that should never be allowed to happen."

"Harry will be fine, Hermione. He has you and the rest of us to help him," murmured Luna. "He's just upset today because of what he saw."

Hermione turned to look at her strange friend intently. Luna often had flashes of insight that others didn't. "Do you know what he saw, Luna?" asked Hermione hopefully.

The blond shook her head. "No, I don't. But I do know it shook him."

Echo stepped forward. "Enough. I will help the Maglios when we are done here. Now, let us talk about how proper placement of the runic stones will allow you to cast a spell over a very large area..."

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### **Hogwarts Castle...**

Severus Snape gave the potion one final stir and then sat back on a stool. The two Cauldrons of Chaos had been delivered several days ago and, as expected, he had been able to successfully create the final potion required. He had sent word to Voldemort two days ago that he'd be ready today. Now it was just a matter of waiting.

Snape moved away from the small cauldron and returned to the manuscript that most clearly defined the ritual. Some parts of the description were missing, so he used other books to help fill in the blanks. He had removed several of the nearby work benches in order to create the necessary space for the ritual, and had spent the last three hours balancing his time between covering the floor with runes and tending to the final potion. It

hadn't been easy. The steel cable which tethered him to the ceiling had to be lengthened by several feet so he could kneel down on the floor to draw the runes, and that required Voldemort's permission.

The door to the dungeon banged open and Snape looked up, his expression paling. After all this trouble, he still wasn't sure that he wouldn't be the first victim of this ritual in over two thousand years. He didn't think so because it would leave him unable to make any more of the potion. But Voldemort wasn't known for making rational decisions.

The two guards stepped into the room. Both pulled their wands out and motioned Snape to move to the back of the room. Severus raised both hands and walked backwards until he bumped into a wall. He stayed there for a moment, shivering, and a line of sweat appeared on his brow. Voldemort then swept into the room and eyed him dangerously.

"So spy... I have been informed that you have completed the potion successfully?" he said in a condescending tone.

Snape nodded frantically.

Voldemort glanced at one of the guards behind him and the man hastily conjured a chair for the Dark Lord to sit on.

"So... Explain the process to me," Voldemort commanded.

"M-M-My lord... the process is quite simple. With the three potions, you can absorb the power of another wizard or even that of a muggle." he said, then slowly slid into lecture mode.

"Many people think Muggles and Squibs have no power, but that isn't accurate. They have power, just not enough to activate a wand. You could siphon the power of twenty muggles to get the same power as from one weak witch. But it works best with witches and wizards.

"There are three potions required. The potions in the blue and green flasks are for the victim, the white flask contains the potion of absorption, which you would drink."

Snape halted when Voldemort held up a hand.

"You will demonstrate this process," Voldemort said, then he snapped his fingers.

Two Death Eaters appeared in the doorway with a weakly struggling woman. She was filthy, heavily bruised and her clothing was torn. She was bleeding from somewhere under her skirt and moaning pitifully. Snape quickly schooled his face into a blank mask as he recognized the former Ravenclaw and Head Girl, Penelope Clearwater. Behind her walked Walden McNair.

"Severus, so this is where you have been hiding," McNair said with a sneer. "This slave was scheduled for disposal since no one wanted to use her anymore." he said, then he kicked Penelope.

She fell out of the grip of the two Death Eaters and lay on the floor moaning. Snape gestured to the two Death Eaters, who reluctantly reached down and pulled Penelope to her feet.

"Take her over and position her in the center of the pentagram," Snape said in an emotionless voice. He walked over and picked up the blue flask and a small ceremonial knife. Immediately, the two Death Eaters by the door had him under wand point. Voldemort raised one hand stopping them and Snape turned away from them, walking to where Penelope stood.

He looked at the two Death Eaters holding her. Placing the knife on a nearby work bench, he reached out and grabbed Penelope by the nose. She gulped a mouthful of air and struggled harder as the two Death Eaters tilted her backwards. Snape leaned forward and as she opened her mouth once more to take a breath, he poured the contents of the blue flask into her mouth. Then he dropped the flask and forced her mouth closed, while still holding her nose. She struggled weakly for a second, then she swallowed the potion.

Once she had swallowed, Snape stepped back and told the two Death Eaters to release her. Penelope swayed dangerously, as if she was going to fall, then she straightened up and stared at Snape with hate filled eyes.

"Traitor! Potter was right about you..." she snarled. Then she tried to spit at him, but it was too much of an effort for her. Slowly her eyes glazed over and she ceased all motion.

"She is now ready to begin the ritual. The first potion accomplishes two simple things. It gives her the innate knowledge she needs to complete the ritual, and the overwhelming desire to do so. Since the ritual won't begin until the recipient steps into the receiving circle, she'll stand like that until she dies of dehydration or starvation.

"McNair, drink the contents of the white flask, pick up the green flask and the knife, give both to the girl and then step into the receiving circle. The green flask contains a concentrating potion. It will concentrate her magic, then she'll release it. The potion in the white flask protects you at the same time as allowing your core to absorb and enlarge enough to accept what she gives you."

McNair quickly picked up the white flask and downed the potion, then he grabbed the green flask and knife, handed them to the girl and stepped into the circle just outside of the pentagram.

Penelope blinked at McNair for a moment, then she uncorked the flask. She placed the open flask at her feet and then sliced her wrist deeply. The blood dripped at a steady rate down her palm and she moved her arm so that some of the blood fell into the open flask.

The blood continued to drip into the flask until there came a hissing sound and smoke poured from the flask. Dropping the knife, she bent down and picked up the flask and drank the potion.

Penelope shuddered a few times and a look of sheer terror appeared on her face. It was possible to see she was fighting for control over the first potion and losing. Raising both arms over her head, she looked upwards as if in prayer.

“Ego tribuo vos meus vox,” she shouted. Then she looked back down at Snape, sheer horror written on her expression. A bright pulse of light flowed down her body and into the pentagram and her scream caused many in the room to flinch back in sheer shock as her horror of what was happening to her was transmitted in that agonizing sound.

The pulse of light hit the pentagram and flowed into the receiving circle, enveloping McNair. McNair arched his back and screamed in reply as the power flowed into him, forcing his magical core to expand.

Pulse after pulse of light left Penelope. Faster and faster the pulses came, until they merged into a steady stream. After McNair's initial scream, he had settled down and seemed to be smiling, even standing a little taller, if that was possible.

Penelope, on the other hand, continued to scream, but her cries grew steadily weaker until there was one final bright burst of light as her core collapsed. She gave a strangled cry and collapsed in the center of the pentagram.

McNair stood breathing heavily and flexing his fists. He smiled thinly at the unmoving form on the ground. McNair turned and nodded gratefully to Voldemort and knelt. “Thank you for this boon, my Lord. I will use it in your name and your name alone,” he said, then bowed until his forehead touched the floor.

“Yes, Walden, I know you will,” Voldemort said sibilantly. “After all, you know the price of failure, do you not?”

McNair cringed on the floor and nodded vigorously.

Voldemort turned his attention back to Snape. “Well spy, what are the side effects?” he asked in a dangerous tone.

“My Lord?”

Voldemort smiled thinly. “Come now, Severus. Even I know a dark ritual like this is not without side effects and caveats.”

Snape winced and nodded lamely. “You can only partake in the ritual once in a fourteen day period, my Lord, and the texts clearly say this ritual should not be repeated more than twenty times. They don't say what will happen, but it can't be good if they are warning against it.”

“And the victim?”

“She is dead, my Lord. The ritual drains everything from her, including her life force. Only a small part of her magic goes into powering the ritual and some is lost in the transfer, but the bulk goes to the one in the receiving circle,” Snape replied.

“Excellent. Prepare enough potion for myself and some others I will select. I will use the ritual to increase my power and the power of some of my personal guard,” Voldemort said, then he stood and turned for the door. He paused in the doorway and turned back to Snape. “Severus, you may yet prove your usefulness to me. I am pleased. I think I'll have one of the slaves sent down here for your enjoyment. Use her, and teach her to clean your cauldrons. We can't have a Potions Master of your caliber wasting his time on trivial matters.”

Snape bowed low to Voldemort, ever mindful of his precarious position. “Your generosity is overwhelming, my Lord.”

“Yes, it is,” Voldemort said, smiling thinly. With one final look at the corpse, he turned and left the room with McNair scurrying behind him.

The two Death Eaters picked up Penelope's body and followed McNair from the chamber and the door to his dungeon slammed shut. Snape leaned heavily against a table and wiped the perspiration from his forehead. *Well, at least I won't be alone in here all day anymore*, he thought bitterly.

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## Parliament Building, London...

Lucius Malfoy sat and stared sourly at the pile of parchment and paperwork sitting on his desk. It had sounded like running a country would be a wonderful thing, but no one had told him about all the work it entailed.

The door to his office opened and his aide, an oily wizard by the name of Hammersmith, stepped into the office.

“You wanted to see me, sir?” asked the younger wizard.

“Yes. I want a progress report on young Dudley,” Lucius said with a deceptive smile.

Hammersmith nodded. “Yes, sir. Young Dudley was rather intransigent at first, but as you suggested, a carrot and stick approach worked well enough. Judicious use of the Cruciatus curse when he was uncooperative and rewarding him when he was cooperative made him see reason. Since then, he's been rather well behaved.”

“And what is he learning?”

“Right now, Sir, it's mostly basic physical training. He wasn't in very good shape. We turned him over to one of the muggle military trainers, who thinks he's being trained for a secret assassination mission overseas. Apparently, one of the muggle government organizations used to carry out secret assassinations, so the story turned out to be quite believable.

“Anyway, he's undergoing intense physical training and also learning the use of some of the muggle firearms. When he's done especially well, the muggle trainer will allow him some time with one of the girls we keep around to entertain the troops. We've also discovered that Dudley has some unique tastes in his women and prefers to be rather rough with them.”

Lucius nodded and waved the man to silence for a moment. Dudley's sexual preferences wasn't anything he was interested in.

“When do we think he'll be ready to use?”

“We still need another few weeks, Sir. We take him at least once per week to see his parent's bodies, as you ordered. And we've done everything we can to reinforce the idea that Harry Potter is the reason why his parents are dead. His rage against Potter is becoming quite intense.”

“Excellent. Most Excellent. Stay on top of this project, Hammersmith. I want him ready as soon as possible. Try offering him more incentives, even if it means catering to his unusual tastes,” Lucius said thoughtfully.

“I'll do that, Sir. Will there be anything else?” Hammersmith asked.

“No... Yes. Send that idiot, Akers, to me. He's been sending me reports about troop movements all week and it's giving me a headache,” Lucius replied wearily.

“Yes, Sir,” Hammersmith said, then exited the room.

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### **Ballincollig, County Cork, Ireland (Evening, June 5th)...**

Albus Dumbledore paced back and forth in his little room and swore sulfurously. Charlie had warned him that the Government in Exile considered him a wanted fugitive, but he thought he could sneak into the town, or perhaps just talk his way in, depending upon who he met at the apparation point. His status didn't bother him very much. The Aurors had been unable to catch him when Fudge and Umbridge ordered his arrest, and they wouldn't be able to catch him now.

If ever there was a time for making mistakes, now was not that time. And yet, today, he had made a colossal mistake.

He had been walking up to the main apparation point of the town of Haven when he detected the surge of magic and decided to investigate. Apparating over the town to the northern area, he had entered a wooded section of land and moved south towards the wards he could sense. There was plenty of magic flaring in the area and he suspected a battle of some sort.

Moving from tree to tree, he had arrived on scene just in time to see several men apparate away. He crouched down behind a tree and watched as Harry Potter knelt over a wounded man, then the wounded man and another vanished. Harry then turned and spoke with the other men for a while. That was when he made his mistake.

The spell he had cast was very low power, undetectable by his standards. All it would do was allow him to listen to what Harry was saying. But Harry had apparently sensed the spell and cast a revealing charm. He thought he managed to apparate out in time, but he wasn't sure. It was a foolish risk and one he wasn't prepared for. He wasn't ready to confront Harry right now, especially after he had found that the Ministry wanted him.

Dumbledore paused in his pacing and considered his next move. He needed to get inside Haven... and soon.

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### **Padfoot Manor...**

Harry leaned forward and hung his head down. Then he felt a pair of hands massaging the back of his neck and he leaned into the touch.

“Another headache?” Hermione asked softly.

“Yeah. Danni says they're just stress headaches and repeats her advice about taking it easier or taking some time off,” he replied, then he looked up, scanning the room.

People were still coming in. He had called for a meeting of all his advisers tonight and people were coming in from all over Haven. The only person that would be missing from this meeting would be Tonks, who was up north on a mission for the Irish.

He closed his eyes and leaned into her touch.

“I'll talk to Remus. Maybe we can arrange for a weekend break,” Hermione suggested, still massaging the base of his neck.

“That would be nice. Maybe we could even go to a movie or something?”

“I'd like that,” she replied, smiling at the idea. “It looks like everyone's here now, Harry.”

He opened his eyes again and looked around. “Yeah. I best get this show on the road,” he said, standing up.

The room fell silent as everyone noticed Harry moving to the front of the room.

“Thank you all for coming on such short notice, but I have something I want to show everyone. It's a memory. I placed the memory into a presentation pensieve about an hour ago. Both Remus and Hermione witnessed that the pensieve was empty prior to my placing the memory in it.”

Harry paused as glances were exchanged. Harry's method seemed very extreme, as if he were trying to set a legal precedent or something.

"After the Pensieve plays a very short sequence, I will ask everyone a single question. Then I'll go into more detail about what you were seeing. Remus, would you start up the pensieve, please?" Harry said, motioning to Remus.

The image above the pensieve grew to nearly full size.

*Harry raised his staff high above his head. "Patefacio meus os" he muttered and the staff glowed as the nearby trees turned transparent. There was a popping sound and he had a brief image of an old man apparating away.*

He let Remus replay that sequence several times before stopping him and turning to face his audience. "I know who I think that person was. I could feel his aura and his magic. The question is, who do you think it was?"

Harry looked at everyone, no one wanted to break the silence, so he called on Minerva McGonagall.

"Minerva?" he asked softly.

"It looked like Dumbledore, Harry," she replied.

"Arthur?"

"Dumbledore," came the reply.

Harry went around the room. Some, like Bertrand Lovegood and Narcissa Black, were unsure and therefore unwilling to say one way or the other. Most, especially the Outcasts of Hogwarts, thought it was the former Headmaster. While it wasn't unanimous, the majority seemed to feel the image was that of Dumbledore.

Harry leaned against the mantle of the fireplace and crossed his arms, facing everyone. He had long since bled off the anger he felt concerning Dumbledore and he really didn't want to go through another lecture from Echo about controlling his temper.

"That image," he said in a voice that could barely be heard, "came from my recollection of the Death Eater attack on Haven today."

"What?" Arthur shouted as he jumped to his feet.

"Tis true, Arthur," said O'Dalley. "I wasn't there at that moment, but I spoke with my men who were. They also saw the old man before he apparated."

Minerva sat shaking her head, trying to come to grips with what Harry was saying. Finally, she pinned him with one of her patented McGonagall stares. "Are you implying that he's joined forces with Voldemort, Harry?"

Minerva's voice cut through the room like a knife, silencing every argument instantly. She had long ago learned how to pitch her voice to be heard over the din of students and this was no different. All eyes turned to Harry.

Harry shuffled his feet and ran a hand through his hair nervously. "I honestly don't know, Minerva. What I do know is after the fight, we were cleaning up and talking about the prisoner when I sensed another spell being cast. It was really low powered, I barely felt it and well... you see the result," he replied with a shrug.

"I, for one, do not believe that Albus would have joined forces with Voldemort," Amelia stated in a matter of fact tone.

Harry looked at her curiously and motioned for her to explain her point.

"Well, consider the two men. Both are egotistical to an extreme, and diametrically opposed to the goals of the other. We know that even when Dumbledore was harming Harry, he was still fundamentally opposed to Voldemort. The two are incapable of working together," she said. Several others in the room nodded in agreement.

"I tend to agree with Amelia as well, Harry, but I think it would be wrong to automatically discount the possibility that he has joined forces. I think it's improbable, but not impossible," Remus said softly.

Minerva sat for a moment, then nodded her agreement.

Harry looked around the room. "Alright, is there anything we can do if he has joined forces with Voldemort?"

The room was silent and several people exchanged glances, then O'Dalley coughed. Harry looked over at him expectantly. "Yes, Michael?"

"Well, my Lord, we can increase his fugitive status. We tell the Irish and other Ministries that we now suspect him of crimes and consider him a high flight risk, rather than just being wanted for questioning. I know we've tried to play his status low key, but increasing his fugitive status would bring more pressure to bear on him. Additionally, by informing the Irish of his involvement in today's little fracas will give them reason to want him, as well."

Harry couldn't help but smile as O'Dalley made the distinction between himself and the Irish Government. He was on permanent detached assignment from his government and he was fully intent on letting everyone know he was a Havenite. He had even spoken to Remus about relocating his family to the town as soon as the school year ended.

Harry looked to Amelia, as this advice was out of his league.

Amelia pondered it for a moment before speaking her thoughts.. "Yes, it would put more pressure on him, especially if the Irish put out a wanted poster on him. But I'm not sure what his response would be. We could force him into the open, or force him underground, in which case we'd never find him."

Harry's expression hardened. "If he comes into the open, we'll deal with him. If not, we have more important issues to deal with and, to be honest, he's draining our resources. If a poster can send him scurrying for a hole to hide in, I'm all for it."

Amelia and O'Dalley nodded in agreement. "I'll contact Minister Mallory tomorrow about it, Harry," Amelia said calmly.

"Michael, did we get anything out of the man we captured?" asked Harry.

O'Dalley managed to partially hide his disappointment. "Not much, my Lord. We managed to confirm that he came from up north, in the region of Armagh like we suspected, but that's about it. The Death Eaters on his side of the Irish Sea are playing it close and not divulging a lot to the uninitiated. On the other hand, the Irish are ecstatic about this capture. Apparently, this bad boy is wanted for a number of anti-muggle crimes, including murder and rape."

Harry smiled grimly. A moment later, the atmosphere relaxed even further as Dobby and Winky popped into the room, bringing drinks and dessert.

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### **The Weasley Residence, Haven...**

Bill and Charlie Weasley looked up as the front door of the cottage opened. When Arthur and the twins entered, Bill smiled and set his book aside.

"We've been wondering where you three have been," Bill commented, noting the tired expressions on their faces.

"You've missed dinner," Charlie added, watching them closely.

"There was a meeting up at the manor," Arthur told them as he sat down the couch.

"Discussing the attack, were you?" Bill asked.

"Yes, for the most part," Fred confirmed, taking off his coat and hanging it up on the coat rack.

"So was it just some random Death Eater attack, then?" Charlie asked curiously.

"Yes. Well, maybe. There was an interesting and totally unexpected element to it, though," Arthur said, pinching the bridge of his nose and trying to fight off the headache he felt coming on.

"Oh?" Charlie asked, sitting forward on his chair and closing his book.

"It seems Dumbledore was involved somehow," George piped up, sitting next to his father.

"Dumbledore!" both Charlie and Bil exclaimed.

"Yeah, strange isn't it? Would have thought the old man would have been smarter than to get himself involved with that bunch," Fred told them, leaning against the wall and crossing his arms over his chest.

"We don't know that he was involved, Fred," Arthur said. "It only appeared that way."

Fred shrugged. "Whether it's true or not, I still say he has a big pair of brass ones to show his face around Haven."

George snorted. "Regardless of what they're made of, if Harry catches him, his balls will be hanging over the mantel place in Harry's library."

"Really not a picture I needed," Bill said, scowling at a grinning George.

"How do you know it was Dumbledore?" Charlie asked his father.

"Harry's pensieve memory of the event," Arthur said.

When Bill started to argue with George, Charlie looked down at his feet, thinking quickly. Pensieve memories could be altered. Dumbledore had told Charlie enough for him to know Harry would do anything to discredit Dumbledore in the eyes of the magical world. Altering his memories enough to implicate the greatest living wizard to fight for the light would fit neatly into Harry's plans.

Charlie looked up then, watching his family and trying not to scowl. Harry was dragging the Weasley family into darkness and turning them away from the one man who could save them from destruction.

After retiring to his room later that night, Charlie pulled out his journal and wrote down the events of the day, including the fact that Harry and many others now believed Dumbledore to have been involved in the attack on Haven.

The next morning, a message was waiting for him in the journal. *Proceed with plan. Will explain all when you have completed your task.*

Closing the journal and slipping it under his bed, he made his way into the kitchen. Finding his father alone, sipping tea, he knew he'd find no better time.

"Morning Dad," he said, pouring himself a cup.

"Hello, Charlie," Arthur replied sleepily. "You're up early."

"I wanted to talk to you about something without having to deal with the others."

"Oh? And what would that be?"

"With Bill, the twins and me here, things are getting a bit crowded. I was thinking of putting up a cottage of my own. You said there was still room for more buildings around town, and I found the perfect spot for one. It's quiet, away from the hustle and noise."

Arthur frowned. "Are you sure? We could enlarge the cottage if it's just a matter of space."

"No, it's not just that. Dad, I've been working on dragon reserves for a few years now and I'm not used to the noise level of so many people around all the time. The twins come in at all hours of the night and I'd forgotten how loudly Bill snores," Charlie said, chuckling. "It's funny. The occasional dragon's bellow I can handle. But kids screaming at each other? Men and women laughing and playing music in the town hall? It goes right through me now."

Arthur placed his hand on his son's shoulder and gave it a squeeze. "Well then, since you're sure, we'll go over the maps of Haven and make sure your building site is available and see about getting some of the house elves to help with construction."

"Maybe we could stop off and get breakfast when we're done?" Charlie suggested.

"I'd like that." Arthur finished his tea and stood. "Let's get started, then."

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### **The Broken Wand, Armagh, Northern Ireland (June 10th)...**

The Broken Wand pub was probably one of the worst Wizarding pubs in Armagh. Even the water was watered down, and the sawdust covered floor hid centuries of dirt and blood that had been spilled in the dive. The Leaky Cauldron in Diagon Alley had achieved an effect of appearing mid-eighteenth century inside. The Broken Wand appeared to be mid-fifteenth century and, unlike the Leaky Cauldron, the interior ambience wasn't deliberate.

The normally run down building appeared empty and deserted during the daytime and only assumed an air of activity after dusk. To a passing muggle, the building looked burned out, a by product of years of conflict between Catholics and Protestants.

The slightly graying man turned the corner and walked down the street towards the pub. Looking in both directions to ensure that no muggles were visible, he opened the door slightly and stepped inside. He was a modestly built man with a receding hairline and a touch of a pot belly.

The man looked about as dangerous as a neighborhood girl scout selling cookies. Remus called it her Pettigrew impression, a persona so innocuous, no one would suspect Tonks was a fully trained Auror.

For the past five days Tonks had been coming into this pub every evening and participating in an illegal card game. Undercover work was slow, time consuming and stomach churning work. She had slowly been accepted by some of the players, but only because she tended to lose a lot, and was free with buying drinks. During the last week, she had picked up a few rumors. She had learned that the brothel down the street offered bulk discounts and polyjuiced prostitutes. She had also learned that Mickey, the bartender, was a part-time fence, as well as being a dealer in illegally charmed muggle objects and a number of narcotic potions.

The key thing she had also learned was that there was a strong anti-muggle sentiment in the pub and that if one were the right type of person, work could be found for a wizard with anti-muggle attitudes.

"Did ya hear what Mickey said? He said Mason needed some boys for a job in a few days." said one of the players known only as Jones.

"Wouldn't hurt to earn a few quid," Tonks said diffidently, while looking at her cards.

The others looked at Tonks in surprise. She always seemed to have money to play in their game, and plenty to lose.

Tonks looked at the others. "What? Did yer think the pot was bottomless or sumting? I know you fellas have certainly taken more than yer fair share from me."

The men laughed and one of them slapped Tonks hard on the back. "Aye, that we have, but yer kept coming back fer more Teddy!"

Tonks smiled sheepishly and nodded at the men. She always used her father's name when working undercover as a man.

"So what kind of job is it? Anyone know?" asked Tonks.

Jones snorted. "Knowing Mason, it's either killing or cleaning up after one. He runs with a rough crowd. We hate muggles," he said, pointing to himself and his friends, "but we mostly complain about them. Mason likes to take matters into his own hands."

Tonks scowled. "I ain't too fond of muggles meself. They drove me outta business," she asserted. "You gents have been relieving me of the last of my quid."

The other men nodded sympathetically. "Ain't it the truth! Muggles and muggleborn move in and, next thing you know, yer outta work!"

Jones poked Tonks in the shoulder. "If you don't mind getting a wee bit of dirt on yer hands, tell Mickey to set up a meeting with you and Mason."

The next time Mickey came over with a round of watered down beer, Tonks slipped him a fiver and made quiet arrangements to be introduced to Mason when he came in later that evening. Then she settled down and played the hands dealt to her despite the fact that Jones was cheating outrageously.

After two hours of losing steadily, Mickey walked over to her and leaned down. "You wanted to meet Mason? Take the corridor in the back. He's in the second room on the left."

Tonks nodded and shot the man a nervous look, then she smiled nervously at her friends before folding her cards and standing up.

"Good luck, mate," called Jones.

This is what Tonks had been hoping for all week. She had learned from the Irish that Mason was one of the meaner crime bosses and if anyone was working with and knew where the Death Eaters were, it would be him. She opened the door and stepped into the dimly lit corridor. No neat sconces lit this area. The earthen corridor plunged downward at a sharp angle and was lit by a few smoky torches. From what she could see, the corridor was very long.

It took her nearly three minutes to come to the first door on the left, and she estimated that she was now a good fifty feet underground. The earthen corridor slowly gave way to roughly hewn stone.

After a walk of nearly five more minutes, she came upon the second door. This door, unlike the first, was more ornate. The heavy oaken door had highly polished brass hinges and a ornate lion headed knocker. Above the knocker was an interesting crest, which appeared to be made entirely of gold. It held a lion and the words "Vires in numerus".

Tonks blinked in surprise. She had seen the crest before, but couldn't recall exactly where or when. She hesitated a moment longer, considering the crest, then she knocked on the door.

There was a moment of silence, then the door swung inwards revealing a room cast almost entirely in darkness. She guessed it was a small antechamber to a much larger room. She stepped inside and waited. The door swung shut behind her and the far wall fell away from view, revealing a brightly lit room with several dozen people watching her. She moved to grab her wand when two wands pressed firmly against the back of her head.

"Move another inch, mate, and they'll carry you out in spoon size bits," a voice growled behind her.

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### Authors Notes:

Oh Evil cliff hanger! How could we do this to you? Why would we do this to you? Simple, it's (a) fun and (b) all Alyx's fault. Blame her. She's the one that let us run out of pizza.

Alyx and I are thinking about renaming this section of the file. It's at the bottom of the file, maybe we can call it the Dregs, or the Scrapings? Maybe its like the bottom of the barrel, you know where things start getting moldy and have a strange unappealing odor like those socks you once left in your gym locker for six months. Don't deny it! I have pictures to prove it, and the coroner's reports. So anyway right now this is still the Author's notes, not to be confused with Arthur's notes. And mind you we don't mean the PBS Arthur either. I hate that little bugger.

For all those whining about Charlie. Don't worry, eventually things will get straightened out with him. BUT in the mean time the more people whine about him, the more fun we're finding it to torture him. Not only do we get to twist Charlie, but we get to torment you, our lovely readers who have failed to send us any crispy crème donuts. So there.

For those wondering about Ron's body. What does a spider usually do with it's victim after its fed? Go away you twisted sick people that want dead bodies to appear.

OK. LISTEN UP PEOPLE, BECAUSE THE NEXT PERSON THAT CLAIMS CHARLIE WOULDN'T LISTEN TO DUMBLEDORE IS GOING TO GET AN AVADA KEDAVRA ENEMA. Charlie was raised believing that Dumbledore didn't fart. Nope, the man passed his gas into an alternate dimension and could do no wrong. His parents told him Dumbledore was the leader of the light, the pin in pinnacle, the ace in space! His parents told him how Dumbledore saved the world, and the spotted owl from the evil clutches of Colonel Sanders and his sidekick Grindelwald. In other words, since the red headed kultz has spent the last five years running around shoveling dragon dung and basically ignoring the rest of the world. He don't know jack about what Dumbledore has been up to. And Arthur didn't want to try to cast aspersions on his ex wife by writing Charlie a letter saying 'that bitch followed that asshole Dumbledore and I nearly ended up in jail because of it!' So does Charlie accept Dumbledore? YES HE DOES. If you don't like it, duct tape your fingers before you decide to leave another review questioning why Charlie is doing what he's doing.

Things are finally starting to move along. It took a while, but getting all the starting pieces in place, and explaining why things are the way they are took a while. Unfortunately this is no longer your standard Harry boffs girl, Harry kills bad guy story. It's become a multinational epic tail and we even include the French (sorry, our contract clearly stated we had to include the French and Canada, we managed to wiggle out of Canada, but we're stuck with the French). You just won't believe the logistics for this tale! Why its taken us ummmm minutes on map quest to pick out locations! And the art work! Oy Vey!

To Bob S, who claims to have 'snorked' at the last chapter. We're terribly sorry about that and hope you didn't permanently damage anything important. Lord knows a good 'snork' is fun now and then, but we also know how addictive and damaging they can be. At the bottom of this file, just for you, we have included a recipe for an anti-snorking potion. That is if you can find Snorkack. Need I really explain that Snorkack is kack from a



wild Snork?

For all those who want to see Dumbledore cross the line. Well I think you'll find this chapter interesting.

To everyone that complained about the ranks being assigned by the house elves and the fact that they seem to be totally random. Well of course they are. The Elves are getting the ranks from bad British war movies (Did they ever make a good war movie?) So don't complain to me. Don't complain to Alyx, complain to the Elves.

On a more serious note..... we will try to include at least one date in every chapter so that people know when they are. We realize that some have gotten lost and turned left when they should have turned right. But we'll straighten you out.

Crys, we're sorry if you're getting pissed off at our characters. But isn't that the point? I'd rather have you pissed off at them than at me. \*\*\* Grin \*\*\*

UPDATELESS LIST ADDITION!!!!

Yes, it's another addition to our updateless list. This useless little list is designed to highlight what I consider are true gems of fan fiction, or would be if the authors actually updated them once in a while. Candidates for the Updateless list must have not been updated within the last sixty days. And I have to approve them.

So without any further fanfare, here's this chapter's UPDATELESS WINNER!!!!

Harry Potter and the Mind Mage by James Milamber.

<http://www.fanfiction.net/s/1905554/1/>

This gem hasn't been updated for over six months and is probably abandoned. If this were being updated on a regular basis I'd be recommending this as a wonderful story. As it is, it's disappointing because its incomplete. Good read, no end in sight. Sigh.

*Bobmin*  
*FanficAuthors.net*

# Sunrise Over Britain

## Chapter 8 - Score one for the good guys

### Standard Disclaimer:

"Are you sure this is how you want to do this?" Alyx asked while she eyed her husband curiously.

"Trust me," proclaimed Bob. "It's the latest rage to do disclaimers while wearing nothing but a thong."

Alyx thought about it for a moment, then nodded. "Alright, but you do realize that all the Alan Rickman fan gurls out there are going to go ape when they see Snape in a thong."

Bob stopped and stared at her in confusion. "I meant for you to wear the thong, not him," he muttered darkly.

The curtain opened and standing in the middle of the stage was an mortally embarrassed Severus Snape wearing nothing more than a thong. It was a lovely shade of green with a hint of racing stripes.

The audience gasped, and the sound of projectile vomiting could be heard from where Harry and his friends sat.

Hermione stood, her arms outstretched. "I'm blind!" she screamed.

Ginny fainted and Luna turned to Draco with a look of shock on her face. "He's paler than you are!" she murmured. Draco, who was busy hurling over two rows of seats was too busy to answer her.

"The authors of this confusing tale have informed me that they have no wish to be confused with JK Rowling. They do not own the rights to the Potter Universe, or all rights therein. And furthermore I feel I must protest being forced to wear this obscene garment." Snape said, trying to summon up his dignity.

Bob leaned over and pushed Alyx's mouth closed, then wiped her chin free of drool. "He's not Alan Rickman," Bob said conversationally. "Besides, thats an exploding thong."

Alyx turned to glare at Bob. "I hate you, you do know that don't you?"

"Yes dear," Bob replied smugly.

The curtain closed, then it billowed out from the explosion.

Alyx eyed the stage carefully. "Oh dear, we'll have to replace those curtains now."

Bob nodded and contemplated his next disclaimer. Torturing Snape was to much fun!

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### Sunrise Over Britain

#### Chapter 8

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### Padfoot Manor...

Eocho drifted through the manor as he did every evening. He was very circumspect in avoiding the bedrooms, but it wasn't uncommon for him to come through a wall into one of the many sitting rooms or studies and join in a conversation with the people he found there.

It was late and he had just finished an extended session with Hermione and Luna concerning rune stones and what they could do. Hermione had explained to Eocho what Harry thought in regard to Dementors and her own research into them. He agreed it did sound like an ancient curse and the magic certainly had the capability of forcing such a transformation. For the past few days he had helped Hermione with her research in trying to understand the curse in the hopes of finding a way to lift it.

He paused before drifting through another wall and shook his head. If he had been corporeal, he was certain he would now be suffering a headache. Luna had joined Hermione in her research but, where Hermione was looking for a counter curse, Luna was convinced an answer already existed and she just had to find it.

*"It all comes down to balance, revered Teacher. Nature will not allow one form of creature without an countervailing form to balance it," Luna said dreamily.*

*"But, Luna, there are plenty of creatures we are aware of that do not have counterparts. Vampires, for instance or werewolves," protested Hermione.*

*"Hermione, you know werewolves are a result of a disease and not a true species. The same can be said for Vampires. Look at how they spread their species, by infecting others. No, if you want to examine balance, you need to see the true species. Manticores and Nundus are balanced by dragons. The Griffin and the Sphinx, Acromantulas and Basilisks, Nifflers and Side Whomping Uninooks, the Great Land Whale and Purple Plumaged Acroroc" Luna said seriously.*

*Echo paused and turned to stare at Luna, Hermione blinked in surprise. Luna didn't miss a beat, she simply stood and faced the two.*

*"No, we must consider how to find a way to restore the balance." Luna said as she paced back and forth.*

*"My child," Echo said gently, "the Dementors are the result of a curse and not created by nature. Does nature even consider them a species of hers?"*

*Luna waved a hand, dismissing his concern. "Nature had to approve the change in the first place or the curse would have turned the caster into a five legged Grabow. Mind you, no one has ever seen a five legged Grabow before. Most people see the more common seven legged Grabow, but only just before it hurls itself from the tree to rip out their throat. No, nature had to agree to such a change and they are a species at this point. Their population grows, although no one has ever studied their reproductive cycle. Hmmm. I wonder if I can obtain a Mastery in magical creatures if I were to study it?"*

*Hermione shot Echo a pained look, and his brow wrinkled in confusion.*

*"Well then, Luna, what do you suggest we do?" asked Hermione, who was still trying to figure out where the conversation was going.*

*"About studying their reproductive cycle? Oh, I suppose it would be fascinating, Hermione, but since your dead set on killing them all off, don't you think that would be a waste of time?" the blond asked, staring over Hermione's right shoulder at a very interesting spot on the wall. She was certain the spot had moved, as it used to be over Hermione's left shoulder.*

*Hermione resisted the urge to grab her hair and pull it out by the fistful. "No, about the Dementors and your idea about balance," she said through gritted teeth. Then she turned to glare at Echo... or tried to. Their revered teacher currently had his head stuck through the wall and the noise coming from the next room sounded suspiciously like laughter.*

*Luna looked startled, then suddenly focused on Hermione. Her eyes narrowed as she stared at the older witch for a moment before her eyes misted with unshed tears.*

*Hermione reeled under the onslaught of Luna's emotions, mostly joy and happiness. She started to push herself away from Luna, but the blond's focus changed, releasing her from the emotional storm.*

*Echo pulled his head from the wall and turned to watch his students.*

*"We've truly come a long way if you're willing to ask my advice on something, Hermione," Luna said softly. "I never thought I'd see the day when you'd ask me for advice."*

*Hermione smiled tremulously at Luna. "I know we've had our differences, Luna. I don't always understand you and I'm not sure I ever will. But those of us who know you also know how intelligent you are. I know you can help with this."*

*Luna sat down across from Hermione. "Since I brought this up, I'll ask. I'm still not entirely sure it's a valid path."*

*Luna closed her eyes and took a few breaths. A fine soft green glow surrounded her and it seemed to contain hundreds of twinkling lights.*

*Hermione looked at her, unsure of what was happening, then blinked in surprise when she heard a small pop beside her. A strange, eight legged cat with a prehensile tail looked at her for a moment, then vanished with another pop. All around the room bizarre creature after bizarre creature appeared with a pop, then vanished a moment later. Perhaps the weirdest creature was the short naked man with a horn protruding from his forehead. He looked angrily at Hermione and shook his fist at her, then grabbed himself and gave her a rude hand gesture before he vanished.*

*When Luna finally shook herself and opened her eyes, the glow faded. She looked around the room for a moment, then smiled sadly.*

*"What was that?" asked an amazed Echo.*

*Luna stood and brushed a speck of imaginary dirt from her skirt. "Oh, I had to ask Nature if I was on the right track."*

*"You — You communed with nature?" asked Echo incredulously.*

*Luna smiled dreamily. "Of course I did. Communing is nice and all, and it's wonderful to commune with Draco when we're making love, but it's not all that useful elsewhere. I mean, I tried communing with a tree once, but that didn't work very well, as we don't speak the same language at all. But communing while making love works very well."*

*Hermione peered at Luna inquisitively.*

*Luna, spotting her expression, snickered. "Try it, Hermione. It's fascinating."*

*Echo shook his head, sat down on nothing, and stared at the girl.*

*"I must go now. There is a book growing in the Haven school library that I need to check. It may hold a clue to our problem. And Draco needs me tonight," Luna said, as she walked from the room.*

*There was a moment of silence after Luna left.*

*"Did we accomplish anything with this meeting?" Hermione muttered.*

*"Yes child, we did – I think. Luna picked a path to research – and you and I both received a lesson in patience," Eocho said, still staring at the door Luna had exited.*

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## **Washington D.C....**

Ambassador Sir Reginald Williams closed up his office for the evening and locked the door. It had been another hectic day. The U.S. Government had graciously offered the British Government in Exile space in which they could house themselves. The British Government had accepted. The Royals were being housed in Canada, along with a large number of members of the House of Lords who had managed to flee the country. But the real working Government would be in the United States so as to be closer to the United Nations.

Sir Williams' destination now was one of the more obscure buildings provided by the Yank government. The large warehouse had been a white elephant when the Yanks first offered it. No one knew exactly what to use it for. Then the Embassy began to receive packages from 'Case Green'.

The Rolls Royce pulled into the driveway, its small Union Jack flags snapping in the air stream. As soon as the car stopped, the driver jumped out and opened the door to allow Sir Williams to exit. Nearby, a small group of men and one woman waited respectfully.

One from their group broke away and approached Sir Williams. "Ambassador Williams? I am Dr. Raleigh, from the Smithsonian National Museum. My government asked me to assist you as best as I can," said Dr. Raleigh, offering his hand.

Sir Williams smiled thinly and shook the Doctor's hand. "I take it you have been briefed then?" he asked.

"Oh yes, Sir. We even have a representative of our Department of Magic with us tonight, an Agent Jackson," he replied in a hushed tone and then he pointed to the smartly dressed woman who nodded to both men.

"Very good, then. Shall we begin?" he said, and led Dr. Raleigh towards the locked door of the warehouse.

After the door was unlocked, the group entered and huddled by the doorway while Sir Williams searched for the light switch. When he found the panel and started flipping switches, the interior lit up under the glare of overhead halogen lamps to reveal hundreds of crates.

"When the shipments first started arriving from 'Case Green' we weren't sure what to make of it. But then the Prime Minister briefed me on what was occurring. At the time, people thought it was a case of theft. In reality, it was an attempt to preserve the cultural heritage of the United Kingdom. From what I understand, some of the objects are under a 'stasis spell' and our purpose tonight is to figure out which objects they are, and get them to a proper storage facility that will be supplied to us by the U.S. Government. It is my understanding that this 'spell' cannot last forever and the items under the 'spell' will begin to decay if not taken care of?" Sir Williams looked to the witch for confirmation.

"Yes, sir. The spell is really only good for a few months at the most, then it will wear off," replied Agent Jackson.

"Right, then. Dr. Raleigh has brought sufficient people with him tonight to begin categorizing everything, so let's get cracking."

Agent Jackson conjured a table and several chairs so that she, Dr. Raleigh and Sir Williams could sit comfortably, while the others fanned out, checking the labeling on the crates. Dr. Raleigh was called several times to view the contents of certain crates.

Raleigh looked up from the growing list of inventory. "Some of these items are true treasures, Mr. Ambassador. Some have never left your country before," he said in a low murmur.

"Yes. We got quite lucky, I think. But I don't understand how even a building as big as this one can hold some of these objects. According to the manifests we have, there are some naval vessels in the lists," replied Williams.

"Shrinking charms," replied Jackson with a shrug. "Very easy to cast. They can make anything you want both smaller and lighter. I remember one time we stole an entire Soviet MIG29. The agent in charge of the operation concealed the plane in the bag full of children's toy models and walked right through customs, telling them the toys were for his son."

"So the Victory is really out there?" asked Williams in disbelief.

Jackson shrugged her shoulders. "Probably. It is, after all, on the list, Sir Williams."

He was about to reply when another voice shouted for their attention. "Dr. Raleigh, come over here!"

All three turned to see one of Raleigh's men gesturing wildly from one of the many paths between the crates. Curious, all three stood and walked over to the man. The man was pale and trembling violently.

"George?" asked Raleigh with no small amount of alarm.

"What is going on?" asked Williams in concern.

"This is George Anderson, Sir William. He is our expert in Egyptian Antiquities. He holds the position I once used to hold. Something has him very upset," replied Dr. Raleigh.

George pointed with a shaking finger at the label on the side of the open crate. Raleigh peered at the label. Reading the contents, his eyes lit up with joy. Turning from the label he lifted the top of the crate and peered in.

Dr. Raleigh slammed the top of the crate back down. Trembling violently, he took three steps back from the crate, his mouth opening and closing like a goldfish, then seemed to fold in on himself as he fell into a dead faint, hitting the floor hard.

Both Agent Jackson and Sir Williams moved forward in alarm.

"It's the Rosetta stone... it's whole again!" whispered George Anderson, whose eyes then rolled up into the back of his head as he, too, fainted.

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### **Ballincollig, County Cork, Ireland (June 10th)...**

When the knock came on the apartment door, Dumbledore palmed his wand. He was expecting Charlie Weasley, but one could never be too careful these days. Opening the door a crack and seeing the redhead, Albus opened the door fully and ushered the younger man in. Closing the door quickly, he cast several security charms on the door before turning back to his guest.

"You had no problems leaving Haven, then?" Albus asked.

"No. I was able to apparate from my cottage," Charlie told him as he dug through one of the pockets of his coat. "I have the map you requested. Rather than taking one from the Ministry, I made my own." Pulling the map from his coat, he turned to look at Dumbledore, and his jaw dropped.

The man standing before him looked...appalling. The flowing hair and beard were gone, as were the magnificent robes Albus normally wore. In front of him stood an average looking old man with little hair, no beard and wearing a worn looking, plain brown robe.

Albus laughed at the younger man's expression. "I will assume, from your look, that I pass muster, then?"

"What have you done to yourself?" Charlie asked, shocked.

"I could not walk around Haven looking like myself, could I? No, a disguise was needed. A glamor might have worked for awhile, but eventually someone would have seen through it. It has been so long since anyone has seen me without my hair and beard that a visit to a muggle barber in Cork, and some second-hand robes, took care of the problem."

Charlie stared at him dumbly for a moment before shaking his head. "No one would ever mistake you for Albus Dumbledore as you are now!"

"And that, my dear boy, is the whole point. Between Harry's Pensieve memory and the Aurors around him the day of the Death Eater attack, my looks are a little too well known around Haven at the moment."

"Speaking of that, Sir, what happened? How is it you became involved with a group of Death Eaters?" Charlie asked, his expression grim.

Albus scowled. "I was not involved with them, Charles. I made a mistake, nothing more. I detected magic being used and was curious." He shook his head. "I apparated to the area and watched the fight, trying to figure out what was happening. I should have left when the fight ended, but I wanted to hear what Harry was saying. My mistake was in using magic to listen to the conversation. Somehow, young Harry detected the casting of my spell and exposed my position."

"Harry has convinced those around him that you are in league with Voldemort's forces in Ireland because of that incident," Charlie told him seriously.

Dumbledore met Charlie's gaze fully, his expression sorrowful. "I realized the moment I was caught that he would use the incident to his advantage. My mistake has given him a tighter hold on his people."

Charlie's fists clenched at his sides. "We have to find some way of breaking them free, Sir!"

"I am working on it, Charles. Now, let me look at the map."

"Oh, right." Moving to the kitchen table, Charlie unfolded the map of Haven he'd made and spread it out on the table. "It's all here, including those empty buildings still awaiting businesses."

Dumbledore studied the map carefully for several minutes, noting the location of the new Ministry's building, the Weasley's cottages and the town square. "And the manor? Where is it located?"

Charlie frowned. "I don't know. I've never been invited there and wasn't going to press my luck by just showing up."

"Interesting. Well now, tell me about this building, Charles." Albus pointed to a place on the map, very close to the new Ministry building.

"As of this morning, it's still empty. It's two story, if you count the attic," Charlie replied, a little confused.

"Is that all you can tell me?"

Charlie rolled his eyes. "I don't mean to be rude, Sir, but perhaps if I knew what you were looking for, I'd be of more help."

Dumbledore watched him for a moment, then smiled. "I'm going to open a pub, Charles. I need an appropriate building for that purpose."

"A pub?"

"I will need some reason for being in Haven, Charles. Harry has invited Irish citizens into the town to open businesses. What's more Irish than a pub?" Albus asked him, his eyes twinkling merrily.

Charlie's eyes widened for a moment, then he turned to the map and frowned. "The building you're interested in would work fine for such a business. The attic should be spacious enough to suit as private quarters, and you're close enough to the community hall to pull in people."

"I am not so interested in making money from this endeavor. Bringing in customers is the least of my concerns."

"You might want to rethink that. It would look odd if a publican cared nothing for profits and customers."

Dumbledore beamed at Charlie and slapped him on the back. "You are correct, of course. Besides, if the pub is popular, the information I need will flow right through the front doors!"

Charlie grinned. "Alright, what's next?"

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### **Under The Broken Wand, Armagh, Northern Ireland (June 10th)...**

Tonks froze when she felt two wand tips pressing up to the back of her neck. Slowly she moved her hands out where they could be seen.

"Move forward. Do as your told and you might make it out of here alive." hissed the voice.

Tonks moved into the larger room. There were several tables set up and, along side one wall, sat a heavy set man with a lithe girl on his lap. The man watched with indifference as they prodded Tonks in his direction. The girl continued to nibble on his ear for a moment before removing herself from his lap to sit on the arm of his chair where she could watch the events unfold.

One of the men behind Tonks began to roughly search her, relieving her of wand, watch, wallet and other items, including the Irish supplied emergency portkey.

She winced inwardly, then remembered the bracelet she wore that Harry had given her. For some reason that was overlooked by her captors. The person who had searched her dumped her possessions on a table in front of the seated man, and then stepped back.

The burly man leaned forward in his chair and rummaged through the items. He spent some time looking in the wallet. "So, Mickey says you wanted to talk to me?" drawled the burly man.

When Tonks didn't respond, she felt a wand dig painfully in to her back as a warning, and she nodded. "Mickey said you had work for people. I need work," she said nervously. Tonks had been in some bad spots before, but this one ranked right up there. Her only consolation was Harry's portkey.

The girl looked through the stuff on the table and then picked up Tonks' wand, which she looked over carefully. She looked quickly at Tonks, her eyes narrowed, then back at the wand. When her eyes widened slightly, as if in surprise, Tonks tensed. But when the girl simply twirled the wand in her fingers as she sat on the edge of the chair, Tonks forced herself to relax.

"Mason," she said in a whining tone. "He's kinda cute, in a dumpy sort of way. He reminds me of a teacher I once had."

Mason glared up at the girl who nodded back to him. The girl leaned closer to Mason, allowing her blouse to fall away from her body and giving Mason a distracting view.

"Dammit, Angie, I can't keep helping every stray that stumbles in here. I have a business to run!" protested Mason, trying to tear his eyes away from the girls cleavage.

"But, Mason," she whined. She shook her shoulders slightly, causing his 'view' to move encouragingly.

"Fine! Bring him into the office and I'll find him something," growled Mason.

The rest of the men all looked around, trying to avoid his gaze. Mason may have been the one running the syndicate, but Angie ran Mason and they all knew it. And they all knew better than to say anything to Mason about it.

Mason stood and stomped his way into a small office. Tonks followed him silently, with Angie prodding her in the back using her own wand.

Once in the smaller office, Mason took seat behind the desk. Angie pulled out her own wand and sealed the door before casting several privacy spells.

"Now, what would Nymphadora Tonks be doing with an Irish Ministry portkey?" asked the girl, who was calmly twirling Tonks' wand in her hand.

Tonks paled. "Who?" she stammered.

"Drop the disguise, Nymphie," the girl said with a smirk, then moved over to stand next to Mason. She reached out and fondly ruffled his hair before turning her attention back to Tonks.

Mason raised his wand and aimed it at her chest.

"Well?" Angie said again, her voice hardening.

Tonks sighed and morphed back into her normal state. Mason's eyes widened and he glanced up at Angie, who looked smug.

Tonk nervously fingered her portkey bracelet and Angie's eyes widened. She couldn't see the bracelet, but she could see her fingering something.

"Don't do it, Tonks. Not everything is as it seems here," said the girl hurriedly, then she turned to Mason. "Dear, would you kindly undo my charm?"

Mason looked up at her for a moment, surprised, before nodding. He waved his wand at Angie and the girl changed into an older, more mature version of herself.

"Angela Ollivander?" Tonks blurted out in surprise.

Angie smiled and winked at Nymphadora before turning to Mason. "Tonks entered the academy just after I graduated, dear. I remember her well. We were all excited about having the first metamorph in nearly a century enter the academy. Tonks," she said, turning back to the young Auror, "I'd like you to meet Mason Long, my husband."

Angie walked around the desk, motioning for Tonks to sit, while she conjured some tea. Tonks eyed her warily.

"Oh, do relax, Tonks. Your arrival solves a whole world of problems for us."

"Quite. We've been out in the cold for months now, since the fall of the Government. Our network dried up. Are you now working for a Irish? We're willing to help," offered Mason.

Tonks looked back and forth between the two. She had known Angie when she was just a cadet. Angie had been a hotshot rookie who'd quickly made a name for herself. During the academy years, there hadn't been a single female cadet who didn't look up to her, awed. She had quickly become a legend in the DMLE as an undercover operative. But Tonks had lost track of Angie a few years after she had graduated.

Angie placed a hand on Mason's shoulder. "I think that Tonks is still unconvinced. I know I would be, in her position."

Then Angie reached over and gave Tonks her wand. "I remember hearing about that wand, you see," she told Tonks. "Uncle Ollivander was in seventh heaven when you commissioned it. A wand containing one of your own hairs? Very powerful, but it will only work for you."

For the first time Tonks began to relax. Only a few in the Ministry knew about that. And Ollivander, of course. His niece had probably learned about it from him.

"Angie, what the devil is going on? Just what is one of the DMLE's most successful female undercover operatives doing in Northern Ireland?" Tonks asked in exasperation.

Angie smirked. "Now, now, Tonks. Is that anyway to talk to someone who probably just saved your life?"

"It is a valid question though, dear," Mason said quietly.

Tonks turned to look at Mason, who appeared to be at least twenty years older than Angie and Irish, at that.

"Don't let his accent fool you, Tonks. He's been MLE longer than both of us combined. And to answer your question, we've been here for a number of years now, running the third largest syndicate in the city. It's a good cover to keep an eye on the troubles. Or it was, at any rate. But with the Ministry gone, we're adrift here."

Tonks nodded thoughtfully. Running an undercover operation as a criminal element would be different and above suspicion as far as both sides of the Irish conflict were concerned. The Ministry of Magic's position on the Irish troubles was a simple one. Keep the Wizarding world out of the conflict, no matter which side they picked. The Irish troubles with their religious overtones of Catholics versus Protestants troubled the Wizarding World, and they wanted no part of it.

"So what is the deal, Tonks? Have you become free lance or something?" asked Angie with a hint of steel in her voice.

"Freelance? Merlin, no. I still work for the DMLE, but I'm on loan to the Irish..."

"Wait a second! The DMLE is still around? Who's running things?" asked Mason incredulously.

Tonks frowned. "Don't you folks up here get the Dublin Daily?"

Both Mason and Angie nodded. "Yes, we do, but that rag is nearly as bad as the Daily Prophet or Quibbler. You really can't trust it," protested Mason.

"Well, you can trust this. There is a Ministry of Magic in Exile based in Haven. Amelia Bones is the current Minister and Miles Pickerton is in overall charge of the war effort, including our DMLE," Tonks said quietly.

Mason and Angie exchanged a look. It was a common occurrence between long time spouses and, with it, they could communicate volumes. Then Angie turned back to Tonks.

"Can you put us in contact with Miles, then? We've been out in the cold since the government fell, running without any guidance or support," asked an anxious Mason.

Angie placed an hand on his arm. "Wait a second, love. Tonks, why are you here?"



Like I started to say, I'm on loan to the Irish. They are worried about a cell of Death Eaters that made it over to Ireland before Harry put up the ward."

"You mean that ward is real?" asked Mason, a bit awed.

"Of course it's real. I was one of those who helped Harry raise it," Tonks said, grinning.

"And it really works?" asked Angie, the doubt evident in her voice.

Tonks frowned and remembered her academy days when Angie gave guest lectures. And how she'd teased her about some of her magic. "Oh, it works alright. Harry's got more ability than any wizard I've ever seen," replied Tonks hotly.

"Wait, wait... We're getting off track, love," said Mason, trying to divert his wife. "We have a chance here to come in from the cold. Let's concentrate on that."

Angie paused, then nodded. "You're right."

Tonks watched the two of them for a moment. She envied the relationship they seemed to have. But one thing was clear, two of the DMLE's best operatives were coming in from the cold, and she would facilitate that.

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### **Hogwarts Castle (June 12th)...**

The atmosphere in the Chamber of Secrets would always be dank and uncomfortable, but after the work Outcasts had done, it was considerably more cheerful than it had been. It was into this cheerfully dank atmosphere that Harry Potter appeared.

He had made small modifications to the new wards on the castle, which allowed him to move into and out of the room without being detected, but he wanted to keep his use of magic in this room to a minimum. That was why he appeared in the room with two full sized crates, rather than shrinking them before apparating.

Harry waited. It never took long for the ghosts to notice him. A moment later, the Bloody Baron arrived.

Harry bowed briefly. "I received your message, Baron. How can I be of service?"

The Baron stared at him for a moment, then another ghost appeared next to him.

Harry took one look at the new ghost and stumbled back in shock. "Penelope?" he asked in a whisper.

Penelope Clearwater smiled softly. "Do not mourn me or my passing, Harry. My life ended when the man I loved fell in love with power."

Harry nodded, but he couldn't stop the tears that slid down his cheeks. He had never known Penelope well, but seeing her now, in such a state, hurt.

"The Dark Lord is using a vile ritual to steal power. The power is transferred from one person to another, killing the witch or wizard in the process," she said, then her expression grew sad. "Such was my fate, as Walden McNair took my power and my life. Severus Snape is held in the castle, and is brewing the potions for this obscene rite.

As Penelope described the process, Harry grew more and more horrified. Finally he waved her to silence. "Baron... you were right to ask for me to come here and hear this first hand. I... I don't know what to say at the moment, but I will be back in a day or so. The crates contain more toys for Peeves."

Harry bowed quickly to the Baron, then threw an apologetic look at Penelope before vanishing from sight.

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### **Padfoot Manor...**

Hermione and Emma looked up from the table when the door to the room burst open and Harry rushed past them and into the bathroom. The two were in the sitting room, off the master bedroom, and had been discussing handfasting plans and what Hermione would be wearing.

Hermione stood when she heard the sound of Harry retching. She started towards the bathroom, but Emma stopped her.

"Wait a moment, then go to him." she said softly.

A moment later the toilet flushed and both felt the Brotherhood medallions they wore vibrate, signaling an urgent meeting.

Dan walked into the bedroom holding his medallion and looking at the two women curiously.

The door to the bathroom opened and Harry stepped out. Dobby appeared and Harry whispered something to him. The elf's eyes widened and he nodded quickly before vanishing. He appeared a moment later with a full bottle of Fire Whiskey and a tray of glasses.

Hermione took one step towards him. "Harry?" she asked in alarm.

He held up a hand, silencing her, and accepted the glass from Dobby with a trembling hand. Downing the drink in a single swallow, he sat at the table and rubbed a hand across his mouth.

Harry, you're frightening me," whispered Hermione.

He looked up and smiled weakly at her, then reached for her hand. "I'm sorry, love," he said in a soft voice. "I'm pretty frightened myself right now. Please, just wait until everyone gets here and I'll explain what is going on. I don't want to have to say this twice if I can help it."

His eyes begged her for a reprieve. He obviously only wanted to explain this once. One by one, the Brotherhood members filed into Harry's bedroom. Hermione took to conjuring chairs for everyone instead of pressing him for details. Among the last to enter were Luna, Ginny and Eocho.

Luna, more perceptive than most, took one look at Harry and then spun into Draco's arms, crying softly.

"Everyone's here, Harry," Hermione told him softly.

Harry nodded and began to speak without looking at anyone.

"I received a message from the Bloody Baron today, asking me to meet with him. He had information that he felt was important enough to risk my apparating to the Chamber of Secrets. When I arrived, I met a new Hogwarts ghost. It was Penelope Clearwater. Do you remember her? The Ravenclaw prefect who used to date Percy Weasley?"

Ginny moved closer to Neville and he wrapped an arm around her protectively.

"Apparently, Voldemort is using a ritual which transfers the powers from one witch or wizard to another. The ritual kills its victim, painfully. The end result is a stronger, more powerful witch or wizard and a corpse. Penelope told me that Voldemort has Snape and another Potions Master brewing the potions for this ritual. Draco, remember that we wanted to know what those Cauldrons of Chaos were for? Well, this is it. The Cauldrons are needed because one of the potions is so volatile it would cause any lesser cauldron to explode.

"The only good news I can see in this awful mess is that a person can undergo the rite only twenty times, with two weeks between each ritual. The bad news is that Snape is brewing the potions for Voldemort, and another Potions Master is making them for members of his inner circle, but they aren't being brewed in Hogwarts."

Harry stopped speaking and sagged slightly in his chair.

Hermione took the half full glass of fire whiskey he held and swallowed it quickly. Several others moved to pour themselves a drink. Dan and Emma were the only ones who didn't seem to understand the disgusting nature of the ritual.

"I don't understand why this upsets everyone so much. Yes, it's cruel and disgusting, but how is this different than the hundreds who are starving everyday in Britain right now? Why is everyone so upset?" Emma asked plaintively.

Hermione looked over at her mother. "Mum... a ghost isn't the person's soul. It's more like a recording of a personality. When Penelope had her magic ripped from her, what made her the person she was, her soul, was destroyed."

"There is a belief that our magic is tied to our soul, Emma," Remus said in a quiet voice. "To destroy one, destroys the other. Penelope was not only killed, she was destroyed, denying her an afterlife."

Dan looked shocked and Emma shivered violently. The two were still coming to grips with the changes Harry had awoken in them, and the new world they now belonged to. In some ways, their Christian beliefs conflicted with the Wizarding world. But being told that an immortal soul had been destroyed? It not only shook the foundations of their belief, but they both began to realize that evil, true evil, did have a name: Voldemort.

There was another moment of silence, then Remus released the breath he hadn't realized he was holding. "Well, that explains that. At least now we know."

Harry looked at him sharply. "Know what? Explains what? Remus, we have to find a way to stop this!"

"No, Harry, we need to let this continue," Remus replied sadly.

Harry surged to his feet and face Remus. "What? Are you insane? He's destroying people, Remus! He's stealing their magic, killing them as painfully as possible, destroying their very souls, and you expect me to sit here and do nothing?"

Remus placed a hand on Harry's shoulder and closed his eyes, trying to block out the pain and outrage in the younger man's gaze. "You don't have a choice, Harry," he said quietly. Opening his eyes, he shook his head. "Remember the prophecy conflict? Voldemort had to find a way to either bring his power level up to yours, or bring yours down to his. If we put a stop to this, the war will go on until he finds another obscene way of equalizing power levels. Frankly, I'm more concerned about his inner circle getting boosted than I am about Voldemort getting boosted. That will make the fight all the more difficult.

"I don't like this, Harry. I fully plan on getting myself quite drunk tonight. But I don't think we can stop it. I'm not even sure we'd be allowed to interfere. This has to happen," Remus said, his eyes haunted.

Harry stared at his friend for a minute before nodding in defeat and turning away from Remus.

"How can we be expected to go up against wizards who are so powerful?" asked Terry, worriedly.

"Guile and intelligence," Eocho said softly, and everyone turned to face him.

"When an enemy relies on brute strength, you must be smarter than him. That your foe may be stronger doesn't necessarily mean he is a better or

more intelligent fighter. I know of this ritual that you speak of. It is evil magic at its worst. But even with its use, your enemy will have to rely on the combined strengths of himself and his inner circle to match that of the Maglios. And therein lies our advantage. The Maglios is not just a wizard, he is an enchanter.”

Several people looked confused.

“Of course!” Draco exclaimed, and all eyes swung to him sharply. “Harry can enchant objects at his power level. We’ve all been learning the rune stone magic. But if Harry were to make the stones, rather than someone like Mr. Granger, who is also an enchanter, the rune stones would be much stronger! That would mean we’d be able to cast at least the rune stone magic at Harry’s level of power.”

Echo nodded at Draco and smiled slightly. Several others in the room relaxed as they thought about the solution. Luna, who had been holding onto Draco, brightened.

“Voldemort isn’t exactly known for recruiting the best wizards. McNair, and people like him, will be so enthralled over their own power boost that they’ll consider fight training to be a waste of time,” murmured Remus reflectively.

“We’re going to need to try to find out who is in Voldemort’s inner circle,” Dan suggested. He glanced at Draco, who nodded and pulled out a small pad to make a note to himself.

“We need more than names. We need to find out as much as possible about them,” Draco said, mostly to himself.

Throughout the conversation Harry had backed himself up against a wall. He was having difficulty coming to grips with the idea that he had no choice but to let this abomination go unchecked.

“Voldemort wouldn’t risk letting anyone in his inner circle becoming as powerful as he was, would he?” asked Hermione, her eyes on Harry.

“I don’t think so,” replied Dan. “Voldemort has all the symptoms of being a megalomaniac. He’ll let his people get boosted, but no where near to his level.”

Hermione walked over to Harry. She was concerned about his reaction to the ritual.

“Harry?” she said softly. His eyes looked haunted. The situation was much like the one they’d faced last year, when the prophecies said they had to leave Britain.

He leaned his head down so that his forehead touched her head and placed his hands on her waist. “I’ll be alright,” he whispered to her. “It’s just the shock of it. Stealing someone’s magic... and then Penelope... we knew her.”

“Remus is right. If we stop this, even more people will die,” she replied quietly.

Harry sighed, and kissed her forehead. “I know,” he said, then turned to the others.

“Draco, we need to find out all we can about this ritual, it’s limitations and what it does. I also want to know who is part of Voldemort’s inner circle. See if you can get our elves to pry information from elves still attached to families in Britain. Echo is correct. If we’re going to go up against stronger opponents, we need to do something unusual.

“Ginny, get together with Fred and George. Talk to them about things we can do that will be lethal and fast. If we have to fight these people, we’re not going to resort to jelly legs jinxes and the like. I want them taken down permanently. I don’t want a single one of us to have to go into an extended duel with an opponent that strong.”

“Draco, brief Miles about this. He needs to know in case one of the teams runs across a boosted inner circle member.”

As Harry talked, he straightened up, discarding the defeated feeling he’d had since returning from Hogwarts.

As a group, everyone recognized the commands of the leader of the Brotherhood and they slowly filed from the room to consider various options.

Remus, Hermione, her parents and Echo looked at him after the others had left.

“Oh, I’m alright now. I don’t like what I have to do, but I’ll do it. Besides, I have Hermione here to kick me when I start feeling sorry for myself,” Harry said with a lopsided grin, though it didn’t quite reach his eyes.

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## **Under The Broken Wand, Armagh, Northern Ireland...**

Tonks leaned back in the comfortable chair and sipped her tea. *This has to be the easiest undercover assignment I’ve ever had*, she mused. She had no idea going into this assignment that Mason, along with his wife, Angie, were DMLE operators who had been cut adrift when the government fell. Once that had been established, she had spent many a comfortable hour talking with Angie, while Mason had the members of his syndicate locating the hiding hole of the Death Eaters.

Angie was surprised to learn that Tonks had become engaged, let alone to a former werewolf, and was now one of the leading citizens of Haven. Lupin’s werewolf status was common knowledge, even to Angie, and Tonks had to explain how it had been altered, making him the first werewolf animagus on record. That revelation led to a discussion about Remus and Harry.

“Is it true he survived another killing curse, Tonks?” asked Angie.

Tonks was a bit surprised to discover that Angie, for all her hard headed pragmatism, was just a bit of a Harry Potter fan girl. "Yes. One of his dorm mates was a Death Eater. He hit Harry with the curse just before Harry destroyed the Ministry. It was the same day as the Bombing," Tonks replied with a slight shiver. She remembered that day well. The fear and the sickening realization that events were in motion that no one could control.

Angie nodded reflectively. The Bombing had become a signature event in the life of wizarding Britain and Ireland. Ask someone of the older generations where they were when Grindelwald fell, and they would tell you, in exacting detail, not only where they were, but what they had been doing. It was the same with the Bombing.

"Yes, I remember," Angie said softly as she, too, shivered.

"Harry doesn't like to talk about that much, or talk about his fame at all. Remember that when you meet him and don't bring that up. He'll be more interested in hearing about what you have been doing, both before and after the government fell, than talking about himself. He's a right modest bloke, when you get down to it. He doesn't think he's anything special at all."

"Mason is like that," Angie offered. "He's a mean fighter, one of the best I've ever seen. But unless he's out there..." she trailed off.

Tonks knew what she meant. Mason had two sides, one which he showed to Angie, and to Tonks since she was staying with them. And the side he had developed as part of his undercover persona. Two totally different personalities.

"Tonks, I'm confused about something. This ward that's been placed around mainland Britain. You say you helped Harry do it?"

Tonks sighed, then realized that it was better that Angie was asking her, rather than asking Harry about it. "We performed a power sharing ritual. Even Harry doesn't have enough power to do something like that himself."

Angie nodded, her expression a bit wistful. Most modern wizards and witches had never performed in any ritual, or joined magic. It was something out of a nostalgic past and hearing about it made many wish for a time where people trusted each other enough to share power, or join each other in a rite.

"Is he really that powerful?"

Tonks was about to answer when the door opened and Mason entered, carrying a scroll and wearing a broad smile. "I knew it wouldn't take too long to track them down for you, Tonks," he said, handing her the scroll.

Unrolling the scroll revealed a map with a large farm estate circled. Tonks looked up from the map, an eyebrow raised in question.

"According to my sources, this estate was nearly deserted three months ago. Then the number of people living there increased dramatically. It's only a guess, but I'd say there must be close to one hundred and fifty people living there now."

Tonks blinked in surprise. "How did you find out how many are now living there?" she demanded.

Mason smirked. "One of the things my syndicate controls is dairy production and deliveries, Tonks, for all of Northern Ireland," he gloated.

"Milk deliveries?" Tonks asked incredulously.

Angie's eyes twinkled. "Mason and I had an agreement. Before I married him, I made him get rid of the usual crime syndicate stuff like drugs and prostitution. So, he opted to try his hand at controlling certain key industries instead and left the drugs and prostitution to the other gangs. You can't buy a liter of milk or a piece of cheese in Northern Ireland without it having passed through Mason's hands. The same goes for fuel oil and liquor distribution," she said proudly.

Tonks raised an eyebrow and looked at Mason, reassessing him yet again. Mason looked embarrassed by her scrutiny and shot his wife a glare for her bragging. Tonks snickered and turned back to the map, looking it over.

"Tonks, you know the Irish can't hit this place, don't you?" asked Mason seriously.

Tonks looked up at him, then her expression changed. She sagged in her chair as Mason's comment sunk in. He was right. The Republic of Ireland couldn't hit this place. She rolled up the map and looked at the two. "Can you get away for a day or two?" she asked.

Receiving nods from both, Tonks smiled impishly. "Good. Tomorrow we're bringing you in from the cold."

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### **Padfoot Manor, (June 16th)...**

Harry stepped out of the manor house and stretched in the morning sun. It was only five thirty A.M., but he was awake and starting his day with a morning walk. It had become part of his early morning ritual. He could no longer jog the grounds, so he walked them instead, leaving peanuts for Nutters and his friends. After his walk, he'd swim for awhile before returning to the manor to have breakfast and start his work day. He had invited Hermione to join him on a number of occasions but she declined. She seemed to think that five thirty A.M. was an unreasonable hour to be out and about.

He shook his head in amusement. Hermione wasn't the most active of people, especially if one handed her a book. Her idea of enjoyment was sitting out in the sun, reading. Although Harry had made progress in changing her mind about that, he still hadn't convinced her that an early morning walk was a good idea.

After completing his morning Ti Chi sets, he turned to begin the exercises he used to stretch his leg muscles. In a way, he was glad Hermione wasn't there to witness how painful he found these particular exercises. He stopped when he heard a pair of pops behind him. Turning, he found Dobby and Pappy watching him.

Dobby's eyes held possessive pride as he gazed at Harry, while Pappy tugged on his ears nervously.

"Dobby? Pappy? Is there a problem?" Harry asked.

Dobby shook his head, but Pappy jumped right in. "No problem, good Master Potter. We, that is, us elves, wishes to make the bond, if that be alright with you."

Harry's eyes widened. "Now? Here?"

Pappy nodded vigorously.

Harry sighed in acceptance and the back yard of the manor was suddenly filled with the sound of arriving elves. As he watched, the field became packed with elves. It was an impressive sight.

Dobby walked over to stand beside Harry and he gently tugged on Harry's hand.

Harry turned his attention back to Pappy and the elves nearest him. Pappy straightened up and his ears stood straight out from his head. As one, the elves behind Pappy knelt on one knee.

Pappy walked forward slowly and he knelt before Harry. With both hands, he gripped Harry's right hand in his own and pressed it to his forehead. There was a ripple in the field of elves and a sudden roaring sound in Harry's ears. He swayed as the bonding of so many elves nearly overwhelmed his senses. He tried to protest. They were supposed to bond to Haven, not to him personally! He failed to understand that he personified Haven, just as the Headmistress personified the school.

When Pappy released his hand, Harry staggered backwards. He would have fallen had it not been for Dobby's magic catching him and holding him upright long enough to get his feet under him again. From the elves came a great cry of joy that shook the nearby trees, sending birds winging away in panic.

Harry looked around in bewilderment as the elves started to leave the clearing, heading off for their daily chores. He turned to see quite a few of the windows in the manor open and people leaning out to watch.

Remus watched Harry, the amusement plainly evident on his face, while Hermione frowned at him.

Harry looked ruefully at Dobby after seeing Hermione's expression. "I'm in so much trouble," he murmured. Dobby nodded and his ears drooped noticeably.

Hermione pulled her head out of the window when she felt someone tugging on her nightshirt. Turning, she was surprised to find Winky staring up at her and tapping one foot.

"Miss Hermione, please tell me you're not angry with Master Harry," Winky asked in a stern tone.

Since Hermione had bonded personally to Winky, the elf had become more assertive. While Hermione didn't think this was necessarily a bad thing, there were occasions when Winky's assertiveness seemed a little out of place.

"Winky, you saw what Harry just did out there," Hermione said, pointing out the window.

Winky walked over to the dresser and started pulling Hermione's clothes for the day out. "Yes, Missie, Winky saw Master Harry save the lives of many elves. They not bond with Master Harry, but used him to bond to this place," she replied with a shrug.

"Winky just doesn't understand, Missie. You know the elves will get sick without a master. Even Dobby would be happier bonded to Master Harry. But you shouldn't be angry with Master Harry. He didn't do anything to deserve being angry about," Winky scolded as she placed clothing on the bed.

Hermione sighed and nodded in agreement. "I know, Winky, but it's a habit. I hate the idea of you being enslaved," she said, beginning to dress.

Winky shook her head in amusement. "I know Missie hates elves bonding, yet her own bonding is even harder."

Hermione stared at the little elf in shock. "My own bonding?"

"Miss Hermione loves Master Harry. Master Harry would do anything Miss Hermione asks of him, as Miss Hermione would do for him. We all live with bonds of some kind, Miss Hermione. And all we can do is pray we bond with a gentle soul, like you and Master Harry. He is a kindly master. He loves Dobby, even loves Winky. He greatly loves you, Miss Hermione," Winky said in a serious tone while she set about making the bed.

"But...but... but it isn't like that," protested Hermione.

"Winky thinks it is. But if it makes you feel better, you can think differently," Winky said smugly as she smoothed the bedspread.

Hermione sat down on a nearby armchair and stared out the window, thinking. Winky had disarmed her with elf logic, and not for the first time.

## **Armagh, Northern Ireland...**

The eagle owl slowly flapped its wings while on the last legs of its long journey. Hitting a thermal current, the majestic bird relaxed and let the current lift it high above the landscape. Thanks to its keen eyesight, the large bird spotted the destination and began a slow spiraling glide towards an open window in the farm house far below.

Dolohov looked up from the letter he was writing as the large bird flew in and landed gracefully on the table. The bird had a small pouch around its neck contained dispatches. He removed the pouch and immediately started looking through the notes to see if there was anything which required immediate attention.

One item in particular caught his attention.

*Dolohov,*

*The Master is sending you help. You are directed to send ten loyal men to Portmuck on Island Magee within the next five days. Be sure that the men are capable of working around Dementors. The contacts name will be Tarmash. Inform me when you have sent the men and make sure they are equipped to spend months away from Armagh.*

*Lucius*

Dolohov rose from his chair. He knew a command from the Master when he saw one and, despite the fact that it came through Lucius, he wasn't about to ignore it. He quickly gathered the necessary men and sent them on their way before sitting down to reply.

*Lucius,*

*As instructed I have sent off ten loyal men to Portmuck.*

*If at all possible, please convey to the Master that we are running dreadfully short of funds here. There is a local Gringotts branch up in Belfast we can access, or another on Stonewall Lane in Dublin. But we haven't any account access. If things do not change, we will be forced to resorting to larceny in order to finance our operations. While theft has never bothered me, it will increase our exposure.*

*I am enclosing copies of the Dublin Daily, which I doubt you've seen. I am sure the Master will be most interested in them. I was correct in my assessment that a great number of refugees had fled to Ireland. It seems that Harry Potter has created a town for them, which he named 'Haven'.*

*Potter has also overseen the formation of a British Ministry of Magic in Exile. According to the articles in the Dublin Daily, it has been recognized by the official muggle British Ministry in Exile. I do not have any way of getting into the town at the moment. I don't pretend to understand the political aspects of this.*

*I have confirmed the presence of a ward around the town of Haven, similar to one that now encircles mainland Britain. I sent a mixed team of loyalists and recruits to scout out Haven, but the loyalist leading the team was killed crossing the line and a recruit was captured. This ward makes it impossible for me to send any kind of mission to that town using loyal, marked followers. I could rely on unmarked followers, but their loyalty is questionable at best, and they are not even remotely close to being properly trained.*

*Please inform the Master of our activities and pass along my request for additional instructions. Your letter suggests the help he is sending might be capable of breaching the wards around Haven. If that turns out to be the case, we will attack as soon as I can get the recruits trained up.*

*Antonin Dolohov*

With the reply complete, Dolohov placed the note and several old newspapers into the dispatch pouch and put it back on the owl.

The owl shot him a dirty look before leaping into the air and flying out the window for its long journey home.

Dolohov watched the bird until it dwindle into the distance. Then he stood, coming to a decision. His appeal for funding was more dire than he wanted Lucius to believe. He had very limited funding to start with, and paying for the food for nearly a hundred and fifty men was quickly eroding what he had. No, starting tomorrow he'd begin scattering his men about Ireland with orders to resort to crime to pay for their keep.

Dolohov walked to the door. He had plans to put in motion.

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## **Government House, Haven (Later that day)...**

"Minister?"

Amelia looked up to see Arthur Weasley's head sticking out of her fireplace. "Yes, Arthur?" she replied with a bit of a smile. She hadn't spent a lot of time working with Arthur before the fall of the Government, and his involvement in the crimes against Harry predisposed her to be wary of him.

But Harry had vouched for Arthur Weasley and she had come to discover he was a very hard working man. If he had a flaw, she could only say it had to be that he'd let himself and his family get caught in Dumbledore's web of lies.

"Minister, we've received notice from the Irish that Nymphadora Tonks is returning from the field and should be arriving shortly.. The notice went on

to say that she asks that Miles and yourself be present for a special meeting.” Arthur said seriously.

Amelia frowned. “Very well, Arthur. Contact Miles and ask him to join me here as quickly as he can.”

Amelia straightened up her desk and made sure there was a fresh pot of tea handy. She didn't have long to wait before Miles and Arthur entered her office and the three barely had time to discuss the upcoming meeting when the door opened again, admitting Tonks and Mason and Angela Long. Amelia recognized the two undercover operatives almost instantly and surged to her feet.

“Angie? Mason? We thought you had either gone to ground or were lost to us,” Amelia exclaimed happily.

Mason shook his head and smiled at his old boss. “No, Director. It was more like one day we woke up and found our network had vanished without a word.”

After introducing everyone, Amelia waved the Longs to a pair of seats and looked at Tonks, who had set up this meeting.

“Minister, Mason and Angie were instrumental in getting the information that we, and the Irish, were looking for, but then Mason pointed out one critical fact that I don't think anyone here has realized,” Tonks said, scowling.

Amelia sipped her tea for a moment. “Oh?”

“The Irish can't go after these Death Eaters, Minister. They are on U.K. soil,” Tonks said softly.

The silence in the room was broken only by the hitching breaths of Amelia, Arthur and Miles as the realization set in. Legally, the Irish sending Aurors in to dig out the Death Eaters could be considered an invasion, an act of war.

“I think I have a solution to the problem, Minister,” said Miles, “And it solves a problem that has been bothering me for a while now anyway.”

Amelia motioned for Miles to continue.

“We're looking at roughly one hundred, maybe a hundred and a half, Death Eaters and sympathizers. Why not set up a international task force? I'll send a hundred of our boys, plus another hundred of the American and Canadians. The Irish can send a hundred of their own. The combined force will be double what we're up against and, because we're inviting the Irish to join us, it will be legal.”

“How soon could you ready such a force, Miles?” asked Amelia intently.

Miles leaned back in his chair and looked up at the ceiling for a moment, thinking. “We have part of the force now, Amelia,” he said, his eyes meeting hers once more. “The Americans and Canadians are working with our boys and training to work together. The big issue would be the Irish. I'd want them to work together for at least a week to ten days before sending them in on a mission like this. Coordination and cooperation is critical, otherwise mistakes will happen, mistakes that could cost lives.”

Amelia nodded. She understood the complexity of running an operation such as this. “Arthur, can you meet with the Irish as soon as possible and let them know of the problem? Then invite them to join with us in a joint effort to clean up that nest of snake lovers.”

Arthur nodded and made a quick note on the pad he'd taken to carrying with him.

“Mason, you and Angie go along with Miles to the operation center. We need to figure out if it pays to keep you in place and rebuild the network or bring you in completely. Tonks, I want to thank you for your efforts. You achieved your mission, reestablished contact with valuable lost assets and did it all without getting injured.”

Tonks nodded and gave her friend an encouraging grin as Angie followed Miles and Mason from the room. Tonks was about to follow when Amelia stopped her.

“Auror Tonks, one moment more please,” Amelia said.

Tonks sighed and reluctantly shut the door. Turning back, she faced both Arthur and Amelia. “Minister?”

“I am quite serious about our thanks, Miss Tonks,” Minister Bones said in a formal tone. “Your contribution in locating the Death Eater cell will be duly noted in your file, along with a commendation signed by myself. But since you're here, I have one item that I would like to bring up with you.”

Tonks took one of the vacant seats and looked at Amelia curiously.

“I find myself in new territory and wish an opinion. As you know, I was Director of MLE for a number of years and during that time none of our operatives had the right to use deadly force, except in a case of either saving their own life or that of others.”

Amelia lifted a parchment and waved it at Tonks. “I have here a request from Miles and Harry, asking that the rules for deadly force be relaxed. And I have to admit I find it disturbing.”

Tonks frowned and leaned further back in her chair. “Minister, I'm an Auror. I was trained to catch criminals and put them in prison during peacetime. But this isn't a time of peace.

“Miles, while he won't admit it, was high up in the Unspeakable department. Judging from the way he fights, I'd say he participated in more than a few wet operations.

Harry is a warrior, not a keeper of the peace. When he fights, he doesn't take prisoners unless they are no longer a threat to him or others.

Both of these men, and yes, I will call Harry a man, have come to realize that this isn't a case of arresting some criminal. It's war and war means fighting by a different set of rules.

"Neither of them are asking for this rule change because they are blood thirsty killers. They are asking that we give our people a better chance of coming home to their families. I was trained to be a cop, to use a muggle term. Harry and Miles weren't. We must remember that, no matter how upsetting we may find it, we are at war. And as with any war, you shoot to kill," Tonks said, her voice laced with conviction.

Arthur nodded approvingly. "I have to agree with Tonks, Amelia. It's a necessary step, no matter how distasteful you might think it."

Amelia relaxed in her chair and cleaned her monocle for a moment. "Very well. Arthur, have Miles draft a change of procedure and I'll approve it. Tonks, I appreciate your input. I ask because you know Harry enough to see his reasoning behind his request."

Arthur took the parchment Amelia offered and made a note on the back of it before rolling it up again.

Tonks stood from her chair. "He just wants our people to come home to their families at night, Minister. He'll ask for anything that will help accomplish that."

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### **Padfoot Manor (June 20th)...**

Dan and Emma were enjoying their afternoon lesson with Harry. He was teaching them the basics of Defense Against the Dark Arts, as well as defense against magical creatures. It was a class that both the Grangers found surprisingly enjoyable. Harry didn't expect either of them to actually go into combat in mainland Britain like some of the younger members of their group, but he wanted to make sure they were capable of defending themselves.

To reach that point, Harry had started teaching them Ti Chi to strengthen and center them, as well as give them the meditative skills they'd need for some of the other disciplines they would learn.

"The Patronus charm is the only known defense against Dementors and Lethifolds, and I'm afraid as far as charms go, its not really a very good spell," Harry said ,while facing the Grangers.

"The Patronus is very hard to cast, and it will only drive off a Dementor or Lethifold, it won't kill it. It won't even injure it. On the plus side, a Dementor that's been driven off will rarely turn around and come back to attack again.

"The Patronus is difficult for a number of reasons. The primary reason being the total focus of the caster's mind on a happy memory. You must exclude everything that's happening around you and think only of that one, happy memory. Many wizards and witches fail to cast a Patronus because they're unable to find a memory happy enough. Those who can find a memory find themselves unable to focus on it to the point of ignoring the approaching Dementor while casting the spell."

Harry showed both of them the wand movement, and had them practice for a few minutes.

"Remember, there is no shame if you can't do this right. It took me months to learn how to do it properly. And when you've done it right and have a corporeal patronus, it doesn't matter what form or size it takes. Now, let me show you," he told them. He stood and turned sideways to them so they could see his wand movement.

He summoned up his happiest memory - Hermione telling him that she loved him. He smiled and whipped his wand forward.

"*Expecto Patronum !*" he shouted.

His wand spat out a great shower of silver mist, which formed into a giant stag. Prongs leapt forward, passing through the wall. Even Harry was impressed by the size of Prongs. The stag had grown to over twelve feet tall. He hadn't had to cast a Patronus in quite a while and apparently he had only gotten better at it.

Harry turned to look at Dan and Emma. "Emma, would you like to try?"

Nodding, Emma eagerly stood from her chair. "*Expecto Patronum !*" she shouted. Her wand spit out a silver mist, but it failed to turn into a corporeal form.

Emma looked at Harry, who nodded encouragingly. "That's really quite good for a first attempt, Emma. Most people don't even get the mist on the first try. Now, I think you need to consider using another memory to refine your feelings. Remember, you must use the memory that makes you happy when you recall it."

"Can I ask what memory you used, Harry?" Dan asked.

Harry blushed.

"Dan, don't embarrass him," chided Emma, "It's probably really personal and involves our daughter."

Harry looked between the two and, if it were possible, he blushed harder. "No... no... it wasn't like that. I used the memory of when Hermione first told me she loves me. That was months before we started um..."



Harry ducked his head and blushed even harder while Dan and Emma exchanged an amused glance. Dan stood while Harry was distracted. Harry's comment gave him an idea.

"*Expecto Patronum!*" Dan shouted.

Dan's wand spat out a great deal of silver mist, which then coalesced into a small rabbit.

Harry gaped at the little bunny glowing on the floor. Emma snickered at her husband. Dan straightened himself up to his full height and looked at Emma with a haughty expression.

"It's not the creature that matters," Dan said with a straight face, then he looked down at the glowing rabbit with a mournful expression.

Harry nodded in agreement. Privately he was not only surprised, but astounded that Dan could create such a powerful Patronus on his first attempt.

"Maybe I should get you some carrots?" offered Emma. Then she broke down laughing.

"No, no, this is really very good, Emma," Harry said with a straight face. "This is a very hard spell to cast, and Dan is right. It's not the form of the Patronus that matters." He tilted his head and examined the fuzzy little creature staring up at them. "Although, from the look of it, perhaps this is the bunny from that Holy Grail movie we watched the other night?"

Dan frowned and examined his Patronus more carefully, while Emma slid from her seat, laughing.

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### **Haven Apparation Point...**

"Name?" asked the bored guard.

"Rufus Radagast," said the old man, dressed entirely in brown.

The guard made a note in his book and then handed the man a small map.

"Welcome to Haven. You are only a short distance from town. If you're looking to open a business, you need to visit the Economic Office in the town hall, which is in the center of town. The Ministry building is next door to the hall if you have business with the Ministry of Magic. Please remember that all Irish laws are enforced. May you have a pleasant stay in Haven."

Radagast nodded pleasantly at the man and took the offered map, then turned and walked up the lane towards the town.

The guard made another note in his book and walked back into the small, one room office that had been set up to keep track of people entering Haven.

The process of opening a new pub in Haven was surprisingly easy. The Economic Office went out of their way to make things as simple as possible. By the time he left the office two hours later, he had a five year lease on the building he wanted and a shipper of pub supplies and drinks would be delivering samples for him to examine tomorrow. All in all, it was surprisingly easy.

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### **Padfoot Manor (June 28th)...**

Hermione woke when someone passed between her and the sunshine that was streaming in from the window. Blinking in the bright light, she could see Harry staring out the window.

"Harry?"

"I'm sorry. I didn't mean wake you."

"What are you doing?"

"Thinking mostly and worrying," he replied in a soft tone.

"Worrying? What's going on, Harry?" she asked, sitting up in bed and reaching for her robe.

"Caleb is leading the assault on those Death Eaters up north today. Three hundred fighters. Our people, Hermione. So many things can go wrong. I should be there with them."

"Harry, we've been through this before. I know you hate sending people off to fight, but it's your job to lead, not to take part in every battle we have to face," Hermione said in an annoyed tone.

"I know that. It doesn't mean I have to like it!" Harry snapped, then he frowned and ran a nervous hand through his hair.

"Look, Hermione, I'm sorry I snapped at you. I just can't get it out of my head that later today we may have people learning that they have a family member who won't be coming home again. Imagine how you would feel if you were in that position," he said softly.

Hermione joined him at the window and wrapped her arms around him, pulling him tight to her.

I know, love. It's a terrible burden, but trust Miles and Caleb to know their jobs," she whispered, hugging him.

Harry nodded and continued to stare out the window.

## Armagh, Northern Ireland...

Caleb sat huddled in the early morning rain and wondered for the tenth time why he hadn't become a healer like his mother wanted him to. Next to him, one of the Fairy Flier operators controlled the remote device. The floating hoop in front of them showed them what the Fairy was seeing and hearing. Which, at the moment, wasn't very much. The Fairy was positioned outside and looking in one of the farm house windows. As far as they could see, the room was empty. In fact, it looked like the entire farm house was nearly deserted.

Caleb's heart fell. The Death Eaters had fled while they were busy training the force!

Another man sprinted towards him, bent over and trying to maintain a low profile. He skidded to a halt and knelt down.

"Caleb, we found them. Send your Flier over to the barn," said the man breathlessly.

Caleb nodded to the operator, who swung the Flier around and moved it towards the barn.

"Look for the storm cellar entrance. It's against the eastern wall. You'll find an open entrance," the man told the operator.

Within moments, the Flier was peering into the darkened entrance of what appeared to be a large underground tunnel lit by torches.

Caleb leaned back on his knees and grinned. He turned to other man. "Excellent work. Send out the ward teams. I want those wards in place now. Once that's done, pass the word. We move in five."

The man nodded and sprinted away. Caleb watched him for a moment, then turned back to his Flier operator. "Take us into the tunnel. Let's see what we're dealing with."

The image changed as the Flier dropped into the tunnel entrance and moved further in. There was a long row of doors, all of which were closed. Caleb cursed and wished again that the fliers made by Q Branch had the ability to manipulate objects. Caleb glanced up to see teams of Aurors moving closer. He nodded approvingly to one of his team leaders as the group ghosted past his position, making almost no noise. Then he heard a funny shout.

Caleb turned back to the display for the Flier in time to see the Flier trying to back out of an open door. There was an inarticulate shout from the display hoop, a flash of light, and then the image went dark. The Flier had been spotted and destroyed.

"Shit!" muttered the operator, who looked at Caleb apologetically.

Caleb reached into a bag and pulled out a muggle flare gun. He fired it and then stood for a clear look at the farm in the distance.

"AURORS!" came a distant yell.

"Go, go, go!" shouted a nearby team leader.

All around the farm, teams of Aurors, British, Irish, American and Canadian, surged to their feet and ran towards the farm. Caleb could see men boiling up from several entrances around the farm house and other buildings and he cursed wildly. This was turning into a major screw up!

The Death Eaters set up a hasty defensive line protecting the entrances to the underground complex, while the Aurors moved closer.

A man ran by Caleb, running parallel to the farm house. He shot Caleb a thumbs up as he ran by. Caleb breathed a sigh of relief, the anti-portkey and anti-apparation wards were in place, the Death Eaters weren't going to escape that easily.

Caleb watched as his teams closed to within one hundred yards of the buildings, then everyone dove for cover as the Death Eaters started firing curses at anything that moved.

Caleb rushed forward to support his people. With the wards up, they had the Death Eaters surrounded, but they weren't going to give up without a fight.

Caleb winced when he heard someone scream. Up and down the line he could hear cries calling for the healers they had brought with them. He ducked and rolled to avoid a curse that passed his head by only a few inches.

The farm house itself was now on fire, its smoke obscuring the battle and making it difficult to pick targets. A group of Death Eaters broke from their ranks and ran towards the section of line where Caleb lay. They were receiving plenty of covering fire, which kept the Aurors in front of them from firing back, but elsewhere on the line, other sections were picking off the approaching Death Eaters as best as they could, considering the distance involved.

The wind shifted and smoke from the fire drifted over back over the battlefield in the direction of the breakout. Caleb coughed in the heavy smoke and looked up in surprise as a figure suddenly loomed over him. He surged to his feet and there was a flash of light. He felt his left arm go numb and something warm dripped down the back of his robe.

He snarled and cast a lethal cutting hex, catching the Death Eater just above the hip on a diagonal. The man screamed as his leg separated from

his torso and he fell writhing to the ground as blood from multiple arteries fountained onto the ground.

Several Aurors cast a wind charm, trying to blow the smoke back and Caleb reeled in the murky air. Bright flashes of curse light lit the nearby smoke. Dazed, he stumbled back a few feet and tripped over the body of an American Auror. Several of the reserve squads, consisting mostly of Americans, moved up to his position. He watched as two men assembled something that resembled a muggle machine gun. Once it was complete, it started firing curses at high speed.

A hand landed on his shoulder and Caleb whirled, his wand at the ready.

"Whoa! Easy there, buddy. You're hurt and I need to check you over," said a man Caleb didn't recognize.

"Who? You're American?" Caleb asked in confusion.

The other man nodded as he cut away the sleeve on Caleb's robe. "Yes, Commander. I'm a healer with the 806th, the Animagi Division," replied the Healer in a proud tone. Caleb grunted and let the man work on him. The 806th was just one of the groups representing the American magical military that had been sent to Haven. They also had men from the 102nd Broomsticks and the 5th Sorcerer Infantry.

"What is that thing?" Caleb asked in confusion, nodding towards the strange curse firing mechanism.

"That? It's a prototype. We only have a few with us. It's a RFCG or Rapid Fire Curse Gun. It's enchanted to fire stunning spells, like your *Stupefy*. But it's not perfected yet. Once the gun has exhausted its energy, we have to perform a complicated ritual to recharge it. It's good in forcing your enemy to keep their heads down, however," the healer told him with a chuckle.

The healer frowned and sealed a bad cut along the back of Caleb's head, then he cast an immobilizing charm on his left arm. "You've got a nasty cut on your head and your humerus has been crushed. It will need to be regrown. I'd send you back to the hospital..."

"No, I'm not leaving my men," Caleb said in a cold tone.

"I thought you might feel that way. Drink a sip of this pain killer. It will take the edge off what you're feeling, but leave your mind clear. I expect to see you in the hospital tonight, Commander," the healer said with a shake of his head, then offered him a small vial.

Caleb drank as ordered, then he gathered up his wand and turned back to the battle.

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## **The War Room, Haven Operations Center...**

Miles paced the floor of the war room anxiously. It was bad enough that today was their first large scale operation involving forces from four countries, but he wanted to be with his men. To make matters worse, Minister Bones had arrived to watch the ongoing operation. She was joined shortly afterwards by Harry Potter and Remus Lupin, making Miles feel as though his job had become a spectator sport.

The room had been copied from something used by the RAF during World War Two. There was a large map against one wall. Along the other wall were a series of fireplaces, dedicated floo connections to key places. Next to the map was a blackboard, which someone had sectioned into a grid. One section read 'Ours' and had KIA and WIA with zeros next to them.

Harry, Remus and Amelia took up positions on the observation deck, trying to stay out of the way.

A small bell rang and one of the girls in the room moved over to put up a sign, stating that the forces were engaged.

"Are you sure this is a good idea, Harry?" Remus asked for the tenth time that morning.

Harry grunted and shot Remus a glare for a moment before softening it. "I know Miles probably doesn't appreciate us here, Remus, but I don't think I'll get an ounce of work done today. I'm not here to tell Miles what to do, but I want to know what's going on."

"Here, here," murmured Amelia, then she smiled slightly at the two men.

Harry turned to her. "I'm sorry, Minister. I realize this is really more your job than mine..."

"Nonsense, Mr. Potter," Amelia said gruffly. "It was your actions which resulted in making all of this possible," she replied, waving her hand to indicate the room they were in.

Harry leaned forward, scowling as the numbers on the KIA and WIA columns changed to two and twelve. Amelia's expression tightened as well. Remus gripped Harry's arm.

One of the girls walked over to board and wrote in a new category that read 'Captures'. Under it, she wrote forty two.

Miles glanced at the numbers, then up to the observation deck, expecting someone to say something to him. He was surprised when Amelia and Harry had shown up, but was pleased when they did not interfere with the proceedings. He knew how hard it was for them to remain silent.

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## **Armagh, Northern Ireland...**

Caleb sat on a large stone and looked up at the sky. The morning mist and rains had cleared away finally and it looked like it might turn out to be a decent day after all. He felt a nudge and he turned to see one of his own team members handing him an open canteen. He gratefully accepted it

and drank deeply.

Most of the Death Eaters had been captured or killed. Now his men were mopping up. Several teams had entered the underground complex and were searching it for Death Eaters, as well as anything else of interest. The farm house was a total wash. The building had burned to the ground, along with anyone who might have been inside.

Several men had reported finding caches of dark artifacts and books in the underground complex. Soon, a second team would begin cataloging what they had found.

He winced. The pain potion he had taken two hours earlier was wearing off.

“Caleb?”

He looked up to see one of his men approaching. Caleb waved him over to sit on the rock with him.

“The Irish are starting to move the prisoners out, Caleb,” said the man.

“Why do I hear a 'but' in there somewhere,” Caleb asked with a frown.

“Well, the numbers don't quite match up. Between the bodies and prisoners, we have roughly one hundred and ten Death Eaters.”

Caleb scowled. There should have been more than that. “Are we sure no one escaped?”

The man nodded vigorously. “Yes. The wards would have indicated that. Heck, if someone managed to walk out, the wards would have told us.”

Caleb sighed. “Alright, make a note of the discrepancy and send it back to the Ops Center. What is our final count of casualties?”

The man consulted a piece of parchment. “We have a total of five dead and twenty two seriously wounded, including yourself. The rest of the wounded can be easily healed.”

“I want our wounded off the field as soon as possible. And make sure we bring home every body. No one gets left behind,” Caleb said in a firm voice.

“I'm glad to hear you say that, Commander,” said another voice from behind him. Caleb craned his neck around to see who had spoken. He got a brief glimpse of the American Healer who'd tended his injuries when he felt the tug of a portkey behind his navel.

Several of Caleb's men looked shocked for a moment, then they began to laugh. The healer grinned at them.

“You heard the Commander's orders. I don't know about the rest of you, but I have plans tonight that include a lot of beer, my wife and some serious time in the sack,” the healer said with a grin. Several men laughed and gave him a thumbs up, while a couple female Aurors grinned at each other. They were having similar thoughts.

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## **The War Room, Haven Operations Center...**

Harry couldn't speak for Amelia or Remus, but sitting in the Operations Center unable to do anything was one of the most nerve wracking experiences of his life. It was just before noon when Miles exited the war room and entered the observation deck.

“Minister, our forces are returning from the field. Preliminary reports suggest that we killed or captured over one hundred and ten Death Eaters and recruits. We have twenty two wounded and five killed from our forces,” Miles said in a voice laced with exhaustion.

Amelia nodded slowly. Emotionally, the day had been draining on everyone. Harry hated to think how tired the troops must be. After all, they'd done the hard work.

“And the Irish, Miles? How many did they transfer to the prison?” asked Amelia.

“I'm not sure of the exact number, Minister, but the last count I had was that the Irish had sixty seven prisoners, several of whom were badly injured. The number is bound to change. I don't expect anyone to start any serious interrogations for at least two days. Right now, everyone is just trying to recover. I am pleased and proud of the job our boys did today.”

Amelia nodded in agreement. “Yes, they did an excellent job and are to be commended. The same can be said for you, as well, Miles. You trained these men to work as a group.”

Miles smiled thinly and nodded. “With your permission, Minister, I'll be off now. I want to visit the hospital.”

Miles paused at the door and turned back to Harry. “Now we'll be able to consider your idea, Harry.”

Harry's eyes lit up and he gave Miles a feral smile. “I'll look forward to that one, Miles.”

Miles nodded and left the room. Both Amelia and Remus turned to Harry with inquisitive looks.

“Harry? What idea?” asked Remus.

Harry looked Remus as if distracted. "Hmmm? Oh, Miles suggested a while back that we start hitting back at Voldemort. I suggested we stage a breakout of Azkaban."

"Azkaban!" Remus exclaimed. Amelia grabbed the railing in front of her and paled.

"Think about it, Remus. If we could stage a breakout at Azkaban it would be a huge blow to Voldemort and his ego. But it wouldn't just affect old Dark and Liplless. By breaking into his most secure prison, the world would sit up and realize that the Voldemort is nothing more than a two bit thug and not some invincible monster," Harry said earnestly.

Remus held up his hands. "Wait a second, Harry, slow down. You can't be thinking about just staging a raid on Azkaban."

Harry smirked at the older man. "No, I'm not that dumb, Remus. Miles and I have talked about this a few times. We need to plan this, scout out the area, figure out who we're up against. I'm not repeating my impetuous rush into the Department of Mysteries."

Remus nodded and both he and Amelia breathed a sigh of relief.

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### **Haven, that evening...**

While most of the details of the operation were still secret, the news that the Aurors had carried out a very successful attack resulted in the entire town turning into one giant block party. The Ministry offices closed early and most of the people congregated around the town square, where several bands set up and began playing music. Tables were conjured, food brought out and drinks flowed freely.

Fred and George Weasley had shut down their workshop early, sending everyone out to the party. They were patient enough to know that eventually they'd be hearing just how well some of their inventions worked, or didn't, in the field.

For now, they were content. They sat at the extra large table used by the Johansens, while Olga bustled around, making sure everyone had enough to eat.

Harry's arrival at their table surprised the Johansens greatly. He walked up, holding Hermione's hand, and smiling at the many children. He wore a t-shirt that sent both sets of twins into fits of laughter. It read "Hey Voldemort! Stupidity is not a handicap! Park elsewhere!"

"It's Harry Potter!" squealed little Linda, the three year old.

Olga and Sven both smiled and waved the couple closer.

"Mr. Potter and his pretty Miss, come sit!" shouted Sven over the noise of the crowd.

Harry shook his head and looked regretful for a moment. "I'd like to, Sven, but we can't tonight. I just wanted to stop by and tell Fred, George, Inga and Helga that their hard work paid off and probably saved lives today. Well done, you four!"

When Sven nodded, looking a little disappointed, Harry smiled. "We'll try to get out to see you this weekend, Sven. I wanted to talk to you about the farm anyway," he said, offering an apologetic smile.

Sven nodded his understanding, then turned away as one of the children pulled at his shirtsleeve.

Olga stepped up to Hermione and offered her a large plate of Strudel, then she slipped something into the pocket of the young woman's dress.

As they walked away, Harry nibbled on the Strudel, while Hermione read the note Olga had slipped her. As she did, she blushed deeply.

"So? Are you going to share with me the secret that Mrs. Johansen gave you?" asked Harry, playfully.

"It's... well...", Hermione sighed heavily. "Well if you must know, she gave me her recipe for Strudel and says every bride should know how to feed her man."

Harry blinked in surprise, then stopped. "You know, I don't think I've ever eaten anything you've cooked before."

Hermione laughed weakly and looked at her feet, then she blurted out. "If I can make polyjuice potion, I should be able to cook meals... Don't you think?" she asked weakly.

Harry wrapped an arm around her shoulders. "Oh, absolutely. So long as you avoid the cat hair." When she slapped his arm playfully, he tightened his hold on her. "Besides, if you can't cook, I can."

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### **Author's Notes:**

If you've read our other stories you know that our battle scenes, and especially our final battle scenes, take more than a paragraph or two and that we tend to wallow in blood and gore. We're not generally violent, but we like to put our readers into the battle, so we take care with our details.

We have a lot of things to cover and a lot of places to go in this story. We're mostly finished with the set up sequences, and should be pushing the story forward now as far as the plans to take back mainland Britain. There will still be fluffy moments, but the pace should start to pick up.

All cliffhanger related threats will be forwarded to Bob, as they are his fault! :D

Just for clarification. Dumbledore was not actually IN Haven. During the battle, he was outside the wards, hiding in the trees and trying to figure out what was going on. However, I can tell you, since you should realize it by now, that the wards won't affect old Albus, as he hasn't killed anyone other than a Dark Lord. No matter what Harry and the others think, the old man hasn't actually "gone evil" enough for the wards to hurt him...yet!

As requested, no harm has come to Tonks :D

A reviewer wrote: "next they'll be too powerful and regardless of who wins they'll turn a good portion of the earth uninhabitable and the rest submerged!!" HEY BOB! Did you see this? What a great idea! ~Cackles madly~

We're sorry! Did we forget to introduce Amy? How rude of us. Readers, meet Amy, a young witch working for Q Branch. She helps the twins in testing their products and such. ~Shines a light down the hole Amy is currently residing in~ Wave to the nice folks, Amy. We'll see to it that you're out of there soon.

Yes, Bob realizes that he misspelled "Chapter" in the last update. He would have fixed it, but it would have changed the URL for the file, and we didn't want to do that. That was our excuse. However, now that we've read the reviews, we've come up with a new one. It was actually a form of Elvish, and everyone should really brush up on the language, as we're sure it will probably happen again (Thanks to Kevin, who came up with the Elvish idea!).

Someone's dared us to work our AK Enema into the story. As dares can be so hard to resist, we will point out that, for those of you who may run across a scene employing such a spell and get grossed out by it, you may pummel John for it. You can read his review yourself, folks, so don't blame us! ~Snickers~

As for the mention of rape and other such horrible things, I want to put a reminder in right now. This story, for all its twists, turns and light hearted moments, is a dark tale. War is ugly, brutal and frightening. If that sort of thing disturbs you, either skip those scenes or please stop reading. We won't be offended if you do. While we try not to upset our readers too much, some things are necessary.

Harry's leg: Not going to be fixed, end of story. He has no animagus abilities, and won't in this story. Every powerful man (or woman) has at least one weakness. This is Harry's. If it bothers you that much, you know where the exit is.

Ah yes, Charlie. The Weasley family will deal with him soon enough. Right now, everyone is a little busy with other duties, and only one realizes that there's something a bit off about the lad.

Siryia: We don't mind people borrowing our ideas, and since you credited us in the disclaimer, we have no problems with it and are, in fact, flattered. Of course, naming your first born child after us is always a good way of thanking us. :p

Molly is dead, folks. She was in the Burrow when it burned down, and her ashes were scattered in the wreckage.

Several people seem to think that Snape would kill himself rather than brew those sickening potions for Voldemort. While many understand that Snape, in our story (as well as canon and many fanfics), is an ass, what you need to understand is, beneath everything else, Snape is a coward. What does he want? To survive the war. He never bought into the "savior of the wizarding world" stuff about Harry, as his own hatred of James was too powerful. Now, as a prisoner of Voldemort, he'll do whatever it takes to survive.

James: Bob and I thank you for Charlie's list about Dumbledore. It's very amusing, folks. Go read his review (page one of the reviews for Chapter 7).

To the reviewer offering us cupcakes: You are evil, and must be destroyed. Now discover a way of sending them through the modem, or we will try out the AK Enema on you. Don't make us do it!

As for the Updateless list, yes, Bob knows he's actually recommending them. They're good stories, other than the fact that they've become orphans. But he's also warning folks that they're not completed, and stand a good chance of never being so.

Is Voldemort going to drain Dumbledore in the ritual? While we won't give you a specific answer, we will tell you that Harry would never forgive us if we denied him his chance at the old man.

That's it folks. The Updateless list is next. On a personal note, I just wanted to apologize for the lateness of this chapter (and possibly the next). Those members of our Yahoo group know that I was bitten by a Hobo spider and it wasn't a dry bite. As a result, I have a very painful open wound on my leg. The doctor's put me on antibiotics, but it's going to take time to heal. As such, my writing and editing takes longer.

We hope you enjoyed the chapter!

~Bob and Alyx~

## **Updateless List!!**

Last Chapter we featured Harry Potter and the Mind Mage. Several people told us that the author had continued the story elsewhere. That's wonderful, but we'll ding the author for not removing it from Fanfiction.net. If you're going to abandon a story, or leave it unfinished somewhere. Then delete it from that system!

Additionally several have complained that we haven't put Jeconais into the list because of his very popular 'This Means War' which hasn't seen an update in a long long time. One person even had the gall to claim we didn't put him on the list because he hosts our stories. Not true.

Let's clarify the rules for the Updateless list.

**AN AUTHOR WILL MAKE THE LIST IF HE/SHE HAS (A) AN INCOMPLETE STORY AND (B) HAS PUBLISHED NOTHING FOR THE LAST SIXTY DAYS.**

As a courtesy we check profiles of the authors to make sure they haven't done something silly, like getting themselves sent on an all expense paid vacation to that mideast hotspot, Iraq. Those people are exempt for obvious reasons.

Also, we're pleased to note that 'The Father' has been updated and is no longer on the Updateless list. But we're keeping an eye on the author and watching him. (Evil Glare) We're also pleased to note that others have trembled before the power of the Updateless list and resorted to updating their stories. Kudos to Olaf for an update, you just missed it last time and would have been my victim this chapter.

This chapter's contribution.

“When Nightmares are a good thing.”

<http://www.fanfiction.net/s/1763965/1/>

This is a wonderful story, delightfully angsty and hasn't seen a decent update in a while.

*Bobmin*  
*FanficAuthors.net*



# Sunrise Over Britain

## Chapter 9 - The Pain of Birth

### Standard Disclaimer:

Bob walked out onto the stage then stopped and turned to look at someone offstage.

“What!” He said in exasperation.

“This is not fair, I'm tired of you always writing the disclaimer,” Alyx said with a whine.

Bob placed his hands on his hips. “And what's wrong with the way I write disclaimers?”

“Oh nothing, they are just peachy,” came the flippant reply.

Bob ground his teeth and stared at his pouting wife.

“Well?”

“Nothing!”

Alyx walked onto the stage and glared at Bob.

“Fine! Do you want to write this chapter's disclaimer?” Bob asked in resignation.

Alyx perked up immediately. “Can I?”

Bob nodded and walked away muttering to himself. “I'm going to regret this.”

Alyx stepped back and the stage filled with fluffy decorations. In the distance, across a gently wave lapped lake one could see Hogwarts, its lights shining like a welcoming beacon in the darkness.

Severus Snape stepped onto the stage and moved to the center, admiring the scenery. “I must say, this is far better than anything I've seen before,” he said with a slight bow to Alyx.

“Suck up,” Bob muttered darkly.

Severus looked out over the vast audience and music started to play. In the background behind Snape a herd of Hippogriffs wearing tutus started to dance in a chorus line.

“My delightful hostess,” Snape said silkily, “has invited me here tonight to tell you that neither Bob, nor Alyx, one of my most dearest fans, makes no claim to any rights regarding Harry Potter and the Potter Universe. On a more personal note, I would like to extend my thanks to Alyx for writing this disclaimer as I have been told that had Bob written it, I most likely would have been wearing nothing but a cock ring which is drool rip off from the movie Pump up the Volume.”

Suddenly there was an animal scream and dozens of hippogriffs came crashing down on Snape killing him.

Off to one side Bob could be seen putting away an empty bag of marbles and muttering to himself. “I still think the cock ring idea would have worked.”

“I hate you. You do know that don't you?” Alyx hissed angrily.

“Yes dear.”

“You know? The cock ring idea could work,” Alyx mused thoughtfully.

Bob glared at Alyx. “You just want to see Alan Rickman naked don't you.”

“Of course,” Alyx replied while buffing her nails.

“I hate you!” Bob hissed angrily.

“Yes dear.”

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Sunrise over Britain

**Chapter 9**

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**Padfoot Manor (June 30th)...**

Harry looked at the object on his desk and smiled wanly at his guests. Remus, Hermione, Miles and Amelia sat in their own seats in front of his

desk and all, except Hermione, tried to put up a solid show of support. It hadn't helped any that Dobby had delivered the offending meal, all the while complaining about witches not belonging in his kitchen. Hermione colored, hearing the comment, then her eyes widened slightly seeing the blackened lump of strudel Dobby had delivered to Harry's desk.

Harry looked at the strudel and broke off a piece with his fork.

Remus watched the young witch carefully. When her attention was fixed elsewhere, he banished his strudel along with Amelia's and Miles'. He then smiled and watched as Harry bit into the inedible mass.

"The economy in Haven are really starting to take off, Harry. I know that normally Bill Weasley gives this report, but since he's busy this morning, and as I have some other good news, he asked me to pass along," Remus said in a neutral tone. The aging marauder had been trying, successfully, not to laugh at Harry's plight with the... mis-concocted confection.

Harry looked at Remus gratefully and put his fork down on the plate, then tossed his napkin on top of it. He pretended not to notice Hermione's eyes narrowing.

"Oh? What have you got for me today, Remus?"

"We now have a total of thirty retail businesses open in the town. Bill's successfully brought in a cauldron making company, as well. In other news, I'm pleased to tell you that Granger Publications picked up their first large, school sponsored order. The American Department of Magic has ordered the study guide for all first year students entering their school system. This is a major order and will put Granger Publications firmly on the map. After this, other countries will seriously consider the study guide for their own educational system," Remus explained.

"That is good news. I'm glad to see the town starting to work for itself."

"There was never any doubt of it, in my mind," Amelia told Harry gently.

He turned to look at her in surprise.

"Most of your experience with our world has been negative, Harry. Voldemort, Dumbledore, Snape, attacks and monsters. The average wizard family wants only to have their children grow up happy and healthy. Your parents would have wanted the same thing for you, had they lived. The average wizard or witch may seem strange, but in the end, they're just people. They go to work, they spend time with their families, they laugh and love. You gave them the basics, now they're doing the rest."

Harry seemed to ponder that for a while before nodding. "I guess I do come off as sounding a bit cynical," he mused.

"Now that we have the town business finished, I might as well talk about what is happening on the diplomatic front," Amelia said, adjusting her monocle.

"Miles has the information from the captured Death Eaters, so I won't go into that. The American and Canadian Governments, as well as the Irish, are extremely pleased with our first joint operation. The Americans are talking about making a larger force available to us when we make our push back into Britain. Miles has noted a deficiency in the Aurors we've been getting from elsewhere and is in early planning stages with the Irish to remedy that. Again, I'll leave him to tell you about it.

"Despite the opening of Haven, we're still routing all our owl mail through the Irish for the time being. Apparation coordinates for Haven have been published several times in local magazines and newspapers and we expect to be included in the next Apparation Directory.

"Finally, we've concluded negotiations with the Irish Government concerning the British Ministry here in Haven. When we finally pull out of Haven, our main office building will be set up as commercial space. But the Operations Center has attracted the attention of the Irish Aurory. They would like to take over the facility as either a training center, or as their own operations center."

"We won't need it once we've taken back Britain, so I've no real objections about it," mused Harry.

"Good," Amelia said with a note of relief in her voice. "Technically, the Operations Center is on your land, not part of the land designated for Haven."

Harry blinked at her, then turned to Remus, who grinned and shrugged.

"It's not like you were really using it for anything, Harry," he said.

"No, I guess not. Miles? What information do you have to share today?" Harry asked.

"We've confirmed that Antonin Dolohov was one of the Death Eaters who was killed in the fire at the farm house. One of the bodies bore the Dolohov signet ring, and a forensic wizard has reconstructed enough of the facial features for a positive identification."

Hermione trembled slightly in her chair next to Harry and he casually reached over and touched her shoulder. Dolohov had been the Death Eater who'd wounded her so badly in the Department of Mysteries, more than a year earlier. To Hermione, Dolohov embodied all that was bad about Death Eaters. She wouldn't admit it openly, but the man clearly frightened her. To hear about his death was a release for her.

"From our interrogations, we've determined that some thirty marked Death Eaters were not at the farm during the time of the attack. These thirty remain at large. Apparently, the a group of ten was sent to the coast on some special mission, which no one knows anything about. The remaining twenty had been sent out and scattered, with instructions to scare the locals in their areas and to scavenge what they needed, by robbery if need be, before the attack.

Our Irish friends are much relieved by all this. Thirty Death Eaters is a lot less than the one hundred and fifty they had. And without Dolohov, they are pretty much cut adrift. Dolohov was the key inside man, a member of the inner circle. Without him, they will have no one giving directions and Voldemort can't send them any help, except advice by owl."

Harry nodded thoughtfully and sipped at his tea. "No, I suppose Voldemort can't really send him any help he'd be willing trust. Now, what is this about a deficiency among the Americans and Canadians?"

Miles expression grew disgusted. "We didn't discover it until a day ago, but none of these lads are capable of casting a Patronus."

"Why should that surprise you, Miles?" asked Hermione. "After all, Dementors and Lethifolds are indigenous to the UK, Europe and parts of Asia. There has never been a Dementor or Lethifold sighting in the Americas."

"Oh, I know that Miss, but it also means we have to train them to cast the Patronus. I've made arrangements to start that training near the middle of July. It's just the bother of it all," Miles replied, shaking his head. The Irish Auror academy possessed a Dementor, kept under strict wards, of course, which they used to train their people. Now Miles would have to see that the Americans and Canadians cycled through that same facility.

Hermione shrugged. "It's unfortunate, but not really unexpected, Miles. How many of our boys know the Boone Shot hex? Few, I suspect. The Americans and Canadians are more closely tied to the muggle world than we are, so they've developed a stunner that can be used in muggle public places. It it obviates all who see it as it's traveling to the target. It's a powerful spell, designed for use in urban muggle environments."

Miles looked at Hermione speculatively and made a note in a small book. He wasn't above stealing an idea from someone, if it was worth it, and this sounded worth it.

"Miles, are you planning any sort of memorial service for the men we lost?" asked Harry in a quiet voice.

Miles looked startled for a moment. "I'm not sure, Harry. What did you have in mind?"

"We lost five people, not all of them British. I think we need to honor their memory and let the families know they are not alone in this. I don't have any concrete ideas, but I bet if you talked to Olga Johansen, she probably would. She strikes me as a sound person."

"Harry," Remus interrupted, "I think it's a good idea, but I'm not sure it should fall on Miles' shoulders to organize. How about if I talk to Mrs. Johansen, then fill you and Miles in on the details?"

Miles nodded in appreciation and Harry smiled at the marauder. "If that's what you want to do, Remus. Try to talk to her today, if possible. We have families grieving and I don't want them to think they are alone."

Harry looked around at the people sitting with him. "Is there anything else we need to cover this morning?"

"You're supposed to start enchanting rune stones this afternoon at three. Don't forget that, or Eocho will have your hide pinned to the wall," Hermione told him, smiling.

He winced, but nodded. Enchanting the rune stones was going to be a tedious process... and a tiring one. He was only going to enchant one set, then duplicate them, but there were more than a hundred unique rune stones to create and enchant. And he could only do so many in a single day.

As the others filed out, Hermione lifted the napkin on his strudel and gave him a curious look. Harry looked down at the table for a moment, his hands fumbling with a quill, then he looked up at her again.

"It wasn't a very good first attempt, was it?" she asked in a sad tone.

"Not really," He replied carefully.

Hermione stood abruptly and started to pace. "I don't understand this. I can brew Polyjuice potion and boil remover in my sleep. I can make burn cremes and invisible adhesives. Why can't I cook something as simple as a strudel?"

Hermione paced back and forth, her expression frustrated. Harry watched her for a moment, smiling all the while. Then Hermione spun to face him.

"Are you laughing at me, Harry Potter?" she asked in an angry tone.

Harry shook his head and motioned for her to sit down. "You can make all those things, most of them flawlessly on the first attempt. You didn't do as well with your cooking because your instructions weren't as detailed or as precise as those received before brewing potions. Most recipes call for you to make judgment decisions. For example, I bet Mama's recipe called for it to be in the oven for what? Thirty to forty minutes?"

Hermione frowned. "Yes, that's exactly what she said to leave it in for."

"That figures. Cooking is like that, Hermione. You probably left the strudel in the oven for the maximum time instead of checking it every so often. I know you want to be able to cook for both of us, and ultimately for our children. But this isn't like making potions. If you want, this evening we'll go down to the kitchen and we'll do Mama's recipe again."

Hermione nodded, then her eyes narrowed. "How is it you can cook, but you can't brew a potion to save your life?"

Harry's eyes grew distant. "I suppose if Snape beat me for my mistakes, I might have been motivated, love. It worked for the Dursleys."

Hermione winced and placed a hand over his. "I'm sorry," she whispered.

"Don't be," he replied with a lopsided grin. "I can always cook, if need be."

Hermione smiled and leaned down to kiss him. She knew her question had invoked some bad memories for him, and, as usual, he found a way to laugh them off.

### **Evening, Johansen Farm House (June 30th)...**

Remus and Tonks walked hand in hand up the lane to the Johansens' house. The days were getting longer and the evening was warm. Stepping up to the front door, Remus knocked loudly so he could be heard over the din of the music and singing coming from inside the house.

There was a moment of silence, then what sounded like a small herd of rampaging hippogriffs rushing towards the door. The front door was flung open and six faces stared up at Remus and Tonks. One of the older children ran to get one of the adults, while Remus and Tonks found themselves surrounded and propelled through the door and into the family room.

Olga looked up from a beat up piano she was sitting at and beamed at the pair. "Helga, take my place, while I talk with Mr. Lupin and his pretty lady friend."

"Yes, Mama," replied the young woman, who then sat at the piano and began to play again.

Olga Johansen lead the pair into the kitchen, where she poured them each a cup of tea.

"So, what can I do for you Mr. Lupin?" Olga asked with a smile.

Remus stared into his cup for a moment before looking up at the older woman. "Mrs. Johansen, an issue came up today in one of our meetings and Harry felt you might be able to provide us some help. He was asking Mr. Pickerton about a memorial service for those Aurors we lost in the attack.

"Harry wants the families of the fallen to know they are not alone and need not grieve alone. He seems to think that you've helped others, here in Haven, who've lost family," Remus said in a soft voice.

Olga sat at the table and sipped at her tea. "How we deal with death is almost as important as how we deal with life, Mr. Lupin."

"Remus, please."

"Then you must call me Olga, yes? Now, I have helped a few, Remus, but that's only because I was able to provide what they needed most... someone to talk to. To say goodbye to five brave Aurors, all lost at the same time, is a difficult thing."

The older woman paused, then she slowly smiled. "But I may have an idea. You come with me, hmm?"

Olga stood and grabbed a shawl that was hanging on a hook on the wall. Placing the shawl around her shoulders, she led them out the back door of the house.

Remus and Tonks followed Olga as she walked briskly down the country lane in the direction of the school. Dusk was approaching quickly now and the shadowed lane was darkening. The sky had turned to a dusty orange red before Olga turned off the lane and led them towards the lake that skirted the edge of the school.

Olga looked out at the lake for a moment, then turned back towards Remus and Tonks, beaming at them. The two shared a confused glance, then looked out over the lake again.

It wasn't a large lake, like the one near Hogwarts, but it was big enough. There was even some talk about seeing if a giant squid could be convinced to move into it.

Remus squinted as the setting sun caused the surface of the lake to sparkle. Then he saw it, a single lonely light floating out in the center of the lake and his eyes widened for a moment in surprise.

"Barely a week ago, I helped one of our people say goodbye to her husband. She had a unique way of going about it," Olga said in a reverent tone as her eyes became unfocused with the memory. "She was hurting so much, poor child."

"Are you sure you're ready, my dear?"

*Melinda smiled a bit shakily at Olga Johansen, but nodded. "Yes. I think it's time," she said quietly.*

*Olga looked at the lake before them and sighed. "It's a beautiful spot, yes? I will give you some privacy. If you've need of me, just call, hmm? I'll be close by."*

*"I don't knowhowto thank you," Melinda began.*

*"Hush. There is no need." Olga wrapped her arms around the younger woman for a moment, then stepped back. "Take your time, girl." She smiled, then turned and walked up the slight incline of grass and disappeared through the trees.*

*Melinda watched her go, then turned back to the lake and took a deep breath. Bending down, she picked up a small wreath of ivy and oak and placed a white candle in its center. Standing once more, she walked down to the water's edge and knelt, holding the wreath close.*

*She gazed out over the lake, her eyes unfocused, and thought of Michael, her husband.*

*They'd not been married long and, like most newly married couples, had made plans for the future. They'd both had good jobs, though Melinda hadn't been happy that Michael worked at the Ministry. They'd talked of having children in a few years, once things in Britain were more settled, and of buying a house in the country where she could brew her potions and grow her own ingredients.*

*Their plans had been shattered when Voldemort's forces had overrun the country. Michael had wanted to leave before the violence erupted, but she'd found that the orphans at Mother Wilma's had been abandoned by the staff. And then it was too late. The Dark Lord's armies had moved in, and they'd played a dangerous cat and mouse game, trying to keep the children out of sight.*

*When their food, water and medicinal potions had run out, Michael had been forced to expose his presence more and more often as he scavenged for their needs.*

*Melinda closed her eyes, blocking out the peaceful lake before her, and was transported once again to the filthy alley and the image of her husband's battered body.*

*The sob caught her by surprise, though it shouldn't have. She'd held onto her grief for so long, it was difficult to tear down the walls she'd build around it and let it out. Dropping the wreath, she fisted her hands at her sides, threw back her head and let go.*

*When the sorrowful keen drifted through the trees and reached Olga, the woman closed her eyes and said a silent prayer for the grieving young woman and for the man she'd lost. The sound was heartrending, and Olga let herself weep for the pain so evident in that lament.*

*Melinda opened her eyes, unaware and uncaring of how much time had passed. Her throat burned, and her hands were bleeding where her nails had dug into the flesh of her palms. She inhaled a hitching breath and let it out slowly.*

*She looked down at the wreath she'd dropped and bit her lip. It was time.*

*Picking up the wreath, she closed her eyes and thought of Michael once more.*

*"You always said life was for the living, and I have to believe you meant it. So it's time to let go of the grief and the sadness and accept that you're not coming back to me."*

*She drew her wand and lit the ever-burn candle. Casting a shielding charm over the candle and a buoyancy charm on the wreath, she slipped it into the water. Standing, she used her wand to guide the wreath out into the middle of the lake and anchored it there.*

*She put her wand away and watched the bobbing light from the candle as sunlight began to fade. When she was sure the anchoring spell was fixed, she bowed her head once more.*

*"I love you, Michael. Goodbye."*

*Turning away from the lake, she made her way to the trees and walked into Olga Johansen's waiting arms.*

*"Oh, my dear girl," Olga whispered as she watched the candle's light flicker through the trees.*

*A tear ran down Olga's cheek as she recalled that day, then she pointed to the bobbing light.*

*"She released a candle into the lake and said it would never go out. She was letting go of her husband and her past so that she could start over, here. We could do something like that for the families, yes?"*

*Tonks stared at the floating candle and sniffed a few times. Remus reached out and took her hand in his, needing her close. The simplicity of that single candle spoke volumes of a life lost.*

*"Yes, Olga, I think we can do this for everyone. It's a fitting memorial," Remus said softly, his eyes still focused on the floating light.*

*"I can help plan and organize this with you, Remus," Olga offered, "But I can't do the magic."*

*Tonks shook her head and smiled at the older woman. "You might not be able to do magic, Olga, but you have a unique magic all your own."*

*Olga smiled at Tonks, then nodded back in the direction of the road.*

*Together, the three slowly made their way back to the farm house in the distance.*

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## **Parliament Building, London (July 2nd)...**

*Lucius sat and stared morosely at the two slips of parchment in front of him. The first one he had received nearly a week ago and hadn't acted upon, the second had come in at the end of last month.*

*My Lord,*

*I am Pax Eteperia, from Devon. Dolohov placed me in charge of receiving the Dementors sent to us by our Lord. I fear that Dolohov and the others have fallen. I have sent several owls to him, all of which came back undelivered. I finally sent one of my men to see what was wrong and*

*he reported that the farm house has been destroyed by a fire and the area is crawling with Ministry people, from both the British and Irish Ministries.*

*My men and I stand ready to help move the Dementors. Can we assume that you'll provide us with orders, since Dolohov cannot?  
Eteperia*

Lucius stood and walked to the window angrily. "Damnation!" he spat. Now he'd have to report that Dolohov and his men had probably been killed or captured. His next visit to the Master would require him passing along this information.

"Hammersmith!" Lucius yelled.

There was a moment of silence, then the door to his office opened and Hammersmith scurried into the office. Lucius turned and walked back over to his desk. He picked up the parchment from Eteperia and handed it to him.

"Owl this servant immediately. Inform him that we expect him to continue his mission to the best of his ability."

Hammersmith nodded and took the offered parchment. He turned and started for the door.

"Oh, Hammersmith, how fairs young Dudley?" he asked silkily.

Lucius noted with surprise the tenseness that the question invoked in his assistant.

The man turned away from the door and sighed heavily. "Not well, sir. A few days ago Dudley protested when one his trainers tried to discipline him. Dudley killed the man and I was forced to use magic to punish him. While I tried to keep the damage to a minimum, he was still injured. I would not have bothered, but Dudley killed a wizard, not a muggle."

Lucius sat in his chair and stared at his assistant for a moment. "I see. And how much of a delay will this set back put into our plans, Hammersmith?" he asked in a frosty tone.

"At least six weeks, sir. Dudley will need time to heal and recover from his injuries."

*Dudley was never a sure-fire plan, Lucius mused. Still, it wouldn't hurt to continue as planned. And Hammersmith? Well he did over step his limits.*

"Very well. Allow the boy to heal and continue his training as best as he can," Lucius said in a deceptively mild voice as he raised his wand. Pointing it at the puzzled Hammersmith, he whispered "*Crucio* !"

The man screamed and dropped to the floor, writhing. Lucius watched him for a few moments, then lifted the curse.

"Do not fail me again, Hammersmith," Lucius said in a frightful tone.

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## **Padfoot Manor (July 5th)...**

Harry opened the door to the study and started to enter when a red streak passed him, clipping his cane. Harry flailed for a moment and then crashed to the floor.

"Oh, Harry! I'm so sorry!" Ginny said as she skidded to a halt.

"I always thought you were kinda pushy, Ginny. Maybe to make up for your shortness,," Harry replied, looking up at her with a grin.

Her eyes twinkled with laughter. "Yes, well, I may be short, but good things come in small packages," she replied primly.

Harry chuckled and levered himself upright. Ginny leaned down and helped him get back to his feet.

"Where are you going in such a hurry?" Harry asked.

"I have a session with Eocho and Remus in a few minutes. It's so frustrating, Harry! Eocho says the Brotherhood awoke a talent in me, but he won't tell me what that talent is!"

Harry nodded in understand. Eocho had spoken to him about this and had warned him that no one should tell Ginny what her talent was.

"I think the ritual awoke talents in a lot of us, Ginny, so you're not the only one going through this. I'm sure Eocho will help you develop it further."

Ginny stomped her foot in mock petulance, then grinned. "Maybe, but that doesn't mean I have to like it!"

With a wave, she turned and sprinted down the hall, leaving Harry shaking his head in wonder. Sometimes that girl made him tired just watching her. She had enough energy for three people.

Ginny turned the corner and opened the door to a room they had converted into a classroom. She skidded to a halt, seeing Eocho and Remus already in the room and deep in conversation.

Closing the door behind her, she tried to shake her nervousness. "Sorry I'm late. I bumped into Harry and had to help him get to his feet again," she

said in a soft tone.

Eocho nodded to her, while Remus just shook his head and chuckled. Ginny would have been the queen of clumsy in the manor, had it not been for Tonks.

"Please, take a seat," Eocho said.

Instead of a single desk in front of the student desks, this time there was a long table covered by a cloth. Ginny looked at the table uneasily and took a seat at a desk in the back row.

Eocho watched the girl for a moment, then glided forward to hover closer to her.

"You know why we're here today, child?" asked Eocho in a gentle voice.

"Yes, Honored Teacher, to help me develop my talent," Ginny replied, then she bit her lip, holding back parts of the reply that would not go over well with Eocho.

Eocho smiled and moved back a few feet from her. "Why do you sit so far from the front of the room?"

Ginny's eyes narrowed. "I'm not sure. Something about the table makes me uneasy. And I know that Remus can't always be trusted, either."

Remus chuckled and wagged his eyebrows at Ginny, who couldn't help but laugh.

"My daughter, the uneasiness you feel is your talent at work. But I have watched you these past weeks. Sometimes you pay attention to your feelings. Often you do not. As a result, you are frequently the victim of pranks played by others upon you," Eocho said in a firm tone.

Ginny thought of the time Harry turned her hair blue for the whole day and had arranged it so it appeared as if Draco had done it. Her revenge against Draco was legendary and aimed at the wrong person. She and Draco had spent several hours talking about it, with Luna and Hermione mediating, after Draco's missing limbs had been found and reattached.

"Why you can't tell me what my talent is and how to use it, Honored Teacher?" Ginny asked plaintively.

"Some talents, like Mr. Lupin's, are consciously controlled. His animagus form and his changing are a result of a decision that results in his invoking his magic. Yours, my daughter, is more subtle. Your talent is always working for you. You cannot turn it on and off. I could tell you what your power is, but, in doing so, I risk you losing that ability. It is something tied closely to who and what you are Ginevra.

"What I can do is help you train yourself to recognize your talent at work."

Ginny sat for a moment, thinking hard, then she nodded her understanding.

"Now, let us start again. Why do you sit so far back from the front of the class room?" asked Eocho.

"Something about the table in the front of the room made me uneasy. It's like a twisting sensation in my gut. I didn't like it," Ginny said softly, all the while staring at the table.

Remus stepped forward to stand in front of the table. "Have you felt that feeling before, Ginny?" he asked.

"Yes, several times since we came to Haven. Before that? I don't think so... maybe," she replied, unsure.

"Consider the possibility that your talent is trying to tell you something, Ginevra," Eocho said.

Ginny looked startled. "Like a warning?"

Eocho nodded. "Yes, a warning would be one possibility. But not the only one. Self preservation is a powerful instinct, perhaps the most powerful of all. So let us consider for a moment that your talent is tied to your instincts."

"So you're saying that my talent is providing me with warnings? Like a seer?"

Remus shook his head. "No, nothing like a seer. That's part of what we wanted to show you today."

He turned then and removed the cloth from the table, revealing a book, a glowing sphere, a skull, a dagger and a teddy bear.

Ginny glanced at the objects and her face paled a little. She swallowed nervously and fixed her gaze on Eocho.

"Of the five objects on the table, three are harmless, the other two are not. What we want to see is what you can tell about these objects," Remus said.

"Are you comfortable, child? Revealing the objects seemed to affect you. Do you wish to move further away from them?" Eocho asked.

"I'll be fine, Honored Teacher. I was just surprised. Do you want me to touch these?"

"Try it first without touching the objects," suggested Remus. "I'll levitate them to you, one at a time."

Remus directed the book off the table and towards Ginny. He stopped it about three feet from her and she focused her gaze upon it.

After a minute or two of silence, she sighed. "I don't know. I don't feel anything special about the book. There's a faint sensation that's hard to describe. It's familiar, somehow, but I don't know if it means I've read the book, know the owner of the book, or I'm just imagining things," she said in defeat.

"Do not be downcast, my child. It is likely you will spend a lifetime refining your talent. For a first attempt, you did well," Eocho said encouragingly.

"Alright then, next object," Remus said, then he returned the book to the table and floated over the glowing glass sphere.

"This is different," Ginny said after a minutes silence. "I can feel a tingle in my fingertips, like a bludger under restraint. It's powerful, but I don't get any feelings of danger about it."

"Alright, how about this one?" Remus asked, floating the skull over.

Ginny shook her head. "Nothing. I'm not even sure that it's a real skull."

Remus and Eocho shared a glance, then he returned the skull to the table and floated the dagger over to her.

Ginny's eyes widened and her nostrils flared. "Fred and George!" she hissed.

Lifting a hand quickly, she was able to raise a shield around herself, without the use of her wand, just as the dagger exploded in a shower of ink.

She blinked and jerked back from the explosion, then lowered her shield and looked around. When her eyes came to Remus, she stared for a moment, then bit her lip, trying not to laugh.

Remus stood frozen as black ink dripped down the front of his robe. His eyes seemed to glow whitely from his ink splattered face.

Giving up, Ginny sagged back against her chair and laughed outright. "Remus, I can't believe you would accept anything from my brothers!"

Remus grinned ruefully, laughing at himself. A quick scourgify cleaned up the mess.

"I'll be paying the twins a visit later today, I see. But let's get back to business," he said, then he levitated the Teddy Bear over to Ginny.

As the bear came closer, Ginny shrank back from the bear and started to tremble. "Take it away! Take it away!" she screamed. An aura flickered into existence about her and she started to raise her hand. Eocho gestured, freezing her in place

Remus and Eocho barely had a moment to relax when the door literally exploded inwards. Harry stormed into the room, his aura blazing. A moment later, Hermione entered. Neville was on her heels and he went directly to Ginny.

Remus levitated the teddy bear back to the table and Eocho released Ginny, who slumped against Neville, sobbing.

Neville wrapped both arms around his girlfriend and glared at the two men.

"What in the name of Merlin is going on in here?" demanded Harry angrily.

"Rest easy, Maglios. We were teaching Ginevra to use her talent, that is all," replied Eocho in a soothing tone.

"That's all?" exclaimed Hermione. "Revered Teacher, I expect every member will be here within minutes. I felt her distress call from the library and apparated here."

"I was in the greenhouse," Neville said, glaring at both Remus and Eocho.

Harry walked over to Ginny. "Ginny, what's wrong?"

Ginny pointed at the innocent looking teddy bear on the table. "That! It's evil, hideous! The closer it came, the more threatening it became."

Harry looked over at Remus, who shrugged. "It's one of the objects that we found at the farm house. It detected positive for dark magic, but no one knows what it's purpose is yet."

Harry walked over to the bear. "Hermione, do you think a Revealus might work here?" he asked.

Hermione joined him at the table. "It might, Harry, especially at the level you cast at," she murmured in reply.

Harry raised his staff over the bear. "Revealus," he murmured. A small puff of black smoke rose from the bear and formed into the shape of a face.

"Tell me your secrets," Harry said in a soft voice.

"I am the child's assassin. I am cute and make adults want to place me in a bed with a sleeping child. I kill by smothering my victim and have killed twenty two times," came the reply in a sibilant whisper. Hermione paled and stepped back.

"Remus," Harry called in a soft voice, "is there any reason why I shouldn't destroy this thing?"

Remus paused. He knew the object had been cursed, but not in that manner. "I don't think we have a need for it, Harry," came the hesitant reply. To be honest, he would have to explain it's destruction to Miles, who might have had a use for it. But considering the circumstances, he thought it would be best to allow Harry to proceed.



Harry raised his staff. "*Incendio*."

He stepped back as the bear flashed white hot and vanished, leaving only a small pile of ash. He was surprised when he turned to face Ginny and discovered all of the Brotherhood had arrived.

Eocho glided up to stand at the front of the room, then he turned to address Ginny directly. "My daughter, I did not expect the object to invoke such a primal reaction in you, and for that I must ask for your forgiveness. It was not our intention to frighten or threaten you."

Ginny nodded and smiled wanly at him from the safety of Neville's arms. "I understand, Honored Teacher," she murmured, then she shivered again.

Harry reached into his money bag and withdrew a coin. He then walked over to Neville and pressed the coin into his hand. "Nev, I'm short on quills. How about you and Ginny apparate up to Stonewall Lane and pick me up a couple? Use the change to buy yourselves lunch, make a day of it," Harry suggested with a smile.

Neville looked down at the fifty galleon coin in his hand and then up at Harry. "You don't have to do this..." he said in protest.

"I do, Nev. I really need the quills," Harry said firmly, then he winked at his friend. Neville smiled and pulled Ginny to her feet. She leaned against him, wanting to stay within the safety of his arms.

"Thanks, Harry. Come on, Gin. Let's get Harry his quills.," he said leading the girl from the room.

After Ginny and Neville left, Hermione turned to Harry. "You don't need any quills."

"I know that, Hermione. So does Neville. But Ginny needs a break. A little shopping and lunch away from the manor and Haven will do her some good today. Even if Neville buys me a hundred quills, he'll still have money left over for lunch and a trip to the sweet shop. Neville's been working pretty hard too. They can both use the break," He replied with a shrug.

Then he turned on Remus and Eocho, scowling. "What is with you two? I understand what you're trying to do, but I don't understand or approve of you exposing Ginny to cursed objects you haven't identified. Next time, make a cursed object, or determine what it does first! Her talent exploded across our bond. I'm surprised it didn't trigger the attack warning wards in Government House!

"You know that her wandless ability isn't fully under her control, yet you exposed her to an object that murders children? This is a female Weasley we're talking about. She has a mother's instinct a mile wide! We're lucky it was only a door that needs to be fixed this time. She could have blown up the manor," he told them angrily.

He stepped back and closed his eyes, taking a few cleansing breaths and trying to push down his anger. Opening his eyes again, he looked at the two of them, noting their chastened expressions.

"Train her, teach her, encourage her. Don't frighten or endanger her," Harry said finally in a low tone before he walked from the room.

Remus sagged against the edge of the table. "Merlin! His temper is as bad as Lily's ever was."

"What did you expect, Remus?" Hermione said fiercely. "He considers Ginny to be his little sister. He spoke to Tonks in the same manner when her actions resulted in you being injured. Harry protects his family, even from each other, when necessary."

She turned then and walked out of the room in search of Harry. One by one, the other Brotherhood members filed out of the room, but not before scowling at Remus and Eocho.

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### **The Enchanted Goat Pub, Evening (July 5th)...**

Dumbledore looked up from drying a glass when the door opened.

"Rufus! How about a couple pints for me and my mates!" shouted one man.

Dumbledore waved, a cheery smile on his face, and started to pour the requested drinks.

"I expected you blokes earlier. Where have you been?" Dumbledore asked.

One of the men took a deep pull on his pint, then banged the glass back down on the bar. "Aye, we woulda been here sooner, but we went to that memorial service tonight on account of the free food."

"Not that there was a lot of free food," grumbled another man.

"That be the truth. Just a lot of talking people and weeping wimmen!" said another in agreement.

"I heard about that service. It was for the Aurors they lost in that attack up north, wasn't it?" asked Dumbledore. He already knew all the details, but he wanted to keep the men talking. Deftly, he refilled their drinks.

"Aye," said the first man. "Bugger of it is, only two were ours. The other three weren't even British! And here we be having to sit listening to how brave a couple Yanks and a Canadian were. Bloody foreigners!"

"Hear hear!" shouted several men.

"Seems like a bloody balls up job, if they are losing men over a couple Death Eaters. Wouldn't have happened if ol' Dumbledore were leading the show," offered Dumbledore.

"Damn straight, that is! My Grandad said ol' Dumbledore was a right powerful light wizard. Killed Grindelwald with a snap of his fingers, he did!" said one man.

The others nodded, impressed by the very idea.

Dumbledore smiled to himself and refilled the men's drinks before moving off to serve other customers. As much as he wanted to push things along, he had to go slowly. A little doubt here, a little doubt there. It all added up.

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### **The Johansen Farmhouse, After the Memorial...**

Harry sat at the kitchen table with Hermione, Remus, Tonks and Papa Johansen, while Olga served tea and some of her famous strudel.

Hermione took one look at the pastry on the plate and sighed to herself. Despite Harry's help, she had not yet managed to produce an edible version of the pastry in front of her.

"Mrs. Johansen," Harry started.

"Please Mr. Potter, call me Mama. I answer to that just as well as any other name these days!" Olga said with a laugh.

"I will, if you'll call me Harry," he offered in return.

Olga smiled. "Good! Now what were you saying?"

"Mama, I want to thank you for your efforts. Tonight's memorial service was moving to everyone present, and it accomplished what I most wanted - to let the families know they're not alone," Harry said in a serious tone.

She waved a hand at him. "There is no need for this, Harry. I just try to help where I can, yes? When your Mr. Lupin came to me, I made a few suggestions, that's all."

"A few suggestions?" exclaimed Remus. "Mama, you took over the planning. I still don't know how you made sure there were enough seats for everyone."

Remus trailed off when Sven Johansen started to laugh. "Mama is a good organizer, no? Seats were a problem, but she walked up to the school and spoke to the Headmistress. She got several of the summer stay over students and a number of the teachers to help by conjuring seats and flowers. Headmistress McGonagall was happy to help."

Harry nodded. "That's part of what I'm talking about, but only a part of it. Since your arrival here, you have reached out and touched the lives and hearts of many here in Haven. You are raising the orphans who escaped from Mother Wilma's home, you've organized dances and social gatherings and, whether you want to believe it or not, you're creating change here in Haven."

Olga looked perplexed. "What do you mean, creating change?" she asked.

"Your actions are changing the way people think about muggles." Harry said, then he reached down and ruffled the hair on little Brendan head as the boy watched Harry intently.

Brendan suffered from a serious case of Harry worship.

"People see you raising Wizarding children and loving every one of them. They see you reaching out to those still reeling from the disaster back home and you bring a sense of normalcy to their lives. Most importantly of all, they see you, a muggle, reaching out to help wizards and witches, as if the difference means nothing to you. You may not realize it, or understand it, but your family is nearly as important to Haven as Minister Bones, or the Haven school."

"Or even yourself, Harry," Hermione added in a quiet tone. She sat holding the youngest, little Linda, on her lap. The little girl clutched a stuffed rabbit to her tightly and had one thumb firmly in her mouth.

"But we're all people," protested Olga.

"You're right, of course. But for the longest time, wizards and muggles didn't mix together. Voldemort sits in power in Britain because he believes he is better than a muggle. You are showing people otherwise."

"That's why I wanted to thank you, Mama, for all you've done for us. For tonight, especially, and every other night you've been there for us. I'd like to return the favor. You can come to us whenever you need something," Harry said, indicating himself and the others.

Olga waved a hand, flustered and groped around for a way to change the subject, while Sven watched on, obviously amused. Olga glanced at Hermione and Tonks and saw her opening.

"So? Have you two set dates for the weddings?" she asked.

"Yes. August 1st, but it's going to be slightly different than your regular wedding. We're going to use a very old ceremony called handfasting, and there will be more than just the four of us," Tonks replied happily.

Hermione beamed her own smile and Olga's expression grew predatory.

"More than two couples, hmm? That is interesting. What do you have planned?" Olga asked, as visions of helping in the planning danced behind her eyes.

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### **Haven Lake, After the Memorial...**

The small group of people made their way down to the lake, its surface now dotted with glowing candles - a memorial to the lost.

They stopped at the shoreline and gazed out at those points of light, each lost to their own thoughts. Three of them carried wreathes with ever-burn candles at their center, not yet lit.

"I think this is a mistake," Charlie Weasley said. "We know Ron and Percy are gone, but we don't know that mum's dead. She could be hiding, or in one of the camps, waiting for us to rescue her."

"We don't feel her any longer," George told him quietly. He looked down at the wreath he held, the one representing Molly's loss, and then at his twin.

"We haven't for a few months now," Fred confirmed sadly.

"I went to the Burrow. It had been burned down, but there was no body, no evidence that she was there when it happened," Charlie protested.

"She's gone, son." Arthur reached into his pocket and withdrew a small object. Opening his hand, his children gathered close and, gazing down, each recognized what lay in his palm.

It was his wedding ring, the Weasley crest clearly visible engraved upon the band. But what should have been a bright, gold band was now a black, pockmarked mockery of what it had once stood for.

"The Weasley rings were all that was left of the wealth our family once had, many centuries ago. Upon them were many charms, including this one. Upon the passing of one's spouse, the ring changed to reflect the event. The rings revert back to their natural state when they are passed on, or if the wearer falls in love again.

"This," he continued, "tells me that she died, and that it involved fire in some way. The fact that I was wearing it when it happened meant I felt her passing. While I do not know what caused the fire, I do know that she was unconscious before it reached her."

Arthur looked at his children then, meeting their eyes one by one, before stopping at Charlie. "She is gone. We can only hope that she, Ron and Percy have found peace."

Father and son stared at each other for a moment, then Charlie nodded jerkily.

"I'd hoped..." Charlie began, only to stop suddenly, unable to go on.

"We all did," Bill said, placing an arm around Charlie's shoulders. "But it's time to let them go."

In the fading evening light, the candles were lit and the charms placed over the wreathes. Together, the family put them into the water. Then Fred, Arthur and Bill gently maneuvered them out into the lake, where they mingled with the other bobbing lights.

Standing at the water's edge, Arthur listened to his children share their memories of their mother and brothers, laughing quietly at some, weeping softly at others, and knew the family would be better now. Oh, his children would still fight and scuffle with one another, but the tension and mistrust that had grown since Charlie had joined them seemed to ease somewhat.

And now, watching them, he realized that, while they were saying goodbye to three, they were welcoming back another – Charlie.

When he felt a tap on his arm, he shook his head.

"Dad?" Ginny asked.

"Sorry, Gin. What was it you said?"

"I asked if you were ready," she said gently.

"Oh. Yes, we can go now."

Turning, he followed his family as they walked away from the lake and up a small hill. In front of them was the path to the village, to the left, a small grove a trees. As he stepped onto the path, he stopped suddenly and looked towards the trees, frowning.

"Dad?" Bill called. "Are you coming?"

"Go on ahead, kids. I'll be along in a bit."

When his children continued on the path to the village, Arthur turned away and made his way into the grove and, unerringly, to the woman who stood just inside the tree line.

"Melinda," he said quietly.

"Hello, Arthur."

"Why are you here? Is something wrong?" he asked, concerned.

"I missed the memorial," she told him softly, waving a hand towards the lake. "I was on duty and couldn't get away. When my shift ended, I came down. But as I was arriving, your family was coming down the hill. I didn't want to intrude, so..." She shrugged.

As the last of the light bled from the sky, a feeling of peace seemed to surround the grove. Arthur watched the lights dance upon the lake, unable to tell one wreath from the other, and realized that in sharing grief, it became easier to let go.

Turning to Melinda, wanting to share his sudden insight, a single thought stopped him. She already knew. Her candle was down there - the first memorial. With that thought came the realization that no one had asked her to share it with the village. No one had asked if she would mind others doing as she had done. While the lake was not hers alone, the idea was.

"Melinda," he said softly, casting a quick light spell to better see her face. "Does it bother you?"

"Does what bother me?"

"That," he said, pointing at the lake, but watching her closely in the wand-light. "You were the first to place a candle in memory. Olga Johansen mentioned it to Remus and Tonks. That's where the idea to hold the memorial here came from. But I don't think anyone asked you about it."

Melinda smiled. "Of course I don't mind. We all need to let go at some point. If placing a candle on the lake helps, then I'm glad."

"You're a generous woman."

She laughed. "If it pleases you to think so, who am I to argue?"

"Ah ha! Didn't share your toys as a child, eh?" Arthur asked, grinning.

"And stole toys from others, besides," she said. "But this memorial? It's something different. It wasn't mine to begin with. I was simply borrowing it for however long Lord Potter allowed."

"I think I can safely say it will be here for a very long time, then. Whether he knew them personally or not, Harry mourns each loss deeply. He understand the need for the memorial, and will keep it as such for many years to come."

Time passed, with each lost to their own thoughts.

When Melinda shifted and cast a warming charm on herself, Arthur realized how chilly it had become. With one last look at the lake, he reached over and took Melinda's hand.

"Let's go back to the village," he said. "We should be able to catch a late dinner at the Town Hall, and it will certainly be warmer there."

Melinda wrapped her fingers around his hand and followed him from the grove. "Olga says they're going to stop serving meals there soon. I don't know what I'll do then!"

"I thought Olga was going to teach you to cook?"

"That didn't work out as well as I'd hoped," she told him laughingly.

"Oh? What happened?"

"My pot roast was so overcooked, it could have been used for shoe leather!"

When he laughed, she let go of his hand and slapped his arm playfully.

"Don't laugh. Besides, it didn't end there. I was trying to boil potatoes for mashing, but when I checked on them, they had disappeared. When I started over, I must have pulled them off too soon, because they were still hard and rather starchy. Who knew potatoes were such a perverse vegetable!"

Arthur wiped tears of mirth from his eyes and shook his head. "What did Olga say?"

"Something about needing to practice. But every time I'm over there and go near one of her pots, she gets twitchy and pushes food at me."

"Well, I'm not the best of cooks, but I can help you learn," he told her.

"You may be taking your life into your own hands, but I may take you up on the offer."

"Now, wait a moment, I didn't say I was going to eat what you cooked!" he exclaimed, ducking another playful slap aimed his way.

“Wretch!”

Laughing, he wrapped an arm around her waist as they entered the village, and made plans to have her over for her first lesson.

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### **Padfoot Manor (July 15th)...**

Eocho watched with stunned amusement while Hermione, Ginny, Susan, Luna, Tonks, the Johansen twins, Emma Granger and Mama Johansen chased all of the men from the manor around noon. Some, like Neville and Terry, went quietly. Others, like Draco and Remus, went off in search of something to do.

Harry, however, stood staring at the door to his home in confusion, while a very irate Winky guarded the entrance, telling him firmly that no men were allowed in the manor today.

Confused, Harry turned and walked in the general direction of the town.

“Are they all gone now, dear?” asked Emma.

“Yes. Harry just left. I think we caught him off guard and it confused him,” replied Hermione.

“Well, we wouldn't want them to fully understand us, would we? Where would be the fun in that?” asked Helga.

Inga, her twin, smirked at her and poked her in the side. “You're easy to understand. If it moves, you either prank it, laugh at it, or want to cuddle with it.”

Helga squeaked at being poked and rounded on her sister, but a hand clamped firmly on her shoulder.

“Not now, girls,” said Mama, “We have wedding to plan for! Hermione, what time is the seamstress supposed to arrive?”

“In half an hour, Mama.”

Several of the girls, most notably Ginny, looked around worriedly.

Hermione caught the look and frowned. “Ginny, I know you. Stop worrying. It's all being taken care of.”

“He isn't really going to pay for everything, is he?” Ginny whispered back furiously.

“No, just a few things, like your gown, the food and Terry's robe. He's pitching in where needed and he told me not to let you refuse. I think he wants his little sister to look good.” Hermione replied quietly.

Ginny nodded, her eyes misty. “You're a lucky witch, Hermione Granger.”

“So are you, Ginevra Weasley.”

Mama stood and clapped her hands. “Girls! Girls! While you're being measured for your robes, Emma and I will be working on the food list. If you have something in mind for food, now will be the time to let us know about it...”

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### **Meanwhile, Outside the Manor...**

Harry wandered into Haven wondering what to do with his time. He had spent his morning with Eocho, and usually spent his afternoons working on enchanting the rune stones. That project was nearly complete, with only a handful still to go, but he couldn't do that when the stones were in the manor and he wasn't. Shrugging to himself, he entered one of the lanes that led to the main street.

“Hey, watch it!” shouted a small voice and a boy ran around the side of the house, following a ball that was zipping along overhead. The boy whipped out a small red wand and fired off a spell at the ball, causing it to change direction.

Harry blinked in surprise and watched, surprised, as several other children, also equipped with red wands, fired off spells, keeping the ball in the air.

“You must be British,” said an adult voice from behind him.

Harry turned to see a dusky skinned man grinning at him. Beside him stood a small girl who clutched at his pants and looked up at Harry shyly.

“I'm sorry?”

“You must be British. Most Brits seem to be surprised when they see our kids playing with their training wands,” said the man.

“Those are real wands?” Harry asked incredulously.

“No, they're training wands. When a child first gets a training wand, they can only do one or two spells on them, mostly game spells, like for playing Pitchy, the game you just saw. As they age, their parents unlock the wands a little at a time as the children learn to perform simple things like cleaning charms and or packing charms. By the time they enter school, they will have been given a real wand and the training wand will be given to

another child," said the man.

"By the way, I'm Sam, a healer with the 806th Animagi Division," Sam said proudly.

Harry couldn't help but smile and he reached out offering his hand. "Hi, Sam. I'm Harry."

Harry leaned against his cane and Sam motioned for him to sit on the stoop in front of the house. "I like the idea of training wands. I take it they're limited in what they can do?"

"Oh, yeah. For one thing, they're power restricted. The puffball spell, which they use in Pitchy, wouldn't knock over a toddler, even if an adult used it. But it will keep the ball aloft."

"I wonder how well they'll go over here?" Harry mused.

Sam laughed. "I don't think you need worry about that, Harry. Our kids have been showing them off since they got here and, from what I understand, a lot of British parents are looking into buying them."

"Well, I know of at least one family who will need quite a few of them."

"Let me guess, Mama Johansen?"

Harry blinked, then grinned.

"We hadn't been here half a day when she showed up at our door with a plate of cookies for the kids, a map of the area and a list of people and businesses, who they are and what they do," Sam replied with a laugh.

"She's something special, but then her whole family is," Harry replied.

Harry pulled himself to his feet. "It was nice meeting you, Sam, but it's time for me to get going. I was heading into town."

The two shook hands and parted ways. Harry heading into town, Sam sitting on the stoop wondering about the young man with the limp.

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## **Government House, Haven...**

The fireplace roared and the flames turned green. Michael O'Dalley looked up in surprise. Few people floo'd him or even used the floo in Haven. Most people either walked or apparated.

"Michael, me boy, are you busy?" asked the man sticking his head through the fire.

"Johnny! Why, it's been ages since we last talked. How are you? And the wife and kids?" O'Dalley asked, delighted to hear from an old friend.

"Good and good. Young Robby has been accepted into the Auror Academy up here," Johnny said proudly.

"No! Why, last time I saw him, he wasn't four feet tall!"

Johnny nodded proudly. "He's over six feet now. Even I have to look up to see him."

O'Dalley laughed along with his friend, then the conversation turned serious.

"Michael, we've had an unconfirmed report and I'm not quite sure what to make of it. A small family group of wizards just outside of Kilfinane reported seeing a mass of flying black creatures heading in a south-easterly direction. The father immediately gathered up the children and fled to Stonewall Lane and Government house, so I can't tell you who or what they were, but they were heading in the direction of Haven."

O'Dalley frowned and looked at a map. "Kilfinane, Kilfinane... That's about two hundred miles away. Are you sure they were heading towards us, Johnny?"

Johnny scowled. "No, Michael, I am not sure about anything, except to say a family of wizards were terrified enough to run from their home in the middle of the night. As far as I know, they weren't attacked. Call it a gut feeling, Michael."

O'Dalley leaned back in his chair, thinking hard. "Alright, Johnny. I trust your instincts, so I'll call in my boys and we'll put on an extra watch. I'll also have someone double check the wards on the town."

"Good enough, Michael. I'll floo you if there's another sighting or we get new information."

"Thanks, Johnny," O'Dalley said absently, as the fireplace quieted, his mind already whirling with what he had to do.

Standing, he quickly left his office and walked to the Economic office. Bill Weasley looked up in surprise to see O'Dalley coming in.

"Michael? What can I help you with?" Bill asked.

"You used to be a curse breaker before, right?" asked O'Dalley.

"Yes, I worked for Gringotts before things started going down hill back home. Then I worked for Harry for a while."

O'Dalley nodded. "Good. I have a favor I need to ask. I received a troubling report from one of my friends in the Irish Ministry and I need someone I know and trust to look over the wards on the town to make sure they're up to par."

Bill raised his eyebrows as O'Dalley spoke. The wards on Haven were some of the finest he had ever seen. "I can do that, Michael, but I think you'll find the wards are fine."

"I agree with you, Bill, but I want to be sure."

"I'll speak to my father about it this evening. I'm sure I'll be able to start tomorrow morning. You want all the wards checked, right?"

"Please, all of them."

"Right then, I'll be on it in the morning."

"Thanks, Bill," O'Dalley said with a wave and he walked out of the office.

*What was that all about*, wondered Bill. *Oh, well, checking wards is more interesting than making sure we're getting our daily deliveries of bread and milk.*

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### **Padfoot Manor, (July 16th)...**

Harry looked up from the report Miles had sent him when Hermione and Ginny entered his study. He looked at the two girls and knew something was up.

"What? I haven't pranked anyone in a while," Harry said in protest and pretending to cringe back from the look Hermione was giving him.

"You prat, we're not here because of a prank," Hermione said fondly. "Ginny and I were talking and she has something she needs to ask you."

Harry turned his attention to Ginny.

"Harry, do you think I could borrow your Pensieve?" Ginny asked in a soft voice.

Harry leaned forward in his chair. "What do you need a Pensieve for, Ginny?"

"It's about Charlie. No matter how hard we try to explain to him, he still refuses to fully listen to us. I won't lie to you, Harry. There is something going on with Charlie. I can feel it, but I can't pinpoint what it is. For all I know, it could just be my anger for my overly stubborn brother.

"Dad seems to think that if he can see the memories, he'll come around," Ginny said hesitantly.

Harry frowned. He didn't like the idea of another problem Weasley. "Do you think he will be a danger to us, Ginny?"

Ginny flinched slightly. She knew Harry would have to ask this question. "Honestly, Harry, I don't know. Maybe. He's my brother, but I feel he's hiding something from us. He spends most of his time in that new pub, even though he rarely drinks."

Harry sighed and slid down a little in his chair thinking. "Has he been up to the manor yet?"

"No. I told Dad he wasn't allowed. Dad was a little hurt by that, but accepted it," Ginny replied with a shake of her head.

Harry ran a hand nervously through his hair, then he opened a cabinet with a wave of his hand. Both girls gasped at the rows of Pensieves sitting in the cabinet.

Harry grinned sheepishly at them. "I had these made around Christmas. There is one for every Outcast. I have four more on order, for Remus, Tonks, Emma and Dan, but they haven't been delivered yet."

Harry floated two Pensieves from the cabinet, then closed it. He handed one to Ginny, then handed the other to Hermione.

"Using a Pensieve for yourself is very easy, just touch the tip of your wand to your temple and think of the memory you want to remove. Then drop the memory into the dish. If you want to remove a memory from someone else, the incantation is 'Memorae'. These are solicitor Pensieves. That means you can enter the memory by touching it in the bowl, or you can view them in presentation mode, which will display the memory above the bowl. Try a memory, Ginny. Something short and pleasant."

Ginny reached up and touched her temple with her wand, thought for a moment, then deposited a memory into the bowl. She reached out and touched the memory and her eyes glazed over. A moment later, her eyes returned to normal and she smiled brightly at Harry.

"'Memorae' doesn't permanently remove the memory. It's more like a copy. Memories in a Pensieve are hard to fake, which is why the courts accept them as evidence," Harry said.

Hermione looked like she was itching to try, so he leaned forward and tapped his temple with his finger. She smiled and touched her wand to his temple. "Memorae," she said, then pulled the glistening filament from his temple and dropped it into the Pensieve.

"How do I activate it in presentation mode, Harry?" she asked

“Tap the Pensieve with your wand. That’s all it takes.”

Hermione tapped the bowl with her wand and suddenly there was a small image floating above the Pensieve. Hermione gasped, seeing herself in a bikini, and Ginny started to snicker.

*Harry smiled weakly back at her and gave her a quick kiss on the cheek, then he blushed. “Thank you, Hermione. I’m not sure what I’d do without you around. I think you’re really pretty in that bikini,” he whispered.*

The image froze there and Hermione tried to glare at Harry, but she couldn’t hold it. That moment had been shortly after Harry’s illness the summer before, when they had begun to explore their feelings towards each other.

“No wonder you landed him, Hermione. If only I knew it would have taken a bikini...” Ginny said, then she started laughing.

Hermione blushed and Harry looked embarrassed, though he reached out and touched her hand.

Mustering all the dignity he could, he looked at Ginny. “No, the bikini was just a nice touch.”

“And I bet you couldn’t wait until you could touch, either!” Ginny said with a chortle, then she slid off the chair howling.

Harry buried his head in his hands. “I can’t win with this conversation.”

Hermione looked down at the red head rolling on the floor, then up at her boyfriend and shook her head. She couldn’t be angry with Harry for picking what he obviously thought of as a very happy memory involving her. She just wished he had waited until later to show exactly how much detail he had memorized.

Eventually, Ginny calmed down and climbed back into her chair. She looked at the two and grinned.

“Ginny, I know things have been rough on your family,” Harry said, “but I want you to do what ever it takes to resolve the problem with Charlie. If you can’t, tell me. I have to be honest with you. The idea of Charlie hiding something makes me anxious...”

Ginny’s grin dropped and her expression grew pained. “I understand why you feel that way, Harry,” she replied, then she stood. “I promise you, I’ll either get to the bottom of this or I’ll personally kick him out of Haven myself.”

With that, she nodded to them both, then turned and left the room.

“Are you really worried about this, Harry?”

“I am, Hermione. I feel like I’m juggling eggs and people are poking me. There are so many things that can go wrong, so many ways we can be betrayed. I’ve taken precautions. We have wards around the town, the school and the manor. But I can’t help feeling like I’m overlooking something. This business with Charlie makes me nervous. The Weasley family doesn’t need this sort of distraction right now.

“Arthur and I have made peace. As for Ginny, we need her focusing on her tasks, not worried about Charlie.”

“It will work itself out. Ginny will see to that,” Hermione said confidently.

Then she stood and walked over to Harry and straddled his lap. “Now, about that image of me in a bikini, Mr. Potter...”

Harry grinned and pulled her closer. “Oh? What about it, soon-to-be-Mrs. Potter?” he asked with a cheeky grin.

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## **Town of Haven (Evening of July 18th)...**

Walking through the village towards her father’s cottage, Ginny’s thoughts were focused on the meeting due to take place that evening with her family. It was long overdue, in her opinion. It was true that they’d all been busy, but this was something that should have been taken care of much earlier.

Passing by the Ministry building and the Town Hall, her attention was drawn to the noise coming from the pub a few doors down. As she walked closer to it, her brow furrowed as she remembered the reports from the Haven elves she’d read a few days ago. In them, the elves had stated that there had been quiet grumbings in town about Harry Potter and Albus Dumbledore. The tone of those reports had concerned her, as they had stated that some people were beginning to wonder if Dumbledore had turned his back on the Potter boy because Potter had turned dark. As Dumbledore had been the leader of the light for more years than Potter had been alive, why was he not in the village, helping Potter with the fight against Voldemort?

As she drew even with the pub, fancifully named The Enchanted Goat, she froze and her eyes narrowed.

Candlelight glowed warm and inviting from the windows and lively music poured forth from the open door. The place seemed to exude a feeling of welcoming laughter and good cheer to all those who passed by.

Looking more closely, Ginny’s eyes widened and the hair on the back of her neck rose in warning. The candle glow seemed to dim and the music turned from lively to threatening. She shivered in the early evening light as a feeling of wrongness engulfed her and she knew, without knowing how, that the grumbings heard by the elves came from those within the pub.

“Ginny!”



Spinning quickly, she relaxed when she saw Bill walking towards her. With one last look at the pub, she moved to meet him.

“Is something wrong, short stuff?” Bill asked her, surprised when she wrapped her arms around him and seemed to burrow into him.

“Yes. No. Maybe,” she replied, her voice uneven.

“Well, as long as you’re sure,” he teased. When she didn’t respond, he pulled away slightly. Tipping her chin up with finger, he looked into her eyes and frowned. “What is it?” he asked gently.

“The pub,” she said quietly as her eyes drifted back to the building. “There’s something wrong there, Bill. Don’t ask me how I know it, because I’m not sure myself. Something in that place is...wrong.”

Turning, but not letting go of his sister, he gazed at the pub. “Are you sure?” he asked.

“Yes.”

“Maybe I should go in and buy a pint. I might be able to pick up something useful.”

“No!” Ginny pulled away and met his eyes. “Stay out of there, Bill. I don’t know what it is, but I do know it’s dangerous to us.”

“Us? Dangerous to you and I, the family, or to everyone?”

Ginny paused and looked at the pub once more. “It’s dangerous to Haven and everything we have here,” she said, her voice quiet, but sure. “Eocho told me to stop fighting my instincts and to trust my feelings. For once, I’m going to do as I’m told.”

Bill laughed. “Far be it for me to go against your Revered Teacher. However, with your feelings about the place, you should probably talk to O’Dalley about this, since he’s in charge of the constables, and inform those up at the manor, as well.”

“You’re right. I’ll do that after our meeting tonight.”

“Speaking of that, we should get going. We’re going to miss dinner if we don’t hurry,” Bill told her as he turned her away from the pub and lead her towards the Weasley cottage.

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### **Padfoot Manor...**

Harry stepped into his bedroom and peeled out of his shirt, then removed his basilisk skin undershirt. Haven was firmly in the grip of summer and, despite the cool evenings, the second skin was often very hot to wear.

Putting on a cool, loose t-shirt that read, 'I heard that Voldemort changed his mind today. Wonder what he did with the nappy?', he left the bedroom and headed to the family room where everyone else was waiting.

All conversation ceased when he entered. Tonks took one look at his T-shirt and started to laugh. Remus and Dan tried to hide their laughter. Hermione looked at him and frowned.

“Oh, lighten up, Hermione. Poking fun at Voldemort is amusing,” Harry said with a grin.

“It’s not funny, Harry! You know how Voldemort treats insults...” Hermione trailed off and suddenly looked sheepish.

“Right, it’s not like he can want to kill me anymore than he already does, love.” Then, with his eyes dancing, he waved his hand at Hermione and her blouse became a tight fitting t-shirt that read, 'I bet Voldemort’s mother had a loud bark.'

Remus doubled over laughing, spilling his drink the process, causing Tonks to slide out of her chair and onto the floor.

With a glare, Hermione stood up and waved her wand at Remus, changing his shirt to read 'Do Not Pet The Woofie.'

Remus looked down at his shirt and then up at Hermione. He eyed her carefully and started to reach for his wand. She squeaked and ran for the door.

In a flash, he was up and after her, but tripped over the still laughing Tonks on the floor.

“Now you know why wizards and witches don’t need television,” Harry said smugly to his future in-laws.

With a grin, he sat down, knowing Hermione would be back. Then the cycle of prank and counter-prank would start all over again.

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### **Weasley Residence, Town of Haven...**

Arthur leaned back from the table and watched his family with a fond smile. Ginny and the twins were teasing each other as they finished cleaning the dinner dishes, while Bill and Charlie discussed the charms needed for the planned expansion of the dragon preserve in Romania.

The evening had gone surprisingly well and he was happy to have everyone together for a change. He knew the peace of the evening wouldn’t last,

but was greedy enough to wish that it could. He held out hope, however, that things would improve after tonight.

When Fred placed a tea cup before him, Arthur blinked in surprise and noticed that everyone was seated at the table once more. Knowing he couldn't put it off any longer, he stood up and excused himself for a moment.

Walking into his bedroom, he approached his night table and gazed down at the stone bowl he'd placed there earlier in the evening. Harry had given the Pensieve to Ginny, and everyone in the family had placed memories within it. Everyone but Charlie. The memories were for him, to help him understand what had led the family to Haven...and to Harry Potter.

Arthur took the Pensieve from the night table and turned towards the door. As much as he had enjoyed the peace of the evening, it was time for Charlie to learn the truth, no matter how much pain it caused.

Seeing their father walk into the kitchen with the Pensieve, Bill and George rose and moved to stand behind Charlie's chair. When Arthur placed the bowl on the table, Ginny and Fred stood up and waited.

"What's that?" Charlie asked, looking at the Pensieve. Then, seeing that everyone was standing, he pushed his chair back. When he gained his feet, however, Bill and George took his arms, gently but firmly, and held him in place.

"What's going on?" Charlie asked angrily.

"It's time for you to learn the truth," Arthur said quietly. "Your brothers, sister and I have all placed memories into the Pensieve. Tonight, you will view them and, I hope, understand why our family is here."

Charlie tried to jerk his arms away from his brothers, but they held him firmly. "Pensieve memories can be altered," he all but snarled.

"True, but these haven't been," Arthur said calmly as he removed the shield he'd placed over the Pensieve. "You know us, Charlie, and you know at least some of what you will see here. Once you've seen them, you'll be able to judge for yourself the truthfulness of our memories."

Arthur touched the contents of the bowl with his wand. Then, nodding to Bill and George, he watched as they forced Charlie's hand over the bowl until all three touched the silver liquid.

Turning to face Ginny and Fred, Arthur nodded once more, and they all reached out, touched the liquid and felt themselves drawn down as they, too, fell into the memories placed in the bowl.

*When the scene in front of him unfolded, Charlie's eyes widened. They were in the living room of the Burrow. Before him sat Albus Dumbledore and his parents. As he listened the Headmaster explain to his parents why they should take the money from Harry Potter's trust fund, he glanced at his father. The look of self recrimination and loathing on Arthur's face surprised him.*

*Turning back, he listened to Dumbledore explain to his parents that if they didn't take the money, it would go to Harry's aunt and uncle when the boy died facing Voldemort, rewarding them for their years of abuse.*

*After his parents agreed to the Headmaster's request, the scene faded and everything went gray for a moment before the next took shape.*

*Dumbledore, still in the living room of the Burrow, trying to convince his mother and father to maneuver Ron into meeting Harry on the train in first year, befriending him, then reporting his actions and thoughts to the Headmaster. His parents agreed to Dumbledore's request, and the scene changed again.*

*They were still in the Burrow, but had shifted to the kitchen. Here, Ron was demanding money from his parents. When they refused, he told them he would tell Harry that they were stealing from him. As they reluctantly agreed, Dumbledore came into view, and Charlie watched as the old man convinced Ron of the need for secrecy about the money the family now had access to.*

*One after the other, the memories came.*

*Hermione, standing in the Great Hall at Hogwarts, telling the student body about Ron's attempted rape and Dumbledore's lack of action to protect the female students.*

*Molly calling Hermione a hussy and attempting to strike her in The Three Broomsticks after the Board meeting.*

*Dumbledore telling the Order that the Brotherhood was evil and in control of Harry Potter, who was being trained to kill Voldemort, only to replace him as the next Dark Lord.*

*Ron finding Ginny in a broom closet and beating her until she fell unconscious.*

*Molly striking Bill at the Burrow*

*Charlie wept as he saw his sweet, loving mother become a greedy, thieving shrew and his youngest brother become someone he didn't recognize. As much as he tried to deny the memories he was seeing, they had a ring of truthfulness to them that made it impossible.*

*And still, the memories went on, tearing down his beliefs one by one until he was left with nothing but the horrible truth of what his mother and brother had become.*

As the last memory faded, the kitchen of his father's cottage snapped back into place as he was ejected from the Pensieve. Taking two steps back

from the table, he faced his family as the tears ran freely down his cheeks.

"How? How did all of this happen?" Charlie choked out.

"Your mother and I listened to the wrong person, Charlie," Arthur said tiredly. Placing his palms on the table, he shook his head. "We, like you, felt that Dumbledore was the wisest man to lead the fight against the Dark Lord. At first, his requests seemed logical and I felt we were doing the right thing in agreeing to them. But then, slowly, things started to change. Your mother became obsessed with the money we were receiving from Dumbledore and I came to realize that, no matter how the Headmaster rationalized what we were doing, it was still stealing, and from a young man who thought of us like family. When I tried to speak to your mother about it, she wouldn't hear of it. And once Ron found out about the money, things began to spiral out of control."

Arthur looked away from his family and down at the table top. "It's a horrible thing to tell your child that you are a thief and a liar, but that is what I am, Charlie," he said, his voice thick. "And that is what your mother and Ron were, as well. I got out, confessed my crimes to Amelia, your brothers and sister, and to Harry. I should have written to you, as well. I can only apologize to you for not telling you sooner, for not explaining what was happening to the family while you were in Romania, but it was too painful."

When Ginny wormed her way under her father's arm and hugged him, he wrapped his arms around her and looked at Charlie. "As for the other memories, they all stem from Dumbledore and his manipulations of our family. His ultimate goal, we think, was to gain control of Harry. He attempted to have himself named Harry's guardian and he set Ron to spying on him. He even granted an interview with Rita Skeeter, in which he told the world that Harry was turning dark, or some such rubbish, and that, on top of the physical abuse young Harry suffered, he was also raped, which is untrue and only made Harry's life that much more difficult."

Charlie looked at his family, seeing the truth in their eyes, and blanched. "But all my life you and mum have told me how powerful and good Dumbledore is! How we should all listen to him and obey him!"

"And we were wrong," Arthur said as he released Ginny, took a step towards Charlie and placed a hand on his shoulder. "No one is perfect, son. I've made many mistakes in my life, but none worse than listening to Dumbledore. Had I not done so, your mother and Ron would be here now."

"This has to be a lie, all of it!" Charlie exclaimed, jerking away from his father and looking around the kitchen frantically.

"It's not," Bill said quietly.

"Everything you've seen and been told is the truth," George added.

"We wouldn't lie to you, Charlie," Ginny told him earnestly.

"Oh, Merlin, what have I done?" Charlie whispered.

"Done?" Fred asked, puzzled.

Charlie backed away from his family until his back touched the wall. "You're not lying? Dumbledore is the reason our family was torn apart? Why mum and Ron..." Seeing the nods from the twins, Bill and his father, he fell slowly to his knees and buried his head in his hands. "What have I done? What have I done!"

Ginny scowled. "Yes, just what *have* you done?"

"Ginny," Bill admonished.

"No, Bill," she said, her gaze never leaving Charlie's kneeling form. "He's done something...something that could cost us...all of us." Her eyes narrowed.

"Charlie?" Arthur asked, kneeling next to his son. "What is it?"

Charlie looked up at his father, his expression one of horror and remorse. "I brought Dumbledore into Haven," he whispered.

"What?!" Bill, the twins and Arthur all exclaimed with varying degrees of disbelief.

"The pub," Ginny said quietly, her eyes riveted on Charlie. "He's running the pub!"

"Ginny?" Bill asked.

"It fits," she said, still staring at Charlie. "My instincts tell me I'm right. He's here, running the pub, gathering information." She looked up then, startled, as the sound of a loud, shrieking siren pierced the darkness outside and reached those in the cottage.

"The wards!" Arthur shouted, bolting to his feet. "Someone or something has breached the wards!"

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## Padfoot Manor...

When everyone finally calmed down, Harry found himself sitting on a couch with Hermione curled up close beside him. He was reading a volume on advanced transfiguration. Hermione, too, was reading, while Dan and Emma tried to teach Remus and Tonks how to play bridge.

Suddenly the candles in the room flared brightly and the manor rang with a pure bell tone. Harry leapt to his feet, causing Hermione to fall to her

back on the couch.

"The town's under attack! Remus, get to the Operation Center. We may need help," Harry snapped.

Remus paled. "Harry, most of the Aurors are away at the Academy for that training session."

"Damnit! Fine, get whatever help they can provide. I'm going to Government House. O'Dalley should know where the attack is happening," Harry said. Then he gestured and his staff appeared in his hand. A moment later, he vanished without a sound.

Winky appeared then and handed Hermione her staff.

"Mum? Dad? Do you have your wands on you?" Hermione asked.

Both nodded.

"Fine, let's follow Harry. You two will stay at Government House and help out however you can," Hermione said.

Dan frowned. "I'm not letting you go out there alone, Hermione Jane!"

"Yes, you will! You two are not trained for this yet, she is. Maybe one day you'll join her, but not today," Tonks said in an even tone. Gone were all traces of the happy go lucky woman, replaced by the unflappable Auror.

Remus vanished with a pop, then Hermione. A moment later, the room was empty.

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### **Government House, Haven...**

Harry appeared in the center of the ready room for the town constabulary, and found it was a madhouse.

"We have Dementors coming at us from four different directions," someone shouted.

O'Dalley rushed into the room carrying a large map. He leaned the map up against a wall and marked off four different spots. "We have Dementors here, here, here and here. Right now, I have a few men capable of casting a Patronus holding them off, but I've had reports that they aren't alone. One of our boys was killed with a killing curse, and the Dementors are being driven forward."

Harry's eyes widened. One of the locations where Dementors had been spotted was dangerously close to the Johansen farm. O'Dalley cast a glance at Harry.

"I'm going to the Johansens. Send help as soon as you can," Harry said, then he was gone.

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### **Johansen Farmhouse...**

Harry appeared in the country lane leading up to the farm house. All the lights were out and he could hear screaming and weeping coming from inside, then suddenly the sound of a shotgun going off.

Feeling a strange writhing sensation on his arm, Harry reached up to pull back his sleeve. Before he could reach it, Padfoot burst through his sleeve and, growing as he went, came to a sitting position next to him.

The huge Grim thumped his tail a few times as he looked at Harry. Then he looked at the farm house and growled.

"Come on, Padfoot," Harry said tensely.

Moving as fast as he could, he hurtled through the door. Padfoot followed a moment later. The family was huddled in the center of the family room. Sven stood unsteadily and fumbled with his shotgun, trying to reload.

The room was frigid.

Mama held as many of the children as she could, weeping from the effects of the Dementors. Even though the adults couldn't see the Dementors, they could feel them, and Cally, the oldest of the children, was pointing them out to Sven.

The Dementors circled above the family, driving the fears of the children to a fever pitch.

"Padfoot, protect the children," Harry snapped.

The large spectral dog bounded into the middle of the huddled family, then viciously snapped at an outstretched claw of a Dementor.

The Dementor snatched its hand out of the way and a low howl issued from under its hood.

"Expecto Patronum!" Harry shouted. A blaze of blinding white light exploded from his staff. Prongs burst forth, catching several Dementors on his antlers and goring them. Harry's aura burst from his body and the entire house lit up.

A moment later, an otter flew through the window, then a lion, then other Patronus creatures, pushing the Dementors back.

"Everyone outside! Now!" Harry barked.

Sven jerked as if he had been shocked, then he moved to Mama and they started to push the kids towards the front door. Padfoot followed slowly behind the children, growling and snarling at the Dementors.

The children spilled out the front door, crying and holding onto each other fearfully. Harry grabbed Sven's arm before he could leave. "Is that all of them?"

Sven looked around, taking a quick head count. "Ja, except for the twins," he said. Then he choked, realizing he had no idea about the fate of his daughters.

"Fine, go," Harry said, pushing the older man forward. Then he turned and directed Prongs against several Dementors that were trying to follow the children through the door.

Harry had just about cleared the house when he heard someone outside shout, "Protego!"

There was a flash of light and the house shuddered. A corner of the house exploded in a shower of splinters from a *Reducto* r that had bounced off the shield.

Harry ran to the Johansen family, huddled behind Hermione, Draco, Luna and Ginny. His friends were casting shields, as they had come under Death Eater fire.

Harry frowned. *The ward must come very close to the house*, he thought. He could see one dead Death Eater and two others, who were firing upon the children.

Draco and Ginny started to send curses at the Death Eaters.

"Expecto Patronum!" he shouted again.

With the others fighting Death Eaters, they couldn't deal with the Dementors, who were now circling the group.

Again Prongs sprang from his staff and rushed at the Dementors. Harry could see several constables running up the road to help them. One man stopped right in front of Harry and added his own shield to the fire fight.

"Sir, the Patronuses aren't chasing off the Dementors. The Death Eaters can't cross the ward, but they're driving the Dementors to a killing frenzy," gasped the man.

Harry nodded in reply. He stepped over to join Hermione and the others when Luna suddenly stood up.

"Luna!" Draco screamed and he reached for her. Luna nimbly stepped out of his grip and danced over to Harry.

"I'm sorry, Harry, but I need your help," she said in a soft voice, then she grabbed his free hand.

When her hand made contact with his, a several bursts of light rose up around them. Harry pitched forward to his knees, screaming in pain. He felt like every piece of his body was exploding. Spots burst into his vision and he tried to yank his hand free, but Luna had him in an iron grip.

Hermione looked up at Luna, then at Harry and her expression hardened. "*Stupefy*!" she shouted, aiming her staff at Luna. The red beam of light arced the distance and vanished.

"I'm sorry, Hermione. You'll understand soon enough, but you can't stop this," Luna said dreamily, her voicing taking on a strange, echoing quality.

Hermione moved to raise her staff again, but Draco tackled her from behind, pinning her to the ground.

"No!" he gasped.

"But she's killing him!" Hermione cried, pointing at Harry writhing on the ground. Hermione began to struggle with Draco, but he was too strong.

Around them the lights that had appeared started to swirl and spin. As they did, each became larger and larger. The Dementors began to back away from the area.

Ginny broke her gaze away from Harry, who seemed to be in terrible pain, and looked up at the bright lights.

One light broke free from the rest, rising above the ground and, as it did, it took shape. Ginny watched in awe as a creature appeared. It would have looked fairy-like, had it not been as tall as a person and glowing blindingly white.

Huge white wings unfurled and the creature swooped down over a Dementor.

It gripped the Dementor with its front paws and the wings wrapped around it, trapping it. There came a high pitched keening sound from the hovering creature and it dipped its beautiful face into the space created by the wings.

Ginny gasped when the wings suddenly snapped open and ash and a black cloak fell to the ground. All around her, other lights formed into the fairy-like creatures. In a matter of moments, they had consumed all the Dementors in the area, then they took wing again to find more prey.

The remaining Death Eater, seeing the destruction of the Dementor, apparated away.

When Luna released Harry's hand, his writhing ceased and he lapsed into silence.

There was a small popping noise next to Luna and a small, naked man with a horn in his forehead appeared. The man grabbed his privates and gestured rudely at Luna. He jerked hard on himself several times.

Luna smiled at the little man and patted his head, which only made him angrier.

"Yes, I know. Now be a dear and run off," she murmured.

The little man passed an enormous amount of wind, then vanished as if that had been his propellant. Draco and Hermione turned a little green after catching a whiff. Harry sniffed once and moaned then he started to sit up.

Hermione pushed Draco off her and went to help him.

"Harry?"

Hermione wrapped an arm around him and he leaned against her tiredly. "Merlin, what hit me?" he whispered.

"Luna," Hermione said angrily, shooting the younger woman an angry glare.

Luna looked over at Hermione and Harry, her expression sad. "I'm sorry, Harry. I needed your power. It was the only way."

Harry shook his head groggily. "The only way... Wait, what about the Dementors?" he asked, feeling stupid.

"Eaten, I think. I don't know what Luna did, but they ate them," Ginny said in an awed tone.

"They? Ginny, what are you talking about?"

"Luna grabbed your hand, Harry. You screamed in pain and suddenly she was surrounded by hundreds of white lights. The lights turned into these things that looked like beautiful glowing fairies."

"Angels," Luna said primly.

Ginny looked at the girl startled. "Angels? Alright then, angels," she murmured.

"I created them, with Harry's help, so I get to name them. Would you prefer Glowing Clipshards instead? Or Floating Smugworts?," Luna said with a smile.

"Fine, angels then. Where did they come from?" Hermione asked angrily.

"From nature, Hermione. If you want, you can consider them an anti-Dementors, or the Dementor predator we talked about. I didn't have enough power to do it myself, so I borrowed Harry's power," Luna replied.

"Is that why I feel like I've been beaten?" Harry asked in a plaintive tone.

"I'm sorry, Harry. I didn't know it would cause you so much pain. But nature wasn't going to create them for another thousand years or so. With your power, we hurried the process," Luna said contritely.

Hermione moved to say something, but Harry stopped her. "No, Hermione, it's alright. She didn't do it on purpose. I think she saved us all."

"Look, this is all fine and dandy, I suppose, but I think we should be getting back to town. We need to help the Johansens with their children," Draco said in a tense voice.

Suddenly everyone else realized they were surrounded by frightened children.

Harry stood unevenly and leaned heavily on his staff. "What about the Death Eaters?"

"I think Sven might have gotten one with his gun, Harry," Draco said in a soft voice. "They were able to come very close to the house here."

Harry nodded wearily. "Yeah, the farm house is on the very edge of the town. I couldn't extend the line out any farther without someone helping me in a power sharing... Merlin! Now, I know why we use a ritual to share power. Luna just about drained me dry."

Harry looked over at Sven, who was still holding his shotgun and scanning the night sky. He stood very close to Mama, who was hugging her children. Once they'd all been hugged, she simply started over again, working her way from the littlest to the biggest.

"Sven, let's get to town. There will be food and medicine there for us," Harry said.

Sven nodded. "We fix those men good, eh Harry?"

Harry smiled at the older man, while Mama picked up little Linda and started to lead her children down the lane towards town. Hermione wormed her way under Harry's arm, helping to steady him, and one of the constables walked discretely behind him, ready to catch him if necessary.

Everyone paused upon entering the town square. There were lights everywhere and people were rushing back and forth. Healers were running around pressing chocolate into every empty hand they could spot.

"I'll see to the Johansen's," Draco said, then he led Luna off, with Mama and Papa Johansen following.

Harry motioned towards the fountain in the center of the square and they made their way over to it and sat on the edge.

"Hermione! Harry!" shouted Emma Granger as she rushed up to them, Dan right behind her.

Emma pressed a large piece of chocolate into Hermione's hand and another into Harry's.

Harry took a bite and waited for the rush of sweetness to wash away the numb feeling. Almost immediately, he started to relax and lean against Hermione, while Emma fussed over them both.

"Oh, Merlin! I forgot in all the rush!" shouted Ginny, who suddenly paled.

"Ginny?" Harry asked cautiously. *What else could go wrong?* he asked himself.

"Harry, I'm so sorry... We found out what Charlie was hiding just as the attack started," Ginny said in a rush. Her expression was filled with shame.

Harry's eyes narrowed. "What?" he asked in a hard tone.

"Charlie snuck Dumbledore into Haven. He's here right now! He's disguised himself and is running that new pub." Ginny stammered, then backed away from him as he stood up.

"Dumbledore," he hissed and his aura flared, blinding those nearby.

Harry, his exhaustion masked by a fresh dose of adrenaline, walked toward The Enchanted Goat. With a worried look, Hermione moved to follow him, with the others close behind.

Harry walked up to the front of The Enchanted Goat. He raised his staff and the door exploded upwards in thousands of fragments.

"Dumbledore!" Harry thundered. "Come out here, old man!"

The music ceased from inside the pub and those patrons who had not been helping people started to run from the building. Several men spilled out the hole where the front door used to be, others climbed out the windows.

"Dumbledore!" Harry shouted again. "Come out, you coward!"

Suddenly a figure appeared in the doorway. The man was tall and completely bald. In one hand he held a wand, in the other a glass orb.

"Diffendo!" Dumbledore shouted, pointing his wand at Harry.

Harry contemptuously batted the curse to one side with his staff. "*Stupefy!*"

He had every intention of capturing Dumbledore alive, if possible.

Dumbledore put up a shield and cast another spell. Harry's shielded and returned fire, but his exhaustion started to work against him.

The two men exchanged curses at faster and faster rates, then suddenly Harry got clipped by a powerful bludger and he spun around. He whirled back in time to see Dumbledore hurl the orb at him.

"*Incendio!*" Harry shouted, and Dumbledore shrieked as his robes burst into flames.

Then, with a loud, cracking sound, Dumbledore vanished from view.

Harry started to back away when the orb landed at his feet and exploded, hurling him skyward. He had just enough time for a single thought before darkness took him.

*I really hate that man.*

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### Authors Notes:

Well, another chapter down and some issues are working towards a resolution. Others we've barely scratched and that is how it should be. Never forget our primary aim is to tease and twist the reader's knickers until they bunch up and slide into that crack in a very uncomfortable manner.

"Stop that! You're giving away our secrets!" Alyx shouted at Bob.

Sigh...

Moving right along then.

To the reader who asked a bunch of questions. Yes, yes, yes, no, no, maybe, yes, no, never, no, no, yes, and maybe. Please use these answers for

your questions in any order that makes you happy.

For all those that wished Alyx well with her spider bite, she is doing better and she thanks you. Currently, the bite appears to be healing and the antibiotics took care of the secondary infection. However, now for the bad news. She is recovering from her spider bite and suffering from a husband bite. I warned her about reaching for my donuts!!

Support for the AK enema, strangely enough, is picking up. Frankly, I don't understand the appeal of shoving something up your butt, but then, that's one of the reasons why I'll never write a slash fic... except as a parody.

Yes, Kristina, there is a Santa Claus and Ron Weasley is most definitely dead in the Sun series.

To those of you who saw fit to correct us about the proper usage of the honorific 'Sir', we thank you from the bottom of our hearts. We're just poor ignorant colonials who don't use such elitist titles. DOWN WITH... (smack smack smack)

"Bob! Stop it!"

"Yes, dear."

So many enjoyed the idea of Snape in a thong that we're considering repeating the event at our next annual Christmas party. However, for those who can't make it to the party, we'll send you photos. Thanks!

We'll start seeing more of Harry's T-Shirts soon, I promise.

Hagrid is currently working as keeper of keys and grounds as well as Care of Magical Creatures at the Haven School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. Like Professor Sprout, he was caught by surprise with the evacuation of Hogwarts and went along for the ride.

### **The UPDATELESS LIST!!!**

Harry Potter and Merlin's Gifts by GryffRavHuffSlythendor

<http://www.fanfiction.net/s/1991243/1/>

This is a nice tale about Harry finding someone willing to help him after the DoM fight. Unfortunately it was first started in 2004 and hasn't been updated since December of 2005. Has it been abandoned? Perhaps.



*Bobmin*  
*FanficAuthors.net*

# Sunrise Over Britain

## Chapter 10 - Angels and Weddings

### Standard Disclaimer:

The curtains pull back and spotlight lights up center stage. There is a moment of silence and then you can clearly hear the sound of approaching footsteps. Slowly the figure of Alan Rickman enters the pool of light and he bows, then smiles at the audience.

“WOOO WOOO! GET NAKED!!!” shouted a voice from the audience.

Harry turned to Hermione. “Do you really want to see that slimy git naked?” he asked in a hurt tone.

Hermione blinked and realized she might have gone too far. “I just want to a few photos for my scrapbook!”

Harry turned and grabbed at his program reading it angrily.

Rickman frowned. “I will not get naked, not for you Miss Granger, or for anyone else. I am a serious artist!”

“Yeah yeah, artist my arse,” muttered Harry. Hermione elbowed Harry in the eye.

“Show us your butt!” she yelled.

“Do you mind? I am here at the gracious invitation of the authors who would like me to tell you that they make no claim whatsoever to the Potter universe. All that stuff belongs to JK Rowling. And on a more personal note, I too hate Snape and am quite thankful that no one in their right mind would possibly confuse me for a character I play in some silly movie.”

“Yeah yeah enough talk! Get Naked already!” Hermione shouted, then she swished her wand and a loud disco beat began to play. A mirror ball lowered from the ceiling and Rickman suddenly found himself on Roller skates wearing only a pink pair of speedos.

Rickman looked up in outrage while Hermione tried to climb over the rows of seats to get to the stage. She nearly made it to the stage when Draco and Luna pushed him off the stage. Hermione scampered onto the stage and looked around uncertainly. A noise from one of the balcony booths drew her attention.

“No you can't do this! I'm under contract. Wait, I'll tell them I won't do the movies anymore! Noooo!”

Suddenly Rickman, aka Snape, plunged through one of the curtains and plummeted a hundred feet to his death. Draco and Luna look at each other, smiled, then winked at Harry.

“Death to Roller Disco!” shouted Luna from the balcony.

“Funny, I thought Disco was making a come back,” murmured Bob.

“Over my dead body,” snarled Alyx.

“Nooooooooo!!!!” wailed Hermione.

Alyx turned to Bob and glared at him. “Back to the Snape/Rickman thing again are we?”

Bob shrugged. “Sometimes the old material is the best material. Besides, if he's dead, they'll have to write Snape out of the movies.”

“You are evil and must be destroyed!” Alyx proclaimed holding a pitchfork.

“Yes dear I know,” replied the unflappable Bob.

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### Sunrise over Britain

#### Chapter 10

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#### Haven Town Square (July 18th)...

Hermione watched in horror as Harry and Dumbledore dueled. Had the circumstances been different, she would have laughed at the comical sight of the completely bald ex-headmaster. He looked as though he had been the hapless victim of a Weasley prank.

The reality, however, was far more sinister.

She tried several times to get a shot in, but her father had held her too far back from the fight. Ginny had moved closer, but Bill intercepted her as well. She cried out when Harry landed a weakened flame curse on Dumbledore and he apparated away with his robes aflame. Barely a second later, Harry was thrown a good twenty feet from the front of the Enchanted Goat when the orb Dumbledore had hurled at him exploded at his feet.

Harry landed with a sickening thud and slid a few feet. Hermione couldn't help but moan in pain seeing him lying so still on the ground. She fought

against her father's hold, but Dan was too shocked to do anything but hold her tighter.

The fight was over and it took several seconds for that fact to sink into the minds of the stunned onlookers. It had been a public battle with literally hundreds of witnesses, all of whom were still recovering from the night's Dementor attack.

A collective sigh went through the crowd and Hermione finally broke free from Dan's grasp.

"Harry!" she shouted and ran to his side.

He lay on the gravel road, bleeding from several wounds. Hermione dropped to her knees next to him and reached out, then pulled her hand back. She wasn't sure where she could touch him. He coughed once and opened his eyes.

"Hermione?" he whispered.

"Shhhh. Rest, Harry," Hermione said through her tears.

Another man squatted down on next to Harry and started to cast diagnostic spells. The man did a doubletake when he recognized Harry.

"Well, Harry, we meet again. No, don't move yet. I'll get you fixed up," Sam said.

"Hi, Sam," Harry replied weakly and he tried to smile.

Sam looked at Hermione. "Say, Harry, who's the pretty girl? Friend of yours?"

"Sam, meet Hermione, my fiancée," he mumbled.

Hermione nodded to the healer. Then looked surprised when he reached over and grabbed her hands, placing them on Harry's shoulders.

"Pleased to meet you, now hold him flat for a moment," Sam said with a small smile. "Harry look into your pretty lady's eyes. This is going to hurt."

He nodded and stared up at Hermione. Sam rotated Harry's arm, then gave a strong pull on it. Harry moaned and he arched his back against Hermione's hands as his shoulder popped back into the socket.

Sam ran a few more diagnostics and frowned as he leaned down and pushed up Harry's pants leg.

"That's an old injury," Hermione murmured.

"I'll say," Sam replied, then looked down at Harry. "Alright, you've scrapped a nice bit of skin off your back with that slide, and you had a dislocated shoulder. Besides from that, you're exhausted. Have your regular healer check you over and get some sleep. Oh, and no magic for at least 24 hours after you wake up."

Harry nodded tiredly at the healer, then looked up at Hermione, who was still kneeling by his head with her hands on his shoulders. She looked down at him and her expression hardened.

"Just what did you think you were going to do, Harry James Potter? You were exhausted and you went to fight Dumbledore? Are you insane? You could have waited a day so we could plan and capture him. But no, you have to be the Bloody Boy-With-No-Brains and run off to a fight which nearly got you killed! We're getting married in two weeks and you're picking fights!"

"He started it," Harry mumbled.

That, of course, was the wrong thing to say, as it only wound her up more. She applied guilt like a pro, delivered a passionate appeal to him about what he put her through, and threatened him with bodily harm if he ever scared her like that again. When she took a deep breath to continue her rant, Dan stopped her by placing a hand on her shoulder and squeezing gently.

"Hermione, look," Emma said.

Hermione looked down, only to find him fast asleep.

"Let's get him up to the manor," Dan suggested.

Hermione conjured a stretcher and levitated Harry onto it. She was about to levitate the stretcher when the healer held up his hand.

"He's Harry Potter?" Sam asked in an incredulous tone.

Hermione nodded tiredly, then lifted the stretcher for the walk back to the manor.

Sam watched Hermione and her parents head off to the manor after thanking him for his help. Then he shook his head and turned to see if there was anyone else in need of help.

"Well I'll be dipped in shit," he muttered to himself with a grin, then turned to the business of handing out chocolate.

The cottage was very isolated and, while old, it appeared to be well maintained.

As such, no one saw the flaming person who appeared on the porch of the small cottage. There was a whooshing sound when the flames were extinguished and then, swaying, the person ripped the still smoldering clothing from his body.

Naked, Dumbledore stumbled a few feet, gasping in pain, before collapsing to his knees. He swayed from the pain of the burns and then pitched forward, face down.

Silence descended once again on the remote mountain cottage and for a moment, nothing disturbed it. Then the door to the cottage opened and a pair of elvish arms reached out, pulled Dumbledore inside and slammed the door behind him.

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### **Padfoot Manor (July 19th)...**

Hermione watched Harry wake from his deep sleep. Danni had been in and out several times during the night while Hermione dozed fitfully on divan. According to Danni, his magical core was quickly returning to normal levels. The greatest damage had been to his shoulder and that was healing nicely, even if it would be sore for the next day.

She shook her head, trying to wake up. Magical Medicine was in some ways more advanced than Muggle Medicine and in others more primitive. Danni knew that Harry's arm and shoulder would be sore today, but it hadn't occurred to her to have him put his arm into a sling for the day. For all the power those in the magical world had, it still amazed her that they missed the simple things.

A sound from the bed caused her to cease day dreaming as she stood up and moved quickly towards the bed.

"Ow," moaned Harry as he tried to stretch. He sat up unsteadily and swung his legs off the bed. He made a move to wipe at his face with his hand and winced in pain.

"I really blew it last night didn't I?" he asked, hanging his head.

"Yes, you did."

"I let my anger lead instead of my head," he said ruefully, then he shook his head.

Hermione refrained from saying anything. Now that she'd had time to calm down, she knew his own sense of right and wrong would be bad enough without her adding to it. The last thing he need was her to start ranting at him again.

Harry straightened and winced again. "What's wrong with my shoulder and arm?"

"You dislocated your shoulder last night. It's going to be sore today. Danni left you a potion to drink. It will speed the healing enough that, by tomorrow, it should be fine. Also, she agrees with that American Healer. No magic for you today. Luna's little stunt left you almost totally drained. Your little fight with Dumbledore certainly didn't help, either," Hermione said, trying to keep the biting edge out of her voice.

"Are you still mad at her?"

Hermione moved to stand in front of him, her hands on her hips. "Harry, she nearly drained you dry last night. And we both know if it weren't for that, you wouldn't have gotten hurt by Dumbledore," she replied angrily.

Harry sighed, looked out the window and his eyes become unfocused as he remembered the details of the night before. "The pain was incredible, but at the same time, I could feel her pleading for help. I think she had to feel the same level of pain I was feeling during the power sharing. She didn't mean to hurt me," he said softly.

Hermione sat next to him on the bed and leaned against his good shoulder. "I know," she replied with a heavy sigh. "But she hurt you so bad and I was afraid for you," she finished in a whisper.

"Well, I'm better now," he said with a grin. "And now we have something to combat the Dementors, just like you wanted."

Hermione sat up straight and frowned, crossing her arms across her chest. "Yes, Luna's Angels."

"So that's what she's going to call them? Not Free Floating Grumpmucks, or Albino Snorkacks?"

"Oh no, she's staying with Angels. And, honestly, I'm not too sure she's wrong about the name," Hermione said with her first real smile of the morning.

Harry turned to look at her and arched an eyebrow in a questioning glance. "Oh?"

"Well, she was right about what they do. Apparently they feed off Dementors. When no Dementors are available, they seem to like being around happy people. It's almost as if they feed off the happiness. We're not sure exactly how many Angels were born last night, but we guess it was close to fifty. Of those, most have already left Haven, but three pair have stayed. One pair is hanging around the school, another is in town near the primary school, and the final pair has taken up residence near the Johansens home."

Harry groaned and put his head in his hand. "The Johansens! How could I have forgotten about them? Are..."

"Relax, Harry, they're fine. They were a bit shook up, but I think the Angels nearby are helping the children even more than the chocolate did."

"But what about..."

"Harry, enough," Hermione said with no small measure of annoyance in her voice. "Right now you need to get up, take a long soak in the tub to help heal that shoulder, then have some breakfast. After that, I've arranged for several people to meet with you to fill you in on the details."

Harry looked at her in surprise, then grinned. "Are you handling me, Mrs. Potter-to-be?"

Hermione smoothed her skirt and looked at him primly. "If I don't, no one else will, Mr. Potter," she replied with an impish grin.

One hour and a hot bath later, Harry walked back into his bedroom, half dressed. Hermione looked up from the breakfast table.

"Keep your robe on and don't put on a shirt just yet. Danni wants to have one final look before you get dressed," she called.

Harry nodded and sat down at the table with her. She smiled and offered him a pastry.

"So, who's coming to the meeting this morning?" he asked, trying to sound casual. If there was one thing he had learned about Hermione it was that if she didn't want to talk about something, you might as well speak to the walls.

Hermione eyed him suspiciously for a moment, then shrugged. "I've asked Amelia, Remus and Michael O'Dalley. Ginny asked to bring Charlie around later, but I told her I would get back to her after talking to you about it."

Harry frowned and was about to reply when the door to the bedroom opened. Danni walked in, her eyes examining him before she ever reached him. Emma followed, closing the door behind her.

"Ah, you're awake. Good. That saves me the trouble of waking you. Have you had a soak this morning?" Danni asked, walking over to stand next to the table.

Harry nodded and eyed the healer warily.

She shook her head at him, though her eyes danced. "You know, if you didn't get yourself hurt like this, I wouldn't have to poke and prod you, Harry," she said, openly grinning.

Harry scowled at her, but she ignored him, concentrating instead on pulling his robe off his shoulder. She ran a quick diagnostic charm, which caused his shoulder to glow a soft blue tinged with green. She bent over to examine the glow more closely, then stood up, smiling.

"Excellent, you're healing well and should be fine by tomorrow morning. Until then, don't aggravate your arm by moving it too much. As for your core, it's nearly recharged. I'd lay off any big magics for today, if I were you," Danni said warningly.

Harry nodded and peeled out of his robe with the healer's help. Then she helped him put on a T-Shirt that read, "I refuse to star in Voldemort's psychodrama!"

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## **Weasley Residence, Haven...**

Charlie Weasley sat at one corner of the table and kept mostly to himself. Last night's revelation about Dumbledore had him stunned still. The attack that followed almost immediately afterward and Harry's duel with Dumbledore seemed a blur. It hadn't been until the early hours that he had finally managed to get to sleep. He had followed his father and helped where he could last night.

When he had gotten up this morning, Ginny had stopped by to inform him that he would be seeing Harry up at the manor house later today. He had to admit now that Ginny frightened him. She was a truly formidable witch and totally unbendable when it came to certain issues.

Arthur looked worriedly between the two of them and offered to come with Charlie for his meeting with Harry. It was an offer Charlie gratefully accepted.

"Worried about meeting with, Harry?" asked Arthur in a sympathetic tone.

"A little," Charlie mumbled in reply.

"It's never easy to admit you've made a mistake, Charlie, especially to Harry. I remember when I came clean with him back around the holidays," Arthur said, expression softening. "He was willing to give me another chance, despite what we've done to him as a family."

"How could Ron have done those things, Dad? I mean, we all knew he liked Hermione, but... Bloody bollocks, what a pounce I've turned into," Charlie said.

Arthur laid a comforting hand on his shoulder. "Perhaps, but knowing you've made a mistake is the first step to fixing it. As to Ron... well, he changed," he said pensively, running a hand through his thinning hair. "He became someone else, someone we didn't know. I will always mourn the Ron I like to remember, the small boy in love with chess and Quidditch."

Charlie nodded thoughtfully and stared for a moment at his bowl of cereal before speaking again. "I don't know if I've ever felt more ashamed, Dad," he said in a voice barely above a whisper. "I put everyone in danger by bringing Dumbledore into Haven, and now my own sister hates me."

"I don't hate you, Charlie," Ginny said in a flat voice. "I think you're pig-headed, stubborn and a bloody ass for refusing to believe us. I hate that we

had to force you into a Pensieve to see the real memories. And for forcing us to relive those painful memories. You broke trust with your family and that's going to take a long time to regain. But you're my brother and I don't hate you."

Charlie's head lifted up and he looked at his little sister. For the first time since he arrived in Haven, he could see the twinkle in her eyes and a slight smile tugging at her lips. Charlie smiled back at his sister and a little weight lifted from his heart.

## Padfoot Manor...

Harry sat at his desk in his study. He had finally managed to get Hermione to stop hovering over him and sit down. Emma had put his arm into a sling. It made it easier for him to move around, but harder to do some things. Danni, after taking a close look at the sling, approved of it, and told him to live with it for today, no matter how annoying it may become.

Now he sat reading a list of the casualties from last night's attack. It looked bad initially, but even he had to admit that they had been incredibly lucky. They'd had one death from a killing curse, and one adult kissed by a Dementor. There were dozens of minor injuries caused by people running in panic. He frowned when he saw that a number of small children had been injured in the panic when a few Dementors had come close to one of the residential streets.

After several minutes he wordlessly passed the report to Hermione to read, then wiped a hand over his face tiredly. "I think we got off lucky," he murmured.

"Lucky? It's a bloody miracle," Amelia said with a snort. "Had it not been for the Angels, we would have had a bloody disaster on our hands."

"I don't like this part about the children," Hermione said with an unhappy expression.

O'Dalley looked thoughtful. "How about organizing a block defense?"

Everyone turned to look at him.

O'Dalley tried to hide his grin. "It's simple, really. I was reading about some of the things the muggles did in their great war, and this was one of the ideas that struck me as making sense. If it had been in place last night, there would have been fewer injuries."

Hermione pressed him on the concept. "How does it work?" she asked intently.

"It's not a big deal. We select a few trusty people on each block and call them 'Wardens'. In the event of an attack, it's their job to direct people to previously set up safe areas, like the Town Hall, the school, maybe a few other places. Then the Wardens see that their block of people get there safely. Last night we had a panic. The Wardens directing people should prevent that."

Remus looked up from staring at his feet and nodded. "I like the idea."

Harry looked at each person and received a nod in return. "Alright, it's agreed. Michael, that sounds like an excellent idea and I think I might have just the candidate to head up the effort. I'll speak with him today and tell him to contact you."

O'Dalley nodded. Inwardly he was relieved to hear that he wasn't going to be in charge of this, as well. He had realized last night that his constables needed better training and he was already considering ways to accomplish that.

"Harry, about that orb Dumbledore threw at you last night?" Remus asked.

Harry frowned and nodded for Remus to continue.

"I had the twins look over the area where it hit. From what we could tell, the thing was charmed to explode if the orb came in contact with the ground, as you discovered. Had the orb hit you directly, you would have been bathed in liquid *Imperio* us."

Remus paused as Hermione paled and gripped Harry's arm tightly. Amelia's only reaction was a tightening around her mouth.

"As you know, liquid *Imperio* us normally requires the victim to imbibe the potion. It can be absorbed through the skin, but at a much slower rate. What it would have accomplished would have been to make you highly suggestible for a short time. Oh, and the twins were highly excited by the idea of an exploding orb, it's like their flash bangs, but different. I think they'll have a working prototype in a few days," Remus concluded with a bit of a grin.

Harry smiled as well. He, too, could see the value of a hand held explosive device.

"What about Dumbledore? Is there a connection between him and the attack that occurred just prior to your dueling with him, Harry?" Amelia asked.

Harry shook his head. "I am beginning to think that among Dumbledore's many qualities is a stroke of bad luck. I discovered he was in town last night just after the attack and went off like an idiot after Luna had drained me of most of my magic. He'd been in Haven for a while, from what I understand. I don't have all the details, but our duel was strictly a coincidence with the other attack. And probably the first attack as well."

Amelia considered that for a moment. "Well, that's a bit of a relief, actually. The idea that Voldemort and Dumbledore might have become allies was rather frightening."

"To all of us," Hermione replied in agreement.

There was a minute of silence, then Amelia broke it. "I spoke with Mallory at the Irish Ministry this morning. They offered to provide additional Auror support, if needed."

O'Dalley looked up from his notes. "I'd like to take them up on that offer for a week or two. I think I want to increase the training level among my constables and I want to see every one of them getting a course in field medicine."

"I'll let them know we accept their offer then," Amelia said, then she frowned slightly. "We've also had a request through Minister Mallory to procure a couple Angels for their Department of Mysteries to study."

Harry scowled and turned to Hermione. "How many Angels do we have in Haven again?"

"Six of them," Hermione replied.

Harry turned back to Amelia. "I don't think I'm willing to allow that to happen, Minister. Those Angels saved many lives last night. We owe them a debt of gratitude. Experiments in a lab are not the proper way of expressing it. I would be willing to allow several of their researchers to come to Haven to study the Angels, so long as they conduct their research under the auspices of our Beast Master, and that their research is not harmful to the Angels in any way."

Remus rolled his eyes and started to laugh. Harry was setting up the Irish to work under Hagrid, who would see that no harm came to the Angels in Haven. Even Hermione couldn't resist the urge to laugh.

"I'll let them know about your generous offer, Harry," Amelia replied with a smile.

The door to the office opened and Ginny stuck her head in. "Oops. I'm sorry, Harry. I didn't realize you were still busy," she said.

Harry smiled at her. "Don't go, Ginny. I think we're done here now. Right?"

He looked around and everyone nodded as Amelia, O'Dalley and Remus stood up and walked to the door. Hermione made to stand, but Harry shook his head at her.

Remus, seeing the Weasleys, stopped at the door. He turned around to look at Harry. "Would you like me to stay as well, Harry?" he asked as he stepped aside and Ginny, Arthur and Charlie filed in.

"No thanks, Remus. I think we can handle this one," Harry said with a reassuring smile.

Remus nodded and left the room, closing the door behind him.

Harry looked at the three Weasleys and his expression hardened. Then he leaned back in his chair and tried to run his hand through his hair, only to wince when he chose the wrong arm. Reaching out slowly, he pulled the casualty report closer.

"Do you know there are now over thirty six hundred adults and fifteen hundred children in Haven, Charlie?" Harry asked in a neutral tone.

Charlie blinked at the seemingly unrelated question. "N-N-No, I didn't," he stammered in reply.

"Most of them are refugees from Britain, people who couldn't stand the Ministry or were working for the Ministry when it fell and managed to get lucky enough to fall in our nets. Some of them are family members of students. Healers, seamstresses, enchanters, clerks, shop keepers, mothers, sons and daughters, husbands and wives, all looking for a safe place for themselves and their families."

Harry paused for a moment and stood up from his chair. He turned and walked slowly over to the window and gazed out towards Haven.

"I built this place in the hopes of trying to save something good from Britain. I dreamt of a place where people would once more be able to stand on their own two feet and be proud of it. We've set up a government, we've started planning to take back our homeland, but those people in that town over there still look to me to provide them with protection. I didn't ask for that responsibility, but there it is."

He turned from the window then and glared at Charlie. "What gives you the right to put those people into jeopardy?" he snarled.

Charlie cringed back from Harry, who's eyes were aflame, back-lit by an unholy combination of sheer magical power and blazing anger.

"H-Harry, I'm sorry. I didn't intend for anyone to get hurt," Charlie stammered.

Harry closed his eyes when he realized that his anger, while justified, would solve nothing. With a deep sigh, he let his anger bleed away. When he opened his eyes once again, they were calm, though penetrating. "Charlie, I need your family. Ginny is my sister in a way you'll never understand. Your father is one of Amelia's key people and I have learned to trust him once again. Bill has done wonders in the economic office and the twins have been contributing more to the war effort than anyone realizes. I can't afford to have them distracted by what I should rightfully do to you.

"Therefore, I am going to give you a choice. You can leave Haven, today, never to be welcome back within our wards, or you can join your family in helping our efforts. Be warned, however. No matter what it may do to your family and my relationship with them, if you break faith with me again, I will not spare you a second time."

Arthur closed his eyes and breathed a sigh of relief. Ginny watched, her face a mask, as Charlie hung his head.

"I don't deserve a second chance, Harry. I know that. But since you're offering one, I'd be foolish not to take it. I'll stay."

He looked up at Harry then and their eyes locked. Charlie shivered under the younger man's gaze and tried to break away, but found himself trapped by it.

"Very well. This afternoon you will report to Michael O'Dalley, head of the Haven Constabulary, and inform him that you have been put in charge of the block Wardens, as well as seeing that appropriate shelters are built around the town. Last night we suffered a number of preventable injuries, especially among the children, due to the panic caused by the Dementors. While I don't believe we'll suffer another Dementor attack, the townspeople must be taught what to do in the event of an attack. That, Charlie, will be your job. You endangered the people of Haven. You'll pay for that by helping to make them safer," Harry said.

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### **Later that day in another part of the Manor...**

Hermione paused in the corridor when she heard someone call her name. Peeking into one of the retiring rooms, she spotted Narcissa Black sitting on a small couch, enjoying a cup of tea.

"Hermione dear, please come in. I've meant to speak to you for a while now," Narcissa said in a friendly tone.

While Narcissa and Emma had become close friends, Hermione hadn't had much contact with the older witch and she still harbored a little uneasiness concerning Narcissa's past.

"Tea?" Narcissa asked as she deftly poured a second cup of tea and offered it to her.

Hermione accepted the cup and sat in one of the arm chairs facing Narcissa.

Narcissa smiled. "Relax, my dear. I won't bite you. I've had some wonderful conversations with your mother. She is quite proud of you and your accomplishments."

Hermione blushed slightly and mumbled something into her tea.

Narcissa laughed, then put her tea down and leaned forward, her expression turning very serious. "Hermione, considering your background, you've done really well for yourself."

Hermione bristled at the implied insult about her background, but held her tongue when Narcissa held up her hand.

"No, dear, I don't mean your blood background. I've had enough of that silly tripe to last me a lifetime. No, what I mean is that you were raised in... what do the muggles call it? The middle class?"

Hermione's eyes widened in comprehension and she nodded. "Actually, being dentists, my parents were probably considered upper middle class or even lower upper class."

Narcissa shook her head and refrained from commenting about the bizarre activities of Muggles. "My dear, in a few days time you will be the wife of Harry Potter. Or, to put it in more concise terms, you will be the wife of the last living heir of the Potter family, as well as the current head of the Black family."

Hermione nodded, though her confusion was obvious when she looked at the older witch.

"You will be Lady Potter, or Lady Black, depending upon the occasion. Why, the social obligations of such a position are enough to overwhelm a person," Narcissa said with a sigh.

Hermione stiffened slightly in her seat. She had looked forward to being Mrs. Potter, but she'd never made the connection between Lord Potter-Black and there being some unnamed Lady in the wings.

"I hardly think we'll have time for socializing, at least until Voldemort is defeated..."

"Oh, piff! Voldemort is merely a stepping stone for you two. With you by his side, your Harry would fight the Atlantic Ocean and probably win. No dear, I realize that the war will put a lot of things on hold. But what you need to understand is that you will have obligations not only to your husband, but to the families."

Hermione frowned. "Are you talking about children?"

"Only partially. Having children to keep the family line alive is important. But so is making sure the family's prestige and reputations are upheld. I've watched you struggle for the past few days trying to learn how to cook. But let's be practical here, shall we? You have Dobby and Winky who will probably stay with you and Harry for the rest of their lives. You also have other house elves. Cooking is probably the last thing you need worry about. And finally, you have Harry, who, through no fault of his own, knows how to cook."

"Are you implying I have to become some sort of social butterfly?" Hermione asked through gritted teeth.

Narcissa paused and gave the younger woman a look.

Hermione felt the urge to cringe back, but held her ground. She would *never* become some empty headed bimbo!

"No dear, what I am saying is that part of your job involves the politics of highly placed families. I know that you have a desire to promote the welfare of house elves. What you fail to realize is that, in a mere few days time, you will have the political clout to actually accomplish that desire."



Hermione's expression altered slowly from disgust and anger to one of wonder. Seeing it, Narcissa smiled.

"Yes, dear. You will be Lady Potter, wife and confidant of the savior of the wizarding world and, eventually, the mother of his children. You will have the ability to influence his seats on the Wizengamot when it's reformed."

"Wait," Hermione said. "What do you mean?"

Narcissa smiled. "Harry hasn't told you that he holds two hereditary seats on the Wizengamot?"

Mute, Hermione could only shake her head.

"Don't be too harsh with him, dear. He probably doesn't know himself," Narcissa said with a slight frown. She leaned back in her seat and her fingers drummed on the arm of the couch for a moment. "You know, I think I will need to speak to Remus. Both of you are woefully under-prepared for what will happen after the war is over. Remus has a sound financial mind, so he can stay on helping you manage the estates. But politics? That's a more personal game. Stabbing your enemy in the back, ruining them without killing them..."

When Narcissa's eyes glowed with remembered victories, Hermione frowned. The woman may no longer be a Malfoy, but she had been, and probably still thought of herself as a Slytherin. What she had learned from her house had enabled her to survive not just her marriage, but her dealings with Voldemort and his followers. She was a tough, formidable woman, and Hermione realized that there was much she could learn from her.

Narcissa shook her head and turned her gaze back to Hermione. Seeing her expression, she smiled. "I see you are beginning to understand. Good. Now, I am going to start by helping you and your mother understand what you need to know about politics. In a way, politics has a magic all of its own and it's very satisfying."

"My mother?" Hermione asked, puzzled. Then her eyebrows furrowed in concentration and she nodded in understanding. With Granger Publications taking off and the prestige stemming from their own involvement in the war, the Grangers would be new money and a power unto themselves, and firmly allied to the Houses of Potter and Black.

Narcissa grinned. "Emma was right about you. You do understand. Now then, let me send for Emma and we can start with the basics..."

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### **Haven Operations Center (July 22nd)...**

Caleb looked up from the paper Miles had handed him and stared at Miles in consternation. "This came from the Muggles?" he asked incredulously.

Miles smiled tightly and nodded. "It actually came to us through the Canadian Ministry of Magic, but yes, it started with the Muggle Government in exile."

Caleb scratched his head absently. "I don't know, Miles. Is this really important? I mean, we're in the middle of planning our first real operation and this will draw resources away from that."

Miles frowned and looked over at the large wall map of Britain. "I know what it will do, Caleb, but this is important. The Muggles are concerned about this and it would be in our best interests to cooperate with them. We walk a very fine line here. The Ministry of Magic is fundamentally part of the Muggle Government, even if most of the Muggles don't know we exist. It's been that way since twelve hundred and eighty two. As such, we have to respond to these requests occasionally to ensure the Muggles cooperate with us when needed."

Caleb nodded. He could understand what Miles was saying, but that didn't mean he had to like it.

Miles leaned back in his chair and watched his friend as he came to grips with the politics of the situation. Finally, Caleb relaxed and looked back at Miles.

"So, what can you give me?" asked Miles.

"When do you need them by?" Caleb asked, trying to stem the manpower loss.

"Tonight, tomorrow at the latest."

Miles chuckled as the other man's jaw dropped.

Caleb shook his head, then muttered a quick incantation while waving his wand. A moment later, a piece of parchment appeared in his hand containing his complete roster of Aurors. Scanning his list, he scowled. "Most of the Canadians are still at the Irish training facility working on their Patronus charms. Surprisingly, the Americans picked it up very quickly. They don't have any need of it, but it seems to tickle their fancy. I heard about the block party they held the other day that had hundreds of glowing animals in attendance," Caleb said with a strained smile. The Americans were a rowdy lot and often gave him a headache with their mannerisms and speech, but they generally were a reliable bunch of blokes.

Miles chuckled. He had heard about the block party and how the Americans had introduced the beer and fire whiskey chaser. It was said that the Hospital ran out of Sober-up potions the next day.

Caleb looked down at his list again and his expression brightened. "How many men do you think we need, Miles?"

Two squads ought to take care of it. One for outer security and the other for the actual dirty work.”

“Quite so. So why don't we try the Yanks for this one? We could use a squad of our boys for security and one of the Yank squads?”

Miles grinned. “I like it. Have the boys assemble in the briefing theater at eighteen hundred.”

Caleb stood and nodded to Miles before walking from the office. He had orders to issue.

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### **Strike Team Alpha, Maldon, England...**

Maldon was once a sleepy little historic town on the coast of England. All that changed with fall of the Government and the take over by the military. Now days Maldon was a bustling army controlled town. People who had been caught by army patrols were brought to Maldon for processing. Some, having useful skills, were put to work. For the rest, it was the sprawling slave labor camp that had sprung up around the town.

Maldon was different from the surrounding communities for another reason. They had electricity. The military saw to that. The town had become a staging area for army forays into neighboring communities. Britain, as it currently existed, consisted of regions tightly controlled by the British Army, no-man lands and regions of total anarchy.

The high powered transmitter had been in operation for less than a month, but it's presence had been quickly noticed by the Muggle governments who were keeping an eye on the region. The broadcasts contained a mix of propaganda and coded messages, although it wasn't known who those messages were meant for. It's location within a population center, as well as being encircled by extensive anti-air defenses, made it a difficult target for the Muggle military to reach.

The transmitter was housed in a nondescript gray building on the end of Cromwell Lane. It was an unremarkable building, save for the one hundred foot tall radio antenna behind the building. The transmitter was the brain child of Lucius Malfoy, who had learned about the power of the media in controlling the masses long before the fall of the previous government. It also helped Lucius keep in contact with his ever expanding overseas network. The ward placed around Britain by Harry Potter might prevent Death Eaters from passing, but it did nothing to Muggles and, with the help of the British Army, Lucius had quickly built up an overseas spy network.

Nautical Twilight defines a time when the sun is below the horizon, but the sky is still lit by sunlight. It's effectively dark at ground level and becomes one of the most difficult conditions for the human eye to work in.

It was into this twilight that Strike Team Alpha arrived.

The team consisted of two squads under the over all command of Caleb Newman. Squad one was entirely American in makeup, and would be going for the primary target, the transmitter. Half of squad two would provide outer security for squad one, while the other half of squad two provided a diversion.

At the same time, over fifty house elves would begin a country wide magical diversion to distract the Death Eaters.

Caleb stumbled slightly as he arrived by portkey.

The team was in and not far from their primary target. The American squad leader, a short man named Arnold Blake, gave a low whistle and every one of his people immediately cast a spell on themselves. He then frowned and looked at Caleb. Gesturing, several of his men moved among the British Aurors casting the same spell, while the squad leader cast it on Caleb.

“It's a temperature nulling charm,” Blake whispered. “With it, you can't be spotted by the Muggle infra-red equipment.”

Caleb nodded at the man, but he made a mental note to get more information later about the charm and why it was necessary. Checking his watch he realized that, if everything had gone as planned, the elves would have started their diversion three minutes ago. That meant that the Death Eaters would be chasing ghosts all over the island right about now.

“Let's move out,” Caleb said to Blake.

Blake nodded and then made a series of hand gestures. Five men nodded and split off from the group, heading southeast towards the first diversionary target, the town generator farm.

Everyone waited tensely. It would take the second group a few minutes to make their way down to White Horse Lane and destroy the generators.

Caleb knelt not far from the primary target and watched the minute hand on his watch move at a snails pace. The generators were only a few blocks away, but getting there meant threading ones way undetected among hundreds of Muggle military.

The explosion, when it came, rocked the ground and Caleb nearly fell from his knees. Blake made a motion with his hand and his men moved forward just as the town plunged into darkness. Around them hand torches could be seen turning on and the shouts of alarm came from several directions. In the distance, a siren wailed.

To the southwest Caleb could see a fireball rising over the buildings as the fuel for the generators exploded in their fifty gallon drums. He grinned seeing one drum hurtling high into the sky like a rocket. Secondary explosions began as the fire spread from the fuel depot to a nearby ammunition depot.

Caleb turned away from the carnage to the south just in time to see Blake running back towards him. Blake skidded to a halt and crouched down.

"The building is ready and I have two men prepared to take down the antenna."

"Do it then, Sergeant. I'd like to get us all home tonight," Caleb replied with a grin. He was impressed by how quickly the Americans worked.

Blake gave a low whistle. There was a pause, and then the building simply imploded silently, causing Caleb to look questioningly at Blake. The explosion should have been near deafening. When Blake merely smiled and turned back to watch his men, Caleb looked at the building once more.

One moment it had been a gray, two story brick structure, the next moment it was a pile of rubble. There hadn't even been so much as a cloud of smoke to mark its destruction. Caleb noted the antenna and mast seemed to wobble from side to side before tilting to the north and coming down into the nearby river.

Blake whistled again and his men started to appear, returning from the target site. So far, no one had noticed what had happened to the radio station. All Muggle attention was on containing the fire sweeping through the supply depots.

Caleb did a quick head count, then he pulled out his flare gun and fired a single green star shell into the air, signaling to the distraction team to use their portkeys. With a nod to Blake, he grabbed his own portkey and left the area, arriving in the Operations Center a moment later.

Miles stood nearby taking a head count as the men arrived. He finished two minutes later and smiled in relief, having accounted for all personnel involved in the field operation and noting the lack of injuries.

"You can tell the Prime Minister that that radio station is now off the air for good," Caleb said as he approached Miles. "The Yanks were even better than I expected."

"Thank you, Commander," Blake said, coming up behind Caleb. "I'll take that as a compliment."

Caleb grinned at Blake. "You should. Get your boys debriefed and fed, Sergeant. Pass along my compliment and tell them it was well done."

Blake nodded and moved off to collect his men, while Caleb and Miles watched.

"That's how I like a mission, Caleb, in and out quickly with no casualties. Pity they all can't be that way," Miles said softly.

"True enough, Miles, true enough," Caleb said tiredly. It hadn't been a long mission, it hadn't even been a strenuous mission as far as he was concerned. But the tension was tiring enough. All Caleb wanted now was to relax with a pint and his wife in his arms.

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### **Padfoot Manor (July 25th)...**

Harry stood with Luna, Eocho and Hermione out behind the manor. He had finished making the rune stones a while ago and now they were testing them.

"I think we should try something simple, like a light shield to begin with," Eocho offered.

Luna nodded and pulled four rune stones from a nearby table. She walked about twenty feet away and placed the stones down on the ground.

"Tiwaz, Raidho, Isa and Gebo in a cross shape, with Isa facing north," she mumbled to herself. With the last stone in place, a glowing silver dome sprang up over her. She stood smiling and looked at Eocho, Harry and Hermione expectantly.

"Since these are stones made by the Maglios, we know they will be very powerful," Eocho said softly, then he turned to Hermione. "My daughter, aim a spell to hit her shield. Spare no power."

Hermione blinked in surprise and looked shocked, but Luna smiled at her encouragingly.

Hermione raised her wand. "*Reducto*!" she shouted.

The explosive hex arced out from her wand and splashed harmlessly against the shield. Luna smiled and, reaching down, broke up the stone configuration, causing the shield to collapse.

"Well, it obviously works like we thought it would," Hermione said as Luna approached.

Harry scowled and crossed his arms, his expression tight.

"Something displeases you, Maglios?" Eocho asked, floating over to him.

Harry gestured in the general direction of where Luna had stood. "This is all well and good, but there are over a hundred rune stones in a set. People won't have time to sort through various stones to pick out what they need, then remember the precise configuration while in combat. This just isn't practical."

Hermione placed a calming hand on Harry's arm. "One step at a time, love. First we see what we can do with the stones. Then we work on making it practical."

Harry sighed and wiped a hand over his face. "Alright, but right now the only good I see for these toys are static defenses and rituals. We need a way of setting up a shield using the stones that's as fast as doing it with a wand, otherwise it's of no use."

Harry turned and walked back to the manor, his shoulders slumped.

Hermione frowned. She had been very pleased with the results of this test and wished that Harry could see the potential. She moved to follow him, but Luna stopped her.

"He's not really angry at you or upset about the stones, Hermione," said the blond girl.

"Oh? Then what's his problem then?" asked Hermione, slightly miffed. She still hadn't fully forgiven Luna for what she had done to Harry during the Dementor attack.

"He's just feeling down. Between the attack last week and the responsibilities he carries, it's making him anxious and worried. He thought that the stones might play a pivotal role in his fight with Riddle, but is coming to realize that they won't. He worries because he hasn't figured out how to kill Riddle yet," Luna said, then she paused a moment.

Eocho, listening to Luna talk to Hermione, was startled. He and Harry had been working on that problem, but had not divulged their progress to anyone.

"He's just anxious, Hermione. He's looking for an answer and failing to see it," Luna finished softly.

Hermione looked at Harry's retreating back for a moment longer, then turned back to Luna. "Do you know what the answer is?"

Luna nodded in Harry's direction. "No, but he does. It's inside of him, part of him, and always has been. I'm not sure he'll ever see it for what it is until he needs it."

Seeing Hermione's look of surprise, Luna smiled. "Go to him, Hermione. He needs you now and he's particularly vulnerable to Two Toed Flair Snipers at the moment."

Eocho waved to Hermione, motioning her to go and she turned to follow Harry as Eocho floated over to join Luna.

"You see much, my daughter," Eocho murmured.

She turned and smile at him. "I see what I see, Honored Teacher. The miracle Harry searches for is right under his nose and he'll never see it for what it is. When the time comes, it will blossom and still he won't see it for what it is. In the meantime, he will continue to seek it," Luna replied.

"I suspected as much, but could not tell him. Will he ever recognize it?" Eocho asked.

Luna shrugged. "I don't know. Anyone who's been around him for any length of time can see it, though they don't understand its importance. Even he sees it. But while you and I recognize it for what it is, he does not.

Eocho nodded thoughtfully. "So what will you do with the Rune Stones?"

"Turn them over to the Weasley Twins, I think," Luna offered.

"I'll suggest that to Hermione then," Eocho said with a grin.

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### **Johansen Farm, Haven (July 25th)...**

Harry stopped to look over the two Angels hovering over the farmhouse. At night they could be clearly seen and their glowing white light was a comfort to those who saw it. During the day, however, the Angels were nearly transparent.

Now, for the first time since the attack a week ago, he was able to really look at them. He and a few others were on their way to visit with the Johansens and they had stopped after spotting the two Angels that had taken up residence near the farm.

"They are quite pretty, aren't they?" he murmured.

"It's strange. They have an uplifting effect on everyone around them. It's almost like they exude a natural cheering charm," Remus offered quietly.

"Are they sentient? Like centaurs and elves?" asked Hermione as she watched one Angel hovering nearby.

Remus frowned. "We're not really sure, Hermione. We know that Dementors seem to have a form of sentience about them, although it's fairly primitive. Luna says they are, but they are still babies and haven't developed any language skills as yet. Hagrid isn't sure and, because they don't appear to be dangerous, I don't think he's all that interested in them."

"Does it matter? I don't know about anyone else, but I like them," Tonks offered. "They make me feel good and I get a warm feeling being around them. It's like knowing that someone loves you."

The others turned to Tonks, who had the grace to blush.

Harry watched one Angel float in their direction. He lifted up a hand towards it and it hovered closer.

"It's like it's made of glass," he whispered when the Angel brushed up against his hand with one wing.

The Angel's face was transparent like the rest of its body, but they could clearly make out the smile on its face. The Angel reached out and touched Harry's hand with one of its paws. There was a brief flash of light and then the Angel flew high into the sky above them before swooping down to hover over the farmhouse again.

Harry shivered and felt himself slip into a memory. He watched himself playing the tin whistle for Hermione in the Room of Requirement.

"Harry?" Hermione asked in concern. "Are you alright?"

Harry smiled at her, his expression filled with a childlike wonder. "I'm fine, really. I think Luna said it best when she called them anti-Dementors. They are everything a Dementor isn't. He touched me and for a brief instant I was back in the Room of Requirement, playing the tin whistle for you and giving you the music box for your birthday."

Remus and Tonks shared a look.

"I've often wondered how well that gift was received," Tonks said, grinning slyly when Hermione blushed.

Harry laughed and grabbed Hermione's hand. "Let's get over to the Johansens? We could stand here all night talking about that gift and other things."

A few minutes later they were ushered into the kitchen of the Johansen household. Harry and Remus were told that Sven was working in one of the barns and they went in search of him, while Hermione and Tonks stayed with Olga and talked about the wedding plans.

Harry stepped into the cool interior of the darkened barn. In one corner he could make out a figure hunched over a foot powered sharpening stone. Sven methodically moved the blades of a pair of shears over the stone. Sparks flew from the stone, casting little flashes of light in that corner.

Remus coughed to catch Sven's attention and he looked up. Spotting Harry and Remus, he broke into a grin and stopped pumping the sharpener.

"Mr. Lupin, Mr. Potter! What a surprise!" he exclaimed, then he stood and grabbed several stools, which he passed to Remus and Harry.

Sitting on a milking stool he eyed the other two men, then he reached into his coat pocket and pulled out his pipe. "So, then," he said, lighting his pipe. "What brings you two gentlemen to my little farm?"

Harry and Remus exchanged a look, then Remus began to speak. "Sven, I don't know if you've heard that they're thinking about holding some elections in town."

"Oh, ya, I heard about it. Mayor and Deputy Mayor. Foolish business, if you ask me," Sven said.

Remus looked at Harry.

"I'm sorry you feel that way, Sven. The truth is, we came here to ask if you'd run for one of those positions," Harry told him, looking embarrassed.

Sven stared at Harry in surprise.

"I know it's a shock," Harry said, "but look at it from my perspective for a moment. Both of these positions are largely ceremonial and really have little power within the framework of the Government. But you and your wife have done so much to make people reconsider their position on Muggles. You, as Mayor, would take that to another level. We are a divided people, Sven, Muggles and Wizards. You and your wife have shown people that the distinction isn't important. Now we need to make it more obvious."

Sven looked at Harry for a long moment as he puffed on his pipe furiously. "This job, would it take much time from my farm?" he asked quietly.

Remus chuckled. "A Mayor of a Wizarding town isn't like a Mayor of a Muggle town, Sven. It's largely a ceremonial position. You'd be there to officiate at banquets, or to attend opening ceremonies. The real power still lies with the Government. As to the number of hours it needs? Well, some people make it a full time job, but most only spend an hour or two a week on it."

Sven frowned and stared at the ground for a moment. "How long a term does the Mayor serve?"

"Usually it's a two year term," Remus told him hopefully. He really wanted Sven to agree to this.

"Two years and then I can quit? You promise?" Sven asked. He felt he owed a very large debt to the two men before him. If he could repay them a little by doing this, then he would.

"You can quit earlier if you want, but we wouldn't ask you if we didn't need you," Harry replied in a serious tone.

Sven stood and paced around for a few moments, then he calmly straightened a few tools hanging from the wall. Finally, he turned back to Harry and Remus who were waiting anxiously for some sort of response.

"This is too big a decision for me to make alone. I need to talk to Olga before I decide," he declared.

Harry relaxed a bit. It wasn't an outright refusal. "We understand, Sven, but I hope you'll agree. We could use your help in this."

Sven nodded, then grinned at the two men. "Come, let us go surprise Mama and see if she wants to be a Mayor's wife. Even if she doesn't, I know she has fresh strudel waiting."

Laughing, Harry and Remus stood up and followed Sven from the barn.

## **Padfoot Manor (July 31st)...**

A gentle breeze swept over Harry and the bed rocked softly in the morning sunlight.

*The birds seem awful loud this morning,* he thought fuzzily.

He was tired and wanted to sleep in, so he rolled over and pulled the lightweight blanket up around him. The rolling caused his bed to rock noticeably. Hermione had made a big deal about it being their last night together before the wedding and she had been insatiable. Harry had been thrilled with her last night, but he was justifiably tired when they finally drifted off to sleep.

Nearby, a Bluejay started to caw loudly and Harry pulled his pillow over his head for a moment. When that failed to help, he sat up and rolled out of the bed without bothering to open his eyes first.

That was a mistake, he realized, when he found himself sinking to the bottom of the pool. When his feet touched the bottom he pushed off with his toes, adding a bit of magic for a boost. In short order he was standing on the edge of the pool, dripping wet and more than just a little put out.

He stood for a moment, blinking in the bright sunshine and wondering just which of his friends was responsible for his unscheduled morning swim, when his concentration was broken by three dancing pigs. The pigs pranced and danced around him, singing a merry little birthday song, and his eyes narrowed.

“Fred, George and Ginny,” he growled, then vanished from the poolside, leaving the three pigs still singing.

In the bedroom, Harry wasn't surprised to see that his bed was right where it was supposed to be. Nor was he surprised to find Hermione gently snoring under the blankets. The Weasleys had obviously transported him from his bed without waking her.

He cast a few detection charms, picking up Ginny and Fred's signatures and noted that Hermione was under a deep sleep charm, but it was wearing off. Harry grinned and then dressed quietly. He had work to do.

“Good morning, Remus. Coffee?” Harry asked nearly an hour later.

“Morning, Harry. Happy Birthday!” Remus said with a smile.

Remus reached for a platter of bacon as Hermione walked into the room. Both men turned to greet her when a scream came from one of the upper floors. Remus had bolted to his feet before he noticed that Harry was calmly sipping his coffee.

“What did you do, Harry?” Hermione asked suspiciously.

He shrugged as another scream came from upstairs.

Dobby appeared, pulling on his ears nervously. “Master Harry Potter, sir. Dobby did as you asked. Now littlest wheezy is very angry!”

“Don't worry, Dobby, she doesn't know that you're involved. Besides, all you did was hold them in place while I charmed the beds,” Harry said with a smile. Then he turned to Hermione. “I didn't do anything too elaborate,” he said, wincing slightly at the scream coming from upstairs. “I'm just getting payback for the birthday prank the Weasleys played on me this morning.”

“So what's causing Ginny to scream like that?” Remus asked.

Harry buffed his nails. “Oh, nothing too bad. I just charmed her bed to do everything in it's power to keep her from getting out. The twins will find themselves in a much more precarious position though, as their mattresses will be quite.... amorous.”

Remus started laughing loudly. Hermione shook her head and grinned at the thought of someone getting one over on the twins.

Neville stepped into the dining room and looked at Harry darkly. “I hope you don't plan on pranking us through the honeymoon!”

Harry laughed. “If any pranks happen on your honeymoon, they won't be from me. But that's right up the twins' alley, so you might want to be careful there, mate! Besides, the problem Ginny's currently having with her mattress is simple payback for my unexpected trip to the pool this morning.”

Neville relaxed a bit, then speared a sausage off the platter and hurriedly left the room to go rescue his bride to be.

Harry smiled and reached for another piece of toast as Ginny screamed again from her bedroom upstairs.

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## **Hogwarts Castle (Later that same day)...**

Voldemort stepped over the smoking corpse of his Death Eater and left the ritual circle.

Severus Snape looked at him fearfully from a corner of the room. Hiding just behind Snape was the girl Voldemort had given him several weeks ago.

The Dark Lord reached for the small crystal orb sitting on a bench and smiled when it lit up, then he toed the corpse with his foot. “Have someone get rid of this trash,” he said in a low growl.

Stretching out his hand, he could see a flickering glow about it. "You were right, Severus," Voldemort said, his eyes boring into the man. "Taking Alderman after he had undergone the ritual twice has given me more power than just taking a single wizard's magic. Yes, this will work well. This way I can get around some of the limits of the ritual."

Voldemort lifted up the crystal orb in one gaunt hand and the light from it filled the small potions lab and ritual chamber.

"Tell me, Severus. How many batches of potion do you have ready?" Voldemort asked in a hissing whisper.

"Only twenty, my lord. As you know, the potion does not have a long shelf life, but I have four cauldrons always brewing the potion," Snape stammered.

"Excellent. Excellent work, indeed. Let me reward you for your fine work. CRUCIO!"

Snape pitched to his knees moaning in pain, then he started to scream as he writhed on the floor. A minute later Voldemort released him from the curse and stared at him.

"Never forget your place, Severus. You live and die by my will alone," Voldemort sneered. "You never were very good as a spy, did you know that Severus? Dumbledore used you. I used you. The only person who didn't use you was Potter. Hmm. Potter... I wonder..."

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## Padfoot Manor...

Remus, Hermione and Neville watched in amusement as Ginny backed Harry into a corner.

"You listen to me, Harry James Potter. I don't care if I did help the twins prank you today, that was no reason for you to sneak into my bedroom and charm my bed to keep me from leaving it," she shouted.

"First the sheets held me down, then the mattress folded itself in half, pinning me in," she yelled, then she went for her wand.

Remus and Neville rushed forward and pulled her away from Harry.

"Let me... I just want to... one hex..." she said, while wrestling Neville for her wand.

Harry sighed and relaxed. He knew Ginny would understand that it was just payback for their birthday prank and would eventually calm down. *She might even calm down this year*, he thought, wincing as he watched her jerk violently on Neville's arm.

He inhaled sharply as a long forgotten pain rippled across his forehead. Lights danced in front of his eyes and he clearly heard a voice in his mind.

"*Happy Birthday, Potter,*" Voldemort said with a laugh.

Harry pressed the heel of his palm against his scar and he slid to the floor. He had been lax in performing Occlumency and his shields had eroded without his noticing. Now he was paying the price for that oversight. He moaned and frantically rebuilt his shields while waves of pain washed over him.

The others in the room fell silent as they realized that something was very wrong with Harry.

Harry grabbed at the channel Voldemort was using just as the Dark Lord pushed another wave of pain at him. A scream tore from his throat and blood started to seep from his scar. Harry writhed for a moment, then he threw all his power into forcing Voldemort out. He pushed his way down the channel, forcing his consciousness into Voldemort's.

Hermione knelt next to Harry, trying to keep him from hurting himself, while Ginny ran to get help. Suddenly Harry's body exploded in light. He reached up with a single hand and twisted it sharply like he was turning a door knob.

"Enjoy the pain, Tom," Harry snarled and the windows in the room exploded outwards. There was a huge cracking sound like a burst of thunder directly overhead.

Everyone in the room ducked and winced at the painfully loud sound. Recovering, they looked at Harry, concerned. He was still on the floor, but he was breathing heavily and his scar was bleeding slightly.

"Harry?" Hermione said softly.

"I'm alright," he replied in a voice barely above a whisper. "It was just Voldemort trying to get through my shields."

"And he nearly succeeded, did he not?" came a familiar voice.

"Yes, Honored Teacher. I haven't been keeping up with my Occlumency exercises of late," he said in resignation. He knew he was about to receive a lecture.

"Harry didn't you occlude your mind last night?" Hermione asked, then she blushed realizing that she was the reason why he hadn't.

Harry looked at her and smiled gently. "It's alright, Hermione. No real harm's been done and I think old Moldy Warts probably has a bigger headache than I do at the moment. I pushed him out and gave him a taste of his own medicine," he said, then he sat up unsteadily. He winced when

he saw the blood on his hand and gingerly touched his scar.

Eocho stared hard at Harry. "I think it would be best if we work on your occluding this afternoon, Maglios. You have let that slide too often."

Harry nodded, chagrined that he had let something important slide like that. Then it dawned on him. "Wait a moment," he said, placing both hands to his head. "Voldemort's stronger! When I attacked back, I was in his mind. I saw him going through the ritual. I saw... Oh, Merlin! He's killing wizards who have already taken part in the ritual!" he said with a gasp. His head was pounding so hard he thought his skull would split.

The door opened and Emma stepped in, carrying a small bottle. She gave it to Harry, then looked at him with concerned.

"That must be how he intends to overcome the limitations of the ritual," mused Remus.

"I think this was just a test case, Remus. It seemed like he only picked up the power of two or three wizards," Harry said. Tipping up the bottle Emma had brought, he drank the potion, then grimaced at the foul taste.

"Well, he's still limited in the time factor. He can only do one ritual every two weeks," Hermione offered.

"Yes, and now we can see how he'll overcome the limits to make himself as strong as Harry," Dan replied.

When Harry stood and began to sway on his feet, Hermione steadied him. "Will you be alright? Maybe you should lay down?"

He smiled. "I'll be fine. The potion's already starting to work. I think I'll spend the afternoon meditating and working on my Occlumency shields."

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### **Hogwarts Castle...**

The group of eight Death Eaters looked at the prone form of Voldemort on the floor with uncertainty. He had been sitting in his throne listening to their reports, when a voice said, "Enjoy the pain, Tom!" It was followed by a sound so loud it blew out every window in the castle.

Now, just a few seconds after the windows had exploded, Voldemort lay unconscious on the floor, barely breathing and his faithful minions didn't know what to do about it. Ordinarily it was death to touch him, and yet clearly he'd have to be moved to a bed.

"Should we move him?" asked one Death Eater.

"No. Send for Malfoy," another replied with a sneer. "He's the Dark Lord's favorite, so let him risk the Master's displeasure at being touched."

Several Death Eaters nodded in agreement. In the meantime, the Dark Lord could remain on the stone floor.

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### **Preparations (August 1st)...**

Eocho checked the position of the sun, then looked over the grounds. He had cast the circle in a wooded glen near the memorial lake, using crystals and protective runes. Assuring himself that everything was in place, he hovered nearby for a time, reflecting on what would soon take place there.

The ceremony was deeply meaningful for those who believed. It was not as elaborate as many Christian services, or as involved as Neo-Pagan ceremonies, but it was ancient. It predated the Christian horde by thousands of years and Eocho was honored that the newest members of the Brotherhood had asked him to perform it. He knew the Seeress, Hermione, had some problems with some of the Brotherhood's tenets, but was proud of her tolerance, something the people of his time had lacked. He saw a Christian ceremony in her future with the Maglios, but he was not insulted by it. He was happy to see that Harry himself seemed to accept that part of her, though he did not share her beliefs. At least, not yet.

With a gentle shake of his head, he rose up to the treetops and, with one last look at the ceremonial grounds, disappeared.

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### **The Women...**

With the use of obscuring charms, the young women made their way to the grounds. Most of the townsfolk were unaware that a ceremony would shortly take place, and the obscuring charms were cast to make sure of it. It had been decided that with Eocho performing the ceremony, the guest list would be restricted to only those who knew of him and his connection with the Brotherhood.

They were escorted to the grounds by Emma, Olga, Minerva, Narcissa, Amelia and Constance. The last minute addition of Jenny Boot, Terry's mother, had been agreed upon by all. While she did not know Eocho well, she had been at the meeting when he had explained the need for handfasting.

Once in the woods, they made their way towards the glen. The women of the escort, dressed in cloaks and gowns of brightest white, stopped the party before reaching the circle. While still screened by trees, the group made last minute adjustments to their clothing.

Cloaks were removed and gowns were brushed of imaginary lint. Narcissa reached into the pocket of the cloak she'd just removed and took out a chest the size of a teacup. Setting it on the ground, she removed the shrinking charm with a flick of her wand. As she opened the chest, the other women of the escort lined up the brides and waited for her signal.

Looking up, Narcissa smiled at the young women before her, then motioned the first one forward.



Hermione, dressed in a gown of deepest red, symbolizing the fire and creative spirit of love, moved towards the blond, her expression calm. She stopped, then curtsied and bowed her head, acknowledging Narcissa's position as the highest ranking female of the family she was preparing to pledge herself to.

Narcissa nodded, then reached into the trunk and removed the wreath Hermione had created for the ceremony. Ivy for fidelity and cedar branches for strength were woven together with Myrtle flowers for love, fern fronds for honesty and oak leaves for bravery, creating a wreath that symbolized what Hermione saw as Harry's finest qualities.

Receiving the wreath from Narcissa, Hermione curtsied once more, then stepped aside and waited.

Luna was next. Dressed in a gown of emerald green to symbolize life, harmony and nature, she, too, curtsied, acknowledging Narcissa's position in the Black family.

Narcissa removed the wreath Luna had created for Draco, then smiled with real pleasure at her future daughter-in-law as she passed it over.

Taking the wreath, Luna curtsied once more, then joined Hermione. Narcissa turned to the next member of the escort, Constance Longbottom. Seeing that Constance was ready, she walked towards Hermione and Luna. Standing between them, she touched each young woman's cheek softly. Then, with a slight signal of her hand, the three began to walk towards the glen and the people who awaited their arrival.

Constance turned to the next young woman in line and smiled as Ginny Weasley approached, dressed in a gown the color of indigo, which symbolized intuition. When the flame-haired witch curtsied and bowed her head, Constance raised a wreath from the chest and, rather than passing it to the young bride, stepped around the trunk and kissed the newest member of her family on the cheek.

"There can be no more suitable a bride for my grandson. There had been little happiness in his life until you became a part of it. With your love and guidance, he has grown and flourished into a fine young wizard. I am proud to call you granddaughter," she whispered, passing the wreath to the younger woman.

Ginny curtsied again. "Your welcome means more than you can know, Mrs. Longbottom. For the first time in many months, my family is growing. I am so tired of losing the ones I love," she said, as silent tears slid down her cheeks.

Taking Ginny's hand, Constance smiled. "All wars end, child. This one will too. Your strength will remain as long as you hold on to your faith and the love of your family. But today is not a day for mourning or sadness. Today we celebrate life!"

With a small tug of Ginny's hand, Constance drew her towards the glen and the people waiting for them, leaving the next member of the escort to step forward.

Minerva, standing in for Remus' mother who had been killed in the first war, moved to the trunk and waited. Tonks, dressed in a gown the color of turquoise to symbolize protection, health, confidence and strength, approached the older witch and curtsied. Smiling, Minerva removed the wreath from the trunk and gave it to the blond woman before her. With a final curtsy, the two moved off towards the glen, and the people waiting for them.

Jenny Boot stepped forward and smiled as Susan approached her. With a curtsy, Susan, dressed in a golden colored gown to symbolize wisdom, took the wreath Jenny offered, then dipped her knees once more and bowed her head.

Taking the young witch's hand, Jenny raised her up and the two walked towards the glen, and the people waiting for them.

Amelia shrunk the trunk and placed it in the pocket of Narcissa's cloak. Olga gathered the other cloaks and passed them to the witch, who sent them to the manor where they could be retrieved later if they were needed. The two looked around the area and, with a few flicks of her wand, Amelia erased the small traces of their passage through the wood, leaving it the way nature made it.

With a look, the two remaining members of the escort linked hands and walked towards the clearing, and the people waiting for them.

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## The Men...

In a tent set in the woods on the far side of the glen, Harry paced. He was aware of the amused gazes of the other men in the tent, but didn't acknowledge them. He was nervous and didn't really care who knew it. He would have been glad to know, however, that those watching understood. They all felt the same thing, though to a lesser degree.

While Harry's nervousness was obvious in his pacing, the others were lounging on the plush rugs and pillows strewn around the floor. The wreathes each had made for his bride were on a table next to the tent entrance. Neville and Bertrand were reading, while Draco, Remus, Arthur and Dan were discussing Haven business. Terry and his father John were playing a game of chess while Bill and Sven watched.

The men getting married stood out from the other men in the small tent as they all wore shimmering silver robes. Those who made up the escort, Dan, John, Arthur, Bertrand, Bill and Sven, wore white.

When a small bell chimed in the tent, the men all flinched slightly, and the sound of ghostly laughter was heard.

"Be brave, my children," Eocho said as he appeared in the tent, his eyes dancing. "Your futures approach the glen."

Draco launched a pillow at his teacher and scowled when it sailed right through him.

"Temper, temper," Eocho chastised gently, laughter still evident in his voice.

"Alright, let's get this over with," Harry said. He squared his shoulders, picked up his wreath and faced the tent entrance.

Dan laughed as he walked towards the younger man. "Now, Harry, if Hermione heard you say that, she'd skin you alive."

"Yeah, well, she's not here, is she?" he asked, glowering at Dan. "Why did we have to do this in front of a bunch of people? A private ceremony would have worked just as well."

"You know everyone here, Harry," Remus told him as he brushed the wrinkles out of his robe. "There's nothing to be nervous about."

Harry glared when Remus started brushing the wrinkles out of his robe as well. "I'm fully capable of taking care of my own clothing, thank you," he said as he pulled away from the older man and tugged his robe straight. "The next time we do this, we're eloping!"

"Are you planning on having more than one wife, then?" Draco asked as he stood up. "I'm sure Granger will just love that."

"I wouldn't tell Hermione that until after the honeymoon," Neville suggested as he, too, climbed to his feet.

"Not if you want to *have* a honeymoon," Bill pointed out.

Harry raised his eyes to the roof of the tent, begging for patience from anyone who might hear his plea.

"Why ask for something you already have, Maglios?" Eocho asked curiously.

"Don't you have a job to do or something?" Harry asked him.

"Enough. Leave Harry alone," Arthur said. "If you keep on him, we'll never get you lot married and I am not up for dealing with five angry brides-to-be! Now, line up and let's...what was it you said, Harry? Oh, yes. Let's get this over with."

Harry and Remus stood at the front of the line, with Dan between them. Next came Draco with Bertrand beside him, then Neville with Arthur as his escort, and finally Terry, with his father.

The tent flap was opened as Eocho faded from sight and the procession started. Bill and Sven were the last to exit, and they paused after stepping out into the sunlight. Sven checked the surrounding area for any belongings they may have left behind, while Bill sent the tent back to the manor, and erased all traces of their presence from the area, leaving it the way nature made it.

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## Handfasting...

With a few quick strides, Bill and Sven caught up with the procession and entered the circle. While the others continued on to the altar at the center, Bill and Sven each stood to one side of the opening in the circle, waiting.

A few minutes later, the ladies appeared from the woods and walked to the circle's opening, heads bowed in reverence. As Hermione, Narcissa and Luna crossed into the circle together, their heads came up proudly and they walked towards the altar at a stately pace.

Once each young woman and her escort passed into the circle, Amelia moved to stand next to Sven, while Olga stood with Bill. With everyone in position, the guests were finally free to pass through, though there weren't many. The Weasley and Johansen twins entered together, followed by Johan, Flitwick, Miles and Danni.

Once the guest were through, Bill, Olga, Sven and Amelia turned as one and either bowed or curtsied to each of cardinal directions, beginning with the east, the direction of the rising sun and the symbol of rebirth and new beginnings. Then Bill and Amelia drew their wands and, working together, closed the circle. Once done, all four turned to face those now standing at the altar.

"Come forth, Guardians, and join us. Nothing can break the circle, once closed," Eocho stated.

Together the four approached the altar and stood behind the couples and their escorts. When they were in place, Eocho looked at the people before him, nodded once and began.

"May the peace and safety of this circle and those within it be blessed by the Gods, for we are all gathered here in a ritual of love, with those who would be wedded," he said, his voice rich and vibrant.

"I call upon the beings of Air and Fire, Earth and Water, to bless those who stand within this circle. Lend of them your constancy and courage, your protection and wisdom, your love of life, passion and laughter, your faith and hope everlasting, that they may be strengthened in the conflict to come. Raise them up, oh Gods of old, and embrace them as your children as they fight to save this world."

Eocho waved one hand over the altar and a small, contained, but extremely hot fire sprung up and burned merrily with blue-white flames. Reaching beneath the top of the altar, he came up a moment later with several items, which he kept carefully hidden from view.

"To Earth, the embodiment of strength and constancy, we give this gift of silver, taken from your breast and rendered beautiful," he said, holding the bracelet up for all to see, then dropping it into the flames, where it melted quickly.

"To Air, the embodiment of wisdom and protection, we give this gift of White Mulberry, wild grown, yet shelter to all who seek its branches." Eocho held up several small twigs from a Mulberry tree, then dropped them into the flames.

To Fire, the embodiment of passion and love, we give this gift of Jasmine, grown with patient care and sacrificed in your honor.” Dropping the small flowers into the fire, the witnesses watched them char and turn black.

Eocho held up the last remaining item so that it caught the rays of the sun. The flash of light was dazzling as a small golden torque was displayed.

“To Water, the embodiment of the soul, we give this gift of ancient gold, summoned from the secret stashes of your people, that you may once again know us and, though our ways may now be different, know the purity of our spirit and of our purpose.”

The golden torque, once dropped into the flames, melted, just as the silver bracelet that preceded it. Eocho waited a moment, then spread his arms wide, palms up, in a welcoming gesture.

“Here our prayers, know our hopes, feel our faith. We await your blessings.”

Nothing happened for a moment and several people shifted awkwardly. Then the fire went out.

As the smoke spiraled skyward, forms could be seen dancing with it, twisting and whirling. A breeze began to blow and upon it were voices, unintelligible to be sure, but they brought with them a feeling of peace and tranquility to those within the circle.

A sigh went through those gathered in the glen and Eocho smiled gently before addressing them once more.

“Today we are gathered in the presence of the Gods not only to receive their blessings for our great task, but also to witness the joining of the couples before us. Handfasting is an ancient rite, a sacred rite, and not entered into lightly. It is the binding of two lives, the creation of one soul, in the joyful hope of being so bound for eternity.

“As most here know, the handfasting ceremony signifies that two people have agreed to live as man and wife for the time of one year and one day. At the end of that time, the couple may sever their connection to one another. If they choose to remain together, however, the binding is permanent and nothing, not even the Gods, may separate them, for this ritual has not just the weight of mortal law, but of celestial law as well.”

Eocho paused for a moment, letting those gathered absorb the seriousness of his words. Then, with a slight gesture, he indicated that the first couple should come forward.

Harry, with Dan beside him, and Hermione, with Narcissa next to her, stepped in front of the altar and bowed their heads. Then, in their duties as escorts, Dan and Narcissa took the wreaths from their charges and took one step back.

Eocho's expression became stern as he addressed the couple before him. “Harry James Potter and Hermione Jane Granger, do you come before this gathering of mortal and immortal to bind yourselves, one to the other, in joy and love, and with the understanding that you will never again be alone in this world or any other?”

“We do.”

Eocho turned to Dan and Narcissa and held out his hands. “The wreaths,” he demanded.

The escort stepped forward and placed the wreaths on the ancient priest's hands. Then, bowing their heads once more, returned to their places behind the bride and groom.

Turning to address the gathering, Eocho raised his voice to be heard by all. “In times past, wreaths such as these held the same meaning as the rings many of the couples have already exchanged. The shape, a circle, symbolizes the everlasting. In the binding of these two souls, there is no beginning and no end. There is no 'mine' or 'yours'. There is only wholeness, only one. There is only eternity.

“These wreaths were made, one for the other, before this ceremony. In that way, the individual, the essence of the one, is also present here today.

“In Hermione's wreath we see Myrtle flowers and Cedar, Fern, Ivy and Oak. By this we know that she sees in Harry his love and strength, his honesty, fidelity and bravery.”

Eocho turned to Hermione and held out her wreath. She curtsied deeply before taking it from him.

Holding up the other wreath, Eocho raised his voice once again. “In Harry's wreath we see Amaryllis and blue violet flowers, Birch and Plane tree shoots and the budding flowers of the Hollyhock. By this we know he sees in Hermione her beauty and love, her gracefulness, intelligence and creative power.”

Turning to Harry, he held out his wreath. As Hermione before him, Harry bowed deeply, expressing his respect, before taking the wreath.

“Turn now to your beloved,” the priest told them seriously, “and make known to each other, and to those gathered here, your feelings and intentions.”

Hermione turned toward Harry, looked down at her wreath... and panicked. She had written her vows weeks ago. She had studied them relentlessly and memorized them as she would for a test. Now, for the first time in her life, she drew a blank.

As she stared at the wreath, not saying a word, Harry had to quash the urge to squirm. Forgetting the crowd, he focused only on Hermione. Had she changed her mind? Was she having doubts? Unable to take it any longer, he reached out and raised her head with a finger under her chin so he could look into her eyes. Green eyes met brown, and understanding passed between them.

Smiling, he leaned closer to her and whispered, “See what happens when you study too hard? The brain can only hold so much before stuff before it starts dribbling out the ears.”

Hermione's eyes narrowed dangerously. "Then perhaps you should try to study a bit more. The sound of the wind rushing through your ears at night makes it hard for me to sleep!"

Realizing what she'd just said, she slapped a hand over her mouth and gazed at him, horrified. "Harry, I didn't mean that," she mumbled from behind her hand.

Harry's laughter drown out her words.

Narcissa, Dan and Emma, who had been staring at the young woman first in amusement, then in shock, watched as the young man reached out and touched Hermione's cheek gently.

"You rise to the bait every time. I knew what your reaction would be. That's why I said what I did," Harry told her, his eyes dancing with amusement. Then, taking her free hand, his eyes turned serious. "This isn't a test and you're not going to be graded. I love you and I know you love me. Right now, in this time and place, nothing else matters. No matter what the future may hold for us, know always that you are the most important person in my life. No one and nothing will ever change that.

Tá mé chomh mór sin i ngrá leat, tá mé chomh doirte sin duit. I love you so much," he said as he placed his wreath upon her head.

Hermione shook her head as she tried to blink away her tears. "You never cease to amaze me. Do you know that? Just when I think I have you figured out, you do something like this. When I think that I couldn't possibly love you more, you go and prove me wrong. Eocho says that, after this ceremony, our souls will be bound into one. I say differently. At the end of last summer, I felt you in my heart and your presence within me has only grown since then. You have been a part of me for a very long time now, Harry Potter. I love you and I want nothing more than to be with you forever."

Raising her wreath and placing it on his head, she smiled and said, "Tá mé chomh mór sin i ngrá leat, tá mé chomh doirte sin duit. I love you so much."

Joining hands, they turned then to face Eocho, only to find him grinning at them.

"Leave it to the two of you to change the ceremony," he teased them gently. "But love will take its own path, and we must follow where it leads." Signaling to Dan and Narcissa, the two stepped forward and Eocho gave them each a ribbon - one red, the other silver.

The escort then approached Harry and Hermione and began to wrap the ribbons around their joined hands in an elaborate Celtic knot they had practiced for many days.

"As your hands are bound fast, one to the other, so too are your lives," Eocho told them. "In one year and one day, if you do not sever the bond, two souls will no longer exist. In their place, the one will take precedence. Two bodies, one spirit, bound together for eternity. If this is your wish, turn to each other and declare it."

Turning to face each other, her left hand bound to his right, Harry and Hermione gazed at each other for a moment. Then, in one voice, they declared, "Is mise le meas agus i dtólamh. Yours, faithfully and always."

"My blessings upon you and your newly born union. Let nothing and no one come between you," Eocho intoned formally.

When the sound of many small bells ringing was heard throughout the circle, all looked to Eocho for understanding.

Arms spread wide, the ancient priest laughed happily. "The Gods, too, offer their blessings upon this joining. Shelter under their protection and know they are well pleased by you both. Go now, my children, and begin your life together!"

Harry and Dan bowed deeply, while Hermione and Narcissa curtsied. With one last look, the four turned away and joined Emma, and the others gathered to watch the ceremony.

Dan quickly hugged his daughter and shook Harry's hand. "Congratulations to you both. I need to join Remus, but we'll talk at the reception," he told them.

"I, too, must return to the ceremony," Narcissa told them quietly. "Congratulations, my dears. I will see you both later."

When Dan and Narcissa walked back towards the altar, Emma hugged Hermione, then Harry. Rather than trying to speak, the three turned back to the ceremony and watched as Luna, Narcissa, Draco and Bertrand stepped forward and paid their respects to Eocho.

"Draco Amadeus Black and Luna Laural Lovegood, do you come before this gathering of mortal and immortal to bind yourselves, one to the other..."

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## The Reception...

"You're looking mighty pensive for such a happy occasion, Minerva," someone said gruffly.

Minerva started for a moment, then looked up at Miles Pickerton, who was smiling at her and holding two drinks. He gestured at the chair next to hers.

"May I?"

Suddenly and inexplicably flustered, all Minerva could do was accept the drink she offered. Miles sat next to her and together they watched the party going on around them for a few minutes without speaking.

"What troubles you, Minerva?" he asked.

She sighed and played with her glass for a moment. "I suppose I'm suffering from what all people my age suffer from, Miles; Too long a memory. I'm sitting here wondering what Frank and Alice would say, were they here, or James and Lily, or Luna's mother."

"I think they would be proud of their children. Oh, perhaps they wouldn't have wanted to see them get married so young, but I think they would be proud of them nonetheless. James was a wicked and cunning fighter. So were Frank and Alice, for that matter. Neville is a wicked and cunning fighter, and Merlin knows I don't want to get involved in a fight with Harry. No, I think their parents would be proud of them today."

Minerva looked out over the dancing couples. The reception was set up with a series of long tables in a rectangular pattern and a large open area for dancing in the middle. All eight of the newly wed couples were in the center, at the moment, dancing. Minerva could see Olga nearby, supervising the elves. Sven, who had apparently appointed himself official taster, was behind her.

"Did you know I first saw Harry on the day he was born?" Minerva asked with a smile.

"No. I didn't know you were that close to the family," Miles replied in surprise.

"Lily, like Hermione out there, was one of my favorite students. She was as good in transfiguration as James was. Her specialty was charms and potions, but I loved her like a daughter. As a Muggle born, she was so lost when she first came to Hogwarts. Everything was new and frightening to her. As for James, well, he was a handful, but mostly in a good way.

"I remember visiting St. Mungo's to see a friend when James caught me in the hallway and dragged me to the maternity ward. Oh, he was simply splitting with pride..."

*"Come on, Professor! You've got to see this," James said, bubbling over with joy.*

*"James Potter, don't think you're too old to get detention if you're pulling pranks here in St. Mungos," Minerva replied snappily.*

*James sniggered and pulled her into the room where Lily lay on a bed holding a bundle in her arms. Minerva skidded to a stop and both hands flew to her mouth.*

*"Oh, the baby! Lily, are you alright?" she asked in a rush.*

*James gently lifted the bundle from his wife's arms and handed it to Minerva. "Harry James Potter, meet your honorary Aunt, Minerva. If you're really lucky, Harry, someday she'll be your Head of House," he said softly.*

*"Call her Aunt Minnie," said an impish voice behind her.*

*Minerva frowned. "He'll do no such thing, Sirius Black. And if you know what's good for you, you'll behave yourself."*

*She looked down at the sleeping bundle, performing the customary scan to check fingers, toes, etc. Then Harry opened his eyes and yawned hugely. A nearby candelabra flared, leaving scorch marks against the wall. Minerva looked up and arched an eyebrow at Lily.*

*Lily nodded. "Not even a day old and he's already experiencing accidental magic discharges. He nearly set Hagrid's beard on fire."*

*Minerva passed the baby back to Lily, who looked down at him with love and pride.*

*"You're going to be a powerful wizard someday, my little Harry," she whispered to her son.*

*A flashbulb exploded and Minerva looked up to see James taking a photo of her and Lily together.*

*"I'll see you get a copy, Professor," James told her, smiling.*

*"A copy of that photo still sits on my nightstand. Times back then were hard and we grasped at every piece of happiness and normalcy we could find."*

*"Aye, I remember Minerva. But this is a new time, and we have new challenges. Things aren't as dire as they appear to be," Miles told her with a smile.*

Minerva nodded and smiled at him, then she heard a cough. Looking away from Miles, she saw Harry and Hermione Potter standing in front of her.

"Would you dance with me, Aunt Minerva?" Harry asked in a serious voice.

Minerva's eyes misted with unshed tears and she nodded, allowing Harry to lead her out onto the dance floor. Meanwhile, Hermione was tugging a reluctant Miles out to dance as well.

"Your parents would be proud of the man you've become, Harry," Minerva said, while Harry led her through the slow dance.

Harry smiled down at her. "I hope so. I've tried to live as I think they would have wanted."

"You've succeeded. You've pleased to be pleased with Hermione. Her one great fear for you was that you would have fallen into the pure blood beliefs."

"Hermione is... special. I don't know if I can describe it, Aunt," He said, then he shook his head in frustration. Describing Hermione was impossible for him. How could he describe the single most important person in his life? Words just didn't suffice. Looking back at Minerva, he smiled. "Besides, as a half blood, it would be rather foolish of me to believe as many pure bloods do, wouldn't it?"

He turned when he felt a tap on his shoulder. Behind him were Miles and Hermione.

"Partner switch?" offered Miles.

Seeing Minerva was agreeable, he bowed to her and switched to dancing...with Miles.

Harry and Miles took several bumbling steps, each instinctively trying to lead the other, when the shock finally wore off enough for Miles to start laughing.

"I meant switch female partners, you prat!" Miles exclaimed as he pulled away from Harry and walked back to Minerva.

"That will teach you to be more specific," Harry told him as he wrapped his arms around Hermione and began to dance.

"Merlin! And you had to deal with all of the Marauders? How did you ever survive?" Miles asked Minerva as he lead her out onto the dance floor.

"There were moments when I wasn't sure I would," Minerva said laughingly.

Nearby a pair of red heads danced to the slow tune.

"Are you happy, Ginny?" asked Charlie pensively.

Ginny looked up at her older brother, her eyes serious. "Yes, I am."

"Good... I wish..." he started, then faltered.

"What do you wish?"

"I wish I could have been there. I've only one sister and it will always bother me that I wasn't able to watch her marry," Charlie said with a sigh.

Ginny smiled gently and lifted a hand up to cup his cheek. "It takes time to rebuild trust, Charlie. You were excluded from the ceremony because there are things you aren't ready to know just yet. It will happen in time, if you allow it. Besides, this is just one piece of my life. You won't be excluded from the rest of it."

Charlie smiled down sadly at his petite sister, looking so elegant and refined in her wedding robe.

When the music finally ended, the couples made their way to the head table for dinner. It had been a long day and few of them had eaten before now due to nerves. Years later, Harry would never remember exactly what he ate. He'd just remember that he'd had something.

After dinner, Dan stood and tapped a glass with a spoon to get everyone's attention. Nearby, elves were appearing with four trunks, one for each couple.

"Now that I have your attention, I'd like to begin. Normally, it is customary for the best man to offer a toast to the happy couple. But tonight we're going to break with tradition somewhat. Besides, we'll be here all night if every best man is to give a toast.

"As you can see, the house elves are preparing what our couples need for their honeymoons and I'm sure they all want to start their trip as soon as possible. So please, lift your glasses everyone, and let us toast to the happy couples. May their lives be filled with love and may their love strengthen them in the days to come," Dan said, lifting his glass.

From the other tables came shouts of, "Here Here!" and glasses were raised in salute.

When the crowd died down, Dan stood again. "Our couples have agreed to a final dance before they leave. So let's give them a nice round of applause one final time before they leave us for the evening."

Just as the music started to play, a disturbance was heard from one side of the tables. Several people were approaching the party, including Michael O'Dalley and several of his constables.

Harry, hearing the noise, steered Hermione over to where Michael O'Dalley and his men would arrive. Hermione took a step to the side so that they could both face the oncoming group. They both recognized O'Dalley and the two constables, but not the older couple, though Harry thought they looked vaguely familiar.

From over Harry's shoulder there came a shriek and a pink hair woman bowled Harry down from behind in an attempt to reach the older couple.

"MUM! DAD!" yelled Tonks. Remus followed his wife until he reached Harry, where he paused long enough to help the younger man to his feet.

"Didn't we get them out in the main evacuation, Remus?" Harry asked in confusion.

Remus shook his head. "No, they were traveling at the time and we couldn't locate them. Then we heard some rumors that they had escaped to

southern France, but we were never able to pin anything down.”

“Even owl post?” Harry asked incredulously.

“By the time Britain fell, the owls were as confused as everyone else. None of our owls got through to them. They might have used a *Fidelius* charm, or just some sort of obscurity charm coupled with an anti-scriving charm,” Remus replied.

“They must have learned about Haven in the papers,” offered Hermione.

Remus smiled softly as he watched his wife. “Yes, I suppose so. I’m just glad they made it out alright.”

Tonks grabbed both the man and woman and hugged them tightly, tears streaming down her face. Harry placed a hand on Remus’ shoulder and gently propelled him forward.

“Looks like we got here too late to give the bride away,” murmured Ted Tonks as he reached out to grip Remus’ hand.

Remus shook it gladly and grinned. “Better to be a little late than to never show up.”

Andromeda cupped her daughter’s cheeks in both of her hands. “You make a wonderful bride, m’love.”

Tonks blushed outrageously and her hair cycled through an entire rainbow of colors. Then she looked disappointed. “Oh, bloody Merlin! We’re about to leave for the honeymoon! But you just got here,” she said unhappily.

Remus stepped forward and put an arm around her shoulders. “We can delay or even postpone...”

“No!” Andromeda exclaimed, holding up a hand imperiously. “If you delay, it will only be a vacation when you get around to taking the trip. Go... your father and I will be fine and we’ll be here when you get back.”

Ted nodded in affirmation.

Harry moved forward and addressed the new arrivals. “I insist you stay at the manor while we’re gone. Your daughter is family to me and you’ll be more comfortable there.”

Tonks smiled at Harry gratefully, then turned back to her parents. “Mum, Dad, this is Harry Potter. Harry, these are my parents, Ted and Andromeda Tonks. Harry got married today too.”

“Then we won’t hold you up either,” Ted said, shaking Harry’s hand. “Thank you for the invitation to stay in the manor and we’ll see you all when you get back.”

“Congratulation,” Andromeda added as she, too, shook Harry’s hand. “Enjoy your trip.”

“Thanks,” Harry said, then turned away and rejoined Hermione on the dance floor.

Satisfied that her parents would be fine, Tonks and Remus allowed themselves to be pulled out onto the dance floor for one more dance with her parents. When the dance was finally done, a hush fell over the crowd.

Harry walked over to where the elves had laid out the trunks. Finding the one that belonged to Hermione and himself, he sat down on it. Hermione kissed her mother farewell and she joined him, sitting on his lap.

He looked at her and grinned. “Well?” he asked.

“Well, what?”

“We can’t go anywhere until you tap the trunk with your wand,” Harry said to the laughter of the crowd.

Hermione blushed. “Oh... I forgot.”

“Definitely a day for me to remember,” Harry quipped with a smile and then they were gone. One by one the other couples repeated the process of activating the portkeys or apparating.

Dan chuckled at the antics of his daughter and son-in-law.

Emma turned and looked at him, arching an eyebrow.

“Before you go commenting on how your daughter acted during her wedding, I’ll remind you that you forgot to fuel the car for ours and you had to push us three kilometers to a petrol station,” she said archly.

Dan ducked his head and wandered away from his wife, muttering, “I wonder if there is any more cake left?”

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## **The Newly Wed Game (Draco and Luna)...**

Draco and Luna appeared in the lobby of a posh tropical hotel that catered to Wizarding guests. Luna smiled prettily at Draco as a house elf

dressed as a bell hop appeared.

"Mr. Black? Your cabin has been arranged and is ready. If you will just follow me?" the little elf asked.

Draco nodded to the elf and then reached for Luna's hand.

"It was nice of Harry to let us use this place. I wonder if we'll see any beach combing Snip Wippets while we're here," Luna murmured softly.

"Maybe," Draco offered with a smile. He was quite used to Luna's off comments by now. She had greatly cut down on them, but they still slipped out from time to time.

Following the elf down a sandy path, he led them to a two story A frame cabin facing the beach. A large window adorned each floor, allowing an unfettered view of the beach and the nearby ocean.

"The presidential cabin, Mr. Black. The refrigerator is fully stocked, as is the bar. We also offer twenty four hour room service. Simply ring the hand bell located in the dinette and a staff elf will appear to take your order. Next to your bed you will find a brochure outlining some of the highlights of the island. The management is pleased to be able to serve a family member of one of our directors," said the elf in a serious tone.

Draco could only nod in surprise, then he nudged the door open with his foot and picked up Luna. Luna's laugh sounded like gentle bells in his ear as he maneuvered her through the doorway.

Draco carried his bride all the way into the bedroom and stopped. Luna looked at him questioningly.

"Dray? What's wrong?" she asked.

"I'm not sure. I've seen several of Dan's muggle movies where the groom carried the bride over the threshold, but they never show where he put her," he replied with a hint of confusion in his voice.

"Well, where would you like to put me?"

He colored a bright red, which really made his blond hair stand out and Luna laughed huskily, causing him to blush harder.

"Put me on the bed Dray," she whispered in his ear.

Draco lowered her to the bed and she quickly sat up. "Why don't you see if there's any butterbeer in that bar over there, then go change. I'll head into the bathroom and change out of these robes while you're looking for the drinks," Luna told him, then she started to rummage around in their trunk.

While Draco looked for the drinks, Luna went into the bathroom.

Draco finally found something acceptable to drink, a Muggle soda. The bar was sorely lacking in butterbeer. Turning around, he froze, seeing Luna exit the bathroom.

She wore a gossamer robe and nothing else. Although they had been intimate before this, never had they been so casual about it. They both felt for the first time that they didn't have to sneak around.

Draco backed up a bit until he sat roughly on the bed and stared at her. When she smiled at him, he returned it. Though he didn't say it, he was worried about what was to come. They had still not discovered the key to controlling Luna's emotional broadcasts. Of the few times they had made love, the only way they could do it was with her masking her emotions and it ruined the experience for her.

Draco suddenly stiffened on the bed. He felt something within him snap, and he looked up at her as she approached him, concerned about the emotions she felt from him.

*This situation is ridiculous*, Draco thought angrily. *I want her to enjoy it as much as I do, but her broadcasts overwhelm me every time!* He was angry at himself, at Luna and at life in general. He had a beautiful wife and he couldn't share that most basic of needs with her because of what she was!

Draco stood and stalked towards her. Luna stepped back fearfully and he grabbed her arms. His grip was firm, but not firm enough to hurt. Something in Luna seemed to click and she melted against him.

"You're mine," he growled holding her and caressing her. His hands ran over her body and her senses spun with an increasing desire. She could feel his passion rise as he cupped one of her breasts in his hand and gently pinched her nipple. The bond she had created with him when she had saved his life opened like a sluice gate. When his hand cupped her mons, she lost all control and started to broadcast her emotions. A small part of her mind screamed for her to stop, but she ignored the logical in favor of the physical.

"Not this time, Luna," Draco snarled. She gasped as the bond opened even wider and she could feel him feeding her emotional assault back to her. She screamed once and clutched at him as she orgasmed.

Exulted, he lifted her in his arms and laid her on the bed. He undressed quickly, then opened her robe.

Shivering, she reached for him even as she struggled to control the broadcasting of her emotions.

Draco positioned himself over her and leaned down close enough that his lips brushed hers as he spoke. "You're mine," he repeated in a savage whisper. "Forever, Luna."



She cried out and surrendered to his passions and her own. Draco, in his own way, had managed to unlock the secret to managing her broadcasts. In claiming her for himself, the two surrendered to each other, both attaining ascendancy and submission to the other.

On a small, unplotable Carribean island, a couple, now husband and wife, started a new life together, having overcome the final hurdle.

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International Apparation/Portkey Point, Calais, France...

"Bon jour," said the nondescript clerk.

"Hello," Terry replied. Susan smiled and touched his arm.

"Bon jour," replied Susan.

"Le passeport, s'il vous plaît."

Susan rummaged through her handbag and pulled out two passports, which she handed over to the clerk. The man's eyes widened slightly and he looked again at the photos, then at the young couple standing before him.

"You are English, no?" asked the clerk.

"That's right, but we've been living in Ireland," replied Terry, grateful that the man had switched to English.

"Are you here on business or pleasure?"

Susan smiled at Terry, and he blushed before turning back to the clerk. "Pleasure. We're going on our honeymoon," he replied.

The clerk smiled at the couple, then he pulled out a stamp and stamped both passports.

"Well then, I won't keep you. Enjoy your stay in France." the clerk said as he returned their passports.

Terry and Susan nodded and he led her over to a desk where they could buy a portkey for their final destination, Paris.

The clerk watched the couple until they were no longer visible. Then he ducked into a nearby office. He had an owl to send. This one would earn him a hefty reward, he was sure.

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### **Anafi, Mediterranean Sea...**

The spinning stopped and if Harry hadn't been sitting, he surely would have fell over. He would have preferred to apparate, like Susan and Terry, but the distance was too great. He could probably do it, and perhaps apparate with his new bride. But he didn't want to spend the first days of his honeymoon recovering from exhaustion because he apparated the two of them across the continent.

Hermione stood and looked around. They were sitting in the foyer of a house much like Padfoot Manor.

Harry stood and walked over to a set of doors and threw them open. Inside was a sitting room with huge bay windows. Hermione gasped at the view. The house obviously sat on a cliff overlooking the ocean.

Harry turned at a popping noise from behind him and spotted two ancient looking house elves, both of whom bowed to him.

"We is pleased to see the master of the house return. It has been many years and we was scared that no Potters remained," said the male elf.

Harry smiled and looked down at the pair. "What are your names?" he asked in a gentle tone.

"I is Sippi, Master," said the male.

"And I is Tippi," said the female.

"I'm Harry and this is my wife, Hermione. Would you take our luggage up to the master bedroom for us?"

Both elves nodded vigorously and together they moved the trunk upstairs.

Harry shook his head and muttered "More elves!"

Hermione smiled, then gestured to the view from the window. "Where are we, Harry?"

"This is the Potter vacation house on the island of Anafi, south of Greece. To be honest, I wasn't even sure it was still here until I talked to Remus about it."

She looked at him curiously. "Did Remus visit here recently?"

"No, only Potters and those we invite here can come here. Remus visited the place during the summer of his sixth year with my dad and Sirius, and saw no reason why it wouldn't still be here."

Hermione's eyes bulged ominously. "No reason why... What would you have done if it had been destroyed?"

Harry looked at her in the deepening dusk. The sunset visible from the window painted the sky with a rainbow of colors. He walked to her and wrapped his arms around her. "I had reservations at the Regency Hilton in Cairo if the home was unacceptable," he said with a grin.

"Egypt?" Hermione asked breathlessly. "Why?"

Harry leaned over and kissed her forehead gently. "Because I know my wife," he replied with a smug grin. "She'll want to spend her days learning and her nights loving. This way we can apparate easily enough to Greece, or I can take us both to Egypt. I understand they are restoring the Wizarding library at Alexandria."

Hermione tightened her arms around him. "Tomorrow is soon enough for learning. Tonight I want my husband, as often as possible and as many ways as he can handle," she said huskily.

"I think I can manage that," he whispered to her, then he took her by the hand and led her upstairs to the master bedroom.

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### **Author's Notes:**

Yes once again we come to the author's notes. Unfortunately we also have some bad news. I know we were keeping a really good update schedule, but the simple fact is both Alyx and I have been sick of late and that is wreaking havoc with our updates. It is hard to get motivated when you're in a lot of pain, and weird to read if you're hyped up on drugs.

For the foreseeable future we will try to maintain at least a once a month, sometimes twice a month update schedule. We're sorry, but that's the best we can manage. Sometimes real life sucks, you know?

To Heart\_bloodline: Bell

Sorry, Bob does not have any unmarried brothers. Although he is interested in seeing applications, preferably with photos in case Alyx suddenly slips and falls off the face of the planet.

Yes we know strudel isn't easy to make. But Hermione is an expert in everything. Except cooking. Really we wanted to make her angst a little over the idea that she can do so many other things, but when things get really important. She can't cook.

The showdown between Dumbledore and Harry isn't the last one we're going to see. This one was spur of the moment and Harry regrets that deeply. He also regrets transfiguring himself into a mouse and visiting the girl's showers.

One of the purposes of AU is to take canon characters and warp them in some way. I hate Draco. I loathe the slimy bastard and yet here we are with a good Draco impossibly coupled with Luna Lovegood.

Yes Dumbledore went bald as part of his undercover disguise. Be thankful I didn't paint three black spots and the letters AMF on his head.

For all those who got their knickers in a twist reading this, we want you to stop. Go outside immediately and untwist those knickers! Don't you realize the damage you can do to yourself if you deprive blood to that area?

Will Dumbledore die this chapter? Ummm no.

Anyone thinking they are unworthy should sent us \$29.95 for our worthiness kit. (Just kidding!)

Well we're now starting the long road of redeeming Charlie Weasley. The Weasley angst that had so many readers begging for his death, or redemption is our literary version of the Cruciatus curse, enjoy the pain, minions!

The UPDATELESS LIST!!!!

This is getting hard to do because (a) real life conditions are greatly extending our own updates out.

The Time of Change by Olafr

<http://www.fanfiction.net/s/1637630/1/>

This gem has the ability to turn into one of the best Harry/Hermione fan fics since Old Crow wrote No Thanks. Last updated on 21-Feb-06, come on folks, lets nudge Olafr and let him know we love that story and want more.

*Bobmin*  
*FanficAuthors.net*

# Sunrise Over Britain

## Chapter 11 - Honeymoon Surprises

### Standard Disclaimer:

Severus Snape walked out onto the stage and stood regally in front of the audience.

"The authors of this fine tale have invited me to speak about how they do not own anything in this story. The characters are the sole property of JK Rowling and other people, not the authors. The Authors further wish to claim abject poverty, so suing them would be a waste of money. Bob even went as far as to claim they rent their food, but I don't believe that in the least. Although I did have to return the cookie they gave me so maybe he wasn't kidding."

Snape finished speaking and looked expectantly out at the audience in confusion. The longer he waited, the angrier he got. Finally he couldn't take it anymore.

"WHAT? No herd of rampaging hippogriffs? No tying me to a missile? No death and dismemberment? No burning to death? No..." Snape paused for a moment and paled.

"By Grabthar's hammer, by the sons of Warvan, you shall be avenged!" he blurted in surprise.

Snape stopped speaking and looked horrified. "GIRL POWER!" he shouted as his hair braided and his clothing changed into a yellow polka dot dress.

Snape glared and stared at one section of the audience. Then he reached into his robe pulling out a fish. "A Hero is as good as his weapon!" he called stamping his feet. Then he dropped the fish and slapped both hands over his mouth.

In the audience Harry and Hermione smiled at each other. "Wait til the love/lust potion kicks in, should be any minute," murmured Harry.

"A love/lust potion? Oh Harry that is too cruel," admonished Hermione halfheartedly.

"I know, but it's fun," he replied. At that point a twelve foot tall purple Dinosaur burst onto the stage staring at Snape. "I LOVE YOU, YOU'LL LOVE ME..."

Snape screamed in despair as the Dinosaur reached him.

"This is low, even for you," hissed Alyx to Bob.

"Yes Dear, I know. Now would you still like me to spank you tonight?"

"Of course!" Alyx gleefully cackled in reply.

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### Sunrise over Britain

#### Chapter 11

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#### Hogwarts Castle (August 2nd)...

Voldemort looked up in surprise to see Lucius Malfoy stride into his audience chamber. Normally he came to Hogwarts every other week. Lucius was early and that meant something interesting was coming.

"Lucius! This is not your normal day to report. What news have you for me?" Voldemort said.

Malfoy stopped roughly five feet from the Dark Lord's chair and bowed so deeply he nearly groveled. "My lord, I wish to report on some information that has come into our hands."

Voldemort leaned forward. "Yes? What is it?"

Lucius looked down at a small book where he kept his notes. "First off, we are now one hundred percent sure that both Antonin and his men have been eliminated. We have heard nothing from them in over a week now. I have contacted one of the syndicates to see if they can find out any information for us."

Voldemort scowled fiercely.

Lucius glanced up from his book and cringed under the baleful gaze of his master. Hurriedly, he continued with his report.

"Also, it seems that Potter wasn't very discriminating when he took the students from the school. We have heard from a couple of students via their relatives in Europe. We are working on establishing a more direct method of contact with them. Interestingly enough, the students report that there appears to be some sort of fight going on between Potter and Dumbledore. The Irish Ministry has proclaimed Dumbledore to be a wanted fugitive."

Lucius paused and waited while the Dark Lord considered that piece of information.

Voldemort leaned back in his chair, pondering. "So... Potter and Dumbledore are at odds. This could work to our advantage."

"It appears so, my lord. There were unconfirmed rumors that the Ministry had been investigating Dumbledore on Potter's behalf. When Richfield took over the Ministry, that bitch, Bones, removed all the confidential files from the Department of Magical Law Enforcement, so we never could confirm the rumor," Lucius told him.

Voldemort nodded. "What else have you for me?"

"It appears that our French friends have spotted two of Potter's inner circle entering France yesterday. I have asked them to track them down and observe what they are doing. I thought about authorizing a hit wizard, but I wanted to get your approval before we try that."

Voldemort reached down and stroked Nagini while he considered that. "What other news have you for me?"

"Nothing more at the moment, my lord. The consolidation in and around the London area is complete and we have total control of that region now. The army has moved into the uncontrolled out lying regions and has begun to pacify them. The army has found it necessary to recruit some of the more violent civilians, but that seems to be working in our favor.

"On the international front, we have managed to expand our network considerably by contacting several Wizarding crime syndicates. Most aren't aligned with our cause, but are amenable to helping us for the right price. A few are hoping that once we can solve the barrier problem, they can ally themselves more fully with you. Our friends in Milan have located another cauldron for your use and I expect it to arrive in a day or two. Our agents in the middle east are keeping those countries on the fence, so the British will find no help from them.

"The British Government in Exile is still trying to bring other muggle governments in on their side, looking for support for a possible invasion. Most of the governments are unwilling to commit to such an endeavor, however. It appears they have misinterpreted all those Dementor attacks as some unknown contagious disease."

Malfoy paused, startled by the high pitched scream that trailed off. Voldemort frowned. "Have you had no luck finding me a Necromancer?" he snarled.

Lucius paled. "No, my lord, We have tried, but none of those we know of are willing to come here. The one we tried to kidnap was too heavily protected by the French Ministry. The art of Necromancy is very rare, my lord, and most Ministry's guard their Necromancers closely, to protect them."

"Damnation!" Voldemort said, pounding a fist on the armrest. "That thrice damned poltergeist has killed nearly twenty men so far, and we now have new ghosts infesting the castle. It disturbs my sleep."

As he spoke, a spectral figure of a Death Eater floated into the room. "TURN BACK FROM THY EVIL WAYS," the ghost cried. Several of the living Death Eaters flinched and Voldemort growled deep in his throat.

"*Crucio*" he whispered at one Death Eater who was cowering back from the ghost, visibly frightened.

Voldemort lifted the curse after a few minutes, seemingly bored with the whole process, then he turned his attention back to Lucius.

"Lucius, your news pleases me for the most part. It is a pity about Dolohov, but his performance and reliability had become erratic of late. I will send word to our French friends about what to do about Potter's friends. Now, sit. I wish to discuss other matters with you."

A chair appeared and a very startled Lucius Malfoy sat down in his master's presence for the first time since pledging himself to the Dark Lord.

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## **Cairngorn Mountains, Scotland...**

Dumbledore's first impression even before he opened his eyes was one of pain, overwhelming pain. He opened his eyes and frowned. Ripples of pain crossed his face and he moaned piteously on the bed, writhing in his agony.

"Master Dumblydore should not try moving," piped a small voice.

"Of all the people I expected to see at this safe house, you are the very last, Albus Dumbledore," said a gruff and familiar voice.

Dumbledore tried to lift his head to look around. Something wasn't quite right with his vision. He turned his head towards the source of the voice.

"Alastor?" he croaked.

The little elf placed a drink to his lips. "Drink, Master Dumblydore, it will make you feel better and help heal."

Dumbledore drank sparingly. He wasn't sure of his situation, except to say he was in considerable pain.

"Aye, Albus, it's me. And for once I can honestly say I look better than you do. Nippers and I are all you have when it comes to a healer. You've been asleep for weeks now... Why did you do it, Albus? Are you that willing to risk your very soul?"

Dumbledore peered up at his old friend in consternation. "What are you talking about?"

"I heard it on the wireless. The Irish Government has placed a price on your head for an unprovoked attack at Potter's Haven. I know you and Potter don't see eye to eye anymore, but can't you leave the lad alone? He's the one who now leads the fight against Voldemort."

Dumbledore leaned up in his bed. "It should be me," he snarled, then he collapsed back in his bed, panting.

"Well, that isn't going to happen anytime soon, Albus. You've been badly burned, and your eye is injured. It's going to take you a long time before you can get out of bed, let alone lead any fights. I'll let you stay here long enough to heal, then you need to go elsewhere if you're looking to fight. I want no part of your battles with Potter or Voldemort or whomever. I just want to live here quietly, in peace," Moody said sadly. He was depressed that he had to take this hard line with his old friend, but he would not allow himself to be pulled into some sort of vendetta.

Dumbledore looked up at his old friend in shock. The potion was starting to make him drowsy and it took all his strength to nod in agreement. He'd work on changing his mind after he was better.

Moody watched Dumbledore slip off to sleep. "Oh, no you won't, Albus," he murmured softly, then he turned to Nippers and gave the little elf instructions for dinner.

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## **Anafi, Mediterranean Sea...**

The sun was well above the horizon when Harry finally woke up. He was naked, as was Hermione who was currently using him as her own personal mattress. He smiled and caressed her cheek tenderly. For a moment he thought she'd ignore him and continue sleeping, but she cracked an eye open, looking at him.

"Good morning, Mrs. Potter," he whispered, then he tightened his grip on her.

She smiled and stretched against him. All thoughts of breakfast and getting up fled his mind. "I like the sound of that," she murmured, then she lightly gripped his stiffening erection. "I like this even better."

Harry chuckled as she blushed from her own boldness, then he kissed the top of her head.

"Sweetie, as much as I'd like to, you sort of drained the well dry last night and I need a little time to recover. Besides, we have a busy day scheduled for today," he said with a grin.

Hermione propped her head up on one hand and continued to lightly stroke him. "Oh? I don't think you're as drained as you claim. But just what do you have planned for today? After all, this is our honeymoon."

Harry shuddered from the sensations she was causing and tried to concentrate on the conversation. "I had Remus make some arrangements for us. Today we meet with a Gregorios Stavros in Athens. He'll be showing us around the Wizarding sections of the city. Remus tells me he's the manager of one of my family's companies here in Greece. I know we have only ten days for our honeymoon, but once Voldemort's gone, we're going to do it right. In the meantime, we'll explore Athens, and Minerva has given me a letter of introduction to get us into the Library at Alexandria, in case you want to go see the restoration."

Hermione quickened her hand for a moment then she crawled up and straddling him. Harry gasped as he slid into her and she smiled down at him. "It's nice having a husband who caters to my desires," she said in a husky voice, slowly riding him. "I'll just have to think of a nice way of thanking him."

Harry growled in the back of his throat and pulled her down to kiss her.

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## **El Magica, not far from St. Thomas...**

Draco woke to a wonderful sound. Someone was singing softly, and it sounded perfect to him. A large open window allowed a cool breeze to waft over his naked form. Sitting up, he spotted some clothes laid out for him. Luna was no where to be seen, but unless he was mistaken, she was singing softly to herself in the other room. Dressing quickly, he went to join her on the first floor of the two story cabin.

Luna sat at their dining table, playing with several flowers. What surprised him the most was that she had apparently decided that clothing was optional for breakfast. She wasn't completely naked, though. She wore a floral print skirt and a crude looking hat made from palm fronds. Around her neck was a necklace of iridescent shells.

She looked up at him and smiled widely. He could feel her no longer masking her emotions and he could feel the bond between them insulating him, protecting him from being overwhelmed.

"Good morning my husband," Luna said with a lilting laugh to her voice.

Draco smiled and tried to tear his eyes away from her breasts, lightly swaying as she breathed. "Good morning, my wife," he mumbled then sat down next to her, staring at the table.

Luna leaned over and kissed him on his cheek, then touched his face. "We're married now, Dray. You're allowed to look at me."

Draco nodded and tried to ignore the flush climbing up his cheeks. "I know, Luna. But seeing you like this... it only makes me want to take you back upstairs to make love to you again."

Luna laughed throatily and hugged him, then offered him a cup of coffee. "Later, my sweet. Right now we need to eat and we need to talk... about what happened last night."

"Last night?" he asked, somewhat confused. This was a new aspect of Luna. Despite her attire, or lack there of, she seemed tightly focused for a change.

"Yes. Last night you stabilized our bond. Now, at least when we're alone, I no longer need to mask my emotions. For the first time in my life I can be myself. You are my anchor and my protector," she said in a gentle tone.

Draco took a sip of his coffee and tried to formulate his thoughts into words without hurting her. "Does this mean you'll be able to be yourself around anyone, or just me?"

Luna reached out and cupped his cheek gently. "My poor Dray. This really has caught you off guard, hasn't it? I can feel you struggling, trying to frame your questions. Don't be afraid of hurting my feelings. I know how strange I appeared to everyone. And I know how much you love me, despite my little quirks. The quirks aren't gone Dray, they are just better... Controlled, perhaps?... Yes, controlled would be the right word."

Draco leaned into her touch, surprised at how much he craved her gentle caress. Luna laughed softly and leaned over to wrap her arms around him. After a few minutes she released him.

"Eat up, Dray. After breakfast we'll take a morning swim. It was going to rain today, but I asked the rain to hold off until the afternoon. After our swim we'll shower together and spend a lazy afternoon making love."

Draco's eyes glazed over with the images she painted in his mind and he nodded, completely skipping over her comment about her postponing the rain until later.

Luna stood and put on a bikini top, then she winked at Draco and walked out.

Draco, his mind still a whirl, grabbed one last bite of his toast, then he followed her out of the cabin and onto the beach. He would have walked into the sea fully clothed if she hadn't reminded him to take off his shirt and shoes.

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## Paris, France...

Terry leaned out over the balcony and looked at the Eiffel Tower in the distance. He turned at the knock at the door.

"I'll get it," Susan called.

Susan came out of the bedroom wearing a robe. She opened the door and spoke to the person outside the door. Terry could hear her talking in French and he shook his head, marveling that she was so fluent in the language. A minute later a man wheeled a cart into the suite and started to move food from it to the table in one corner of the living room.

"Terry, breakfast!" she called.

He turned and walked back into the living room, heading for the table while she took care of the tip.

"This sure is a nice place Harry arranged for us," he said with a grin. The large windows showed the city spread out before them. The bedroom was lush, bordering on decadent and the bath was positively hedonistic.

Susan smiled at him and poured them both a cup of tea. "From what I understand, the Potter family owned interests in several muggle and Wizarding hotel chains. He and Remus found out where we all wanted to go and then arranged for us to stay."

"I know, Susan, but look at this place! There are three unused bedrooms to this suite. It's the only suite on the whole floor!"

Susan giggled softly. "It's called the Owner's suite, Terry. I'm just happy that Harry did this for us. Did you see that bathroom?"

Terry grinned back at her, and looked at her carefully. She wore the filmy nightgown she had come to bed in under her robe. Her attire was giving him ideas, which caused him to blush to his roots.

She laughed at his coloring. "We can spend the day here if you like. Hermione gave me a list of things to see and do in Paris that we can pick from. But that can wait until tomorrow."

"It figures. Hermione would have an itinerary set up for us. Let me guess, all educational stuff?" he asked with a laugh.

"Let me check," she said, getting up from the table to get the list.

A moment later she walked back into the room holding the parchment. She walked slowly, approaching Terry while she read the list.

No," she murmured in surprise. "This is the first time I've really looked at it but, shockingly, she lists several night clubs and theaters. She says the Wizarding section of Paris has great shopping. She also recommends a few restaurants and several museums," she told him, looking up with a grin.

Terry smiled and pulled her into his lap, nuzzling her neck for a moment. "That must be Harry's influence on her. I'm sure she would have listed only libraries and museums if it weren't for him."

Susan sighed and ran her hands through his hair. "I don't know, Terry. She's mellowed a lot since she started seeing Harry. I'll bet she had no educational plans at all for their honeymoon."

"So let's plan on spending a little more time here today, then later we can check out one of those restaurants and maybe a club," he suggested while slipping a hand inside her robe.

She shivered in his lap and tightened her grip on him. "I like that idea."

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## The town of Haven...

"Over there is our town hall and meeting place. Next to that is the Ministry building, which is where we're heading," said Arthur.

Andromeda and Ted shook their heads in amazement. Neither had expected Haven to be so well built or so organized. They had envisioned something on the same level as a muggle refugee camp. Instead, they found a neatly built town with shops and schools. The town had gotten off to a shaky start but now was a bustling hub of activity.

"And Mr. Potter built all this?" Ted Tonks asked incredulously.

"That's right," Arthur said with a nod. "The town, schools and hospital. He even negotiated with Gringotts for a branch to be opened here. That's it, next to the Ministry building."

Both turned to look at the white marble building that seemed to lean precariously to the left and yet somehow stayed standing.

"Remarkable," murmured Andromeda.

"What's really remarkable isn't the town, it's the people," Arthur offered.

Ted and Andromeda turned to look at him curiously. "What do you mean?" Ted asked.

Arthur paused in the middle of the street and looked at the two of them for a moment. "When Harry first proposed his idea, he meant to try to save some of the Hogwarts students, their families and some friends. From that point, it grew. We now over five thousand people in the town. More than three times the population of Hogsmeade, which was the single largest pure Wizarding community in Britain.

"One third of our population are either muggles or squibs. Harry and his friends have done a lot to promote the idea of muggles and wizards working together and living together. He's even backing a muggle for the office of Mayor. Personally, I think the man will win too. Harry tries to maintain a low profile here in town, but everyone here knows they owe a debt to him."

Andromeda shook her head. "I still don't understand all this. Why is my daughter so involved with Mr. Potter? Why would he care about her?" she asked in confusion.

"Harry knew your daughter first as an Auror and a member of Dumbledore's Order of the Phoenix," Arthur said after a moment. "But more importantly to Harry, he knows her as Remus' girlfriend. Remus is the last living connection he has to his parents and, in a way, Remus is his surrogate father. Harry loves Remus, and loves what your daughter does for him. She's brought joy into Remus' life, and Harry considers her to be like a big sister, or perhaps a young aunt. Because of that, he considers her, and the both of you as her parents, to be part of his extended family. If there is one thing I've learned about Harry Potter, it's that he will do anything for family."

"Yes, I could see that in his eyes yesterday. Just the look he gave Remus and Dora. And his generous offer for us to stay at the manor house," Ted mused.

Arthur nodded in agreement, then looked up at the building they stood in front of. "Ah... here we are. The Ministry building."

"Why are we coming here again, Mr. Weasley?" asked Andromeda.

"You two traveled through some areas that Miles Pickerton wants to talk to you about. We've had some reports about V-V-Voldemort receiving aide from crime syndicates and the like. Miles just wants to ask you a few questions, that's all," Arthur said reassuringly.

Ted and Andromeda shared a look of relief as Arthur ushered the two into the Ministry building. A few moments later he led them into a small office. Behind the desk sat Miles Pickerton, who looked up and smiled a welcome as they entered.

"Thank you for bringing them by, Arthur. Amelia said she received the figures from the Irish you needed. Should I send them up to your office when I'm done?" Miles asked in a gruff tone.

Ted and Andromeda shared worried look and wondered if they were somehow in trouble.



"Just send me a note when you're done here, Miles, and I'll come get them," Arthur said agreeably.

Miles nodded and Arthur walked from the room, closing the door behind him.

"Please, be seated. This won't take long," Miles said with a smile. "I just have a few questions for the two of you."

"Are we in some kind of trouble?" asked Ted. "I know we just showed up without any kind of warning..."

Ted trailed off as Miles' grin grew larger. "No, you're not in any kind of trouble. I wanted to talk to you both because you might have information we could use."

Andromeda perked up at this. "Oh? How so?"

Miles glanced down at a parchment in front of him. "According to my sources, you are a developer of new charms, and your husband is an investigator for the Wizarding part of Lloyds of London. Both careers require substantial observational skills."

"So what is it you need of us, sir?" asked Ted curiously.

"What I'm wondering is, did anything seem out of place or odd during your trip? Especially across France? We've had disturbing reports that several crime syndicates have been helping Voldemort's forces there, including one attempted kidnapping of the official French Necromancer."

Ted Tonks leaned back in his chair and looked at the ceiling for a moment. "No, I don't think I can recall..."

"Wait, darling," said Andromeda. Ted turned to look at her. "Remember those people at the customs check in?" she asked.

Ted's eyes lost their focus as he recalled their entry and exit from France. "Yes... we had traveled up from Spain into Pic d'Estats. The customs clerk was very curious about our travel plans. More than what I'd consider normal for that kind of job."

Andromeda leaned forward in her chair looking intently at Miles. "Teddy received notice to visit a villa in southern Spain that had been damaged by a herd of hippogriffs. Since it had been a while since we had a vacation, I went along with him, figuring we could turn his trip into a working vacation. While we were gone, the government fell and everything fell apart back home. Teddy cast an obscuring charm on us as a precaution. Then we made our way north. Teddy wanted to go to the Paris office of Lloyds to see if we could find out any information about what was going on at home," Andromeda said, then she choked up a bit.

Ted put a comforting hand on his wife's arm. "She's safe and so are we, Andy," he murmured softly.

Miles nodded in agreement. "Yes, you're both safe now. I understand you had a difficult time not knowing what was happening at home, or with your daughter. But that's all behind you now," he said gruffly, though his eyes shone with warm understanding.

Andromeda smiled weakly at her husband and Miles. Then she prompted her husband again.

"Tell him about the exit point, Teddy," she said softly.

Ted glanced at her, then looked back at Miles, his expression growing somewhat embarrassed. "By the time we had reached Calais, I was downright paranoid. All the time we spent in Paris I couldn't shake the feeling that we were being watched. When we learned about Haven, I went and picked up two false passports from my office, showing us as Irish citizens. Sometimes we need to use phony passports in an investigation to help conceal who we are. Anyway, at the Calais checkpoint, the customs officer spent quite a lot of time examining our papers, then tried very hard to convince us to use a government made portkey, despite the fact that we were clearly planning to apparate. To be honest, Mr. Pickerton, the man felt odd to me and I was well glad to be gone from that place."

Miles frowned and wrote a small note on a piece of parchment, then he folded it and tossed it into the air. Before the parchment could begin to fall an owl swooped into the room and grabbed it. Miles looked at the two and grinned.

"Inter-office express owls. It's an idea one of the Weasley boys came up with," he said in explanation. A moment later Charlie Weasley walked into the office.

"You wanted to see me Miles?" he asked.

"Yes, Charlie. How are things going with the block wardens?"

"We've got the wardens in place, and tomorrow they'll have the last of the wards set on the town hall so we can use it as a shelter. After that, we'll need to build shelters and I still have to look at what we can do for the school. It's pretty open," Charlie replied. He recognized Ted and Andromeda, but had no idea why he had been summoned to this meeting and thought it best to remain quiet for the moment.

"Charlie, you went through the Calais customs point, didn't you?" asked Miles.

"Yeah," Charlie said in a low growl. "The customs officer nearly got me caught, too."

"Can you describe him?"

Charlie leaned against the wall and thought for a moment. "It's been a while, but let me think. He was of medium height and build and had black hair with a bald patch in the back. I seem to remember that he walked with a slight limp."

"That's him!" exclaimed Ted Tonks.

"You had to deal with him?" Charlie asked.

"Yes, on our way here," Andromeda told him.

Miles looked between the three, then shrugged. "Alright then, I'll send word to the French Ministry. They'll put someone to watch him. My thanks to all three of you."

Miles stood from behind the desk and led them out of the office, thanking them for their help.

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## Q Branch, Haven Operations Center...

"Oy! Move a little further to the left," Fred shouted at George.

"Are you sure this is a good idea?" asked Helga worriedly. She could see her boyfriend standing down at the far end of the testing area waving at Fred.

Fred looked up from adjusting the homemade rocket and eyed her in confusion. "Why? Don't you trust us?" he asked with a grin.

"Actually, she trusts you," offered Inga. "It's your inventions that she's worried about. And the fact that you're using her boyfriend as a target."

Fred glanced downrange to see George prancing around playfully, then he looked at the five foot long rocket with the erumpent fluid warhead and scratched his head. He stepped back from the large rocket and looked at the two girls. Helga stared back at him, looking very worried, while Inga tried to look encouraging.

Fred sighed. Then he stepped away from rocket and looked downrange at his brother again. "OY! Get up here!" he shouted.

A minute later George came trotting up to the three of them. "What's the problem? Something wrong with the rocket?" he asked in confusion.

Helga placed a hand on his arm. "No, George, but I don't see why you have to be the target for this thing," she said, starting to get angry.

"You know, we could get Amy to do it," George offered.

Fred blinked in surprise. "Is she back yet? I told you that the ejection charm on the broom was too powerful!"

"Oh, yeah, she came back two days ago. Did you know the muggles have put up some sort of box that people are living in that floats over the planet? Amy claims she saw it! Can you imagine anything so crazy?"

Fred and George started laughing at the idea, while the Johansen twins frowned at the two of them. Both girls had tried to explain some of the muggle advances before, without much success.

When Fred finally stopped laughing he looked around the work area. "So where is Amy, anyway?" he asked, unable to see her.

"Oh, she'll be in tomorrow, I think, I gave her the day off to go get her toes reattached," replied George while he buffed one broken fingernail.

Helga and Inga looked at each other in horror.

Fred chuckled appreciatively and clapped his hands. "Right then, we'll postpone the test until tomorrow. Now then, what's next..."

Fred stopped as a wall panel dropped open and an alarm sounded. George dived for a cabinet and started pulling out dragon hide gloves and an apron. Through the open panel an owl flew in and dropped a smoking red letter into Fred's open hands. He blanched and dropped the letter in fear.

"NO!!! It will explode!" yelled George as he made a dive for the letter, catching just in time with one gloved hand.

The two Johansen twins looked at George fearfully. Neither had seen a howler before and from the reaction of Fred and George they knew this was something to be wary of.

The letter suddenly opened itself and levitated a few feet above George's hand.

"FRED AND GEORGE WEASLEY!" shouted a voice that was clearly Ginny's. "IF YOU DON'T SEND ME THE COUNTER TO THIS IMPOTENCY CURSE, I SWEAR I WILL CURSE YOUR DANGLY BITS TO BITE! THE NERVE OF YOU HEXING MY HUSBAND BEFORE WE LEAVE ON OUR HONEYMOON! WAIT UNTIL DAD HEARS ABOUT THIS, WHICH SHOULD BE IN ABOUT FIFTEEN MINUTES. I PROMISE YOU TWO YOU WILL RUE THE DAY YOU CROSSED ME. JUST WAIT UNTIL YOU GET MARRIED! I PROMISE YOU I WILL CURSE YOU WITH A COUNTER TO EVERY CONTRACEPTIVE CHARM IN EXISTENCE! NOW SEND ME THE COUNTER TO THIS CURSE THIS INSTANT OR I WILL APPARATE BACK THERE AND DEAL WITH YOU PERSONALLY!"

The letter then exploded, knocking everyone to the floor. Unfortunately, the explosion also ignited the fuse on the rocket. Fred rolled over to lay atop Inga, protecting her, as George did the same to Helga.

The rocket took off with a whoosh of sparks and a great cloud of smoke, causing everyone to cough.

Fred poked his head up and waved a hand trying to clear the smoke away enough to see. The door to the work area opened and Arthur Weasley stepped into the room, looking angry.

"Look out, Dad!" shouted Fred.

Arthur took one look and dived to the side as the rocket flew out the door. The door slammed shut, but a scream could be heard on the other side. A scream that sounded suspiciously like Amy, who'd obviously just come back from the hospital. Then the wall bulged ominously as the rocket exploded.

Arthur lifted his head and glared at his two sons before standing up. "Fred! George! I want a word with the both of you!"

Fred and George cringed and helped their girlfriends climb to their feet. They walked towards their father, protesting their innocence the whole way, as the Johansen twins eyed the smoking door in horror.

"That poor girl," Inga whispered to her sister.

"I'm sure it was more than her toes, this time," Helga agreed.

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### **The Waldorf Astoria Hotel, New York City (August 3rd)...**

Ginny sat at the breakfast table and drummed her fingers impatiently on the surface. She had sent a message to her brothers yesterday and she was still waiting for a reply. She looked fondly at the closed bedroom door where Neville lay, still sleeping. Despite being handicapped by an impotency curse, he had risen to the challenge, pleasuring her so many times on their wedding night and last night, but it wasn't enough! Ginny huffed a few times and mentally put her brothers under a slow testicle crushing hex. How dare they!

Neville was taking it a lot better than she expected. A Weasley would be punching holes in the walls or throwing things. But not Neville. In many ways, he reminded her so much of her father. He was soft spoken, easy going, quick to smile, but a real powerhouse when angered. Neville was their third best dueler in the Brotherhood behind Draco and Harry. She was sure that if Neville really wanted to, he could probably bypass Draco, he was that good.

He was her anchor and she recognized it. He calmed her on days when her abilities disturbed her, he helped her maintain a grip on her temper. Their personalities were so different, yet somehow they fit perfectly together.

She sighed and stared at the bedroom door again, feeling guilty. Since their handfasting, Neville had gone out of his way to give her pleasure, but she had been unable to return the favor, thanks to her prat brothers.

Their first encounter with the curse had been enough to pin the blame firmly where it belonged. She and Neville had arrived in New York City early enough for them to go out to dinner before retiring for the night. She had dressed with care, wanting to knock his socks off. The evening gown she'd chosen had shimmered with its own magic. It had several charms on it that she thought she might have to use, but the dress, coupled with her own, innate sensuality, had made them unnecessary.

Neville had come to bed wearing only a pair of boxers and when she got close enough he merely pulled her into an embrace that he held for a good five minutes before he started kissing her.

It was something that she had realized early on in their relationship. Like Harry, Neville had grown up with a family who didn't show affection well, and he craved it. He craved holding her and her touch and probably would for the rest of his life. He could hold her all day long as far as she cared. She felt safe, content and loved in his arms.

Neville took her to bed and began pleasuring her for what seemed like hours before he finally decided it was time. She eagerly helped him peel out of his boxers and as soon as he did, a cloud of green smoke emitted from his penis and he fell back onto the bed in shock.

The cloud rose above the bed and slowly formed into the words, "Don't be silly, you can't use this Willy!"

She screamed and poor Neville fainted.

Ginny looked up in surprise when she heard scratching at the window and saw a long distance courier owl with a small package. She opened the window, letting the owl in. It flew to the table and landed and Ginny could have sworn she heard it sigh in relief.

"Let me see what you have," she said kindly, then she removed the small package from it's talons. She poured some water into a dish and put a small plate of sausage in front of it before turning her attention to the package.

Opening the package she smiled seeing the letter from her father.

*Ginny love,  
I am pleased to tell you that this package contains the counter for that pesky curse. Your brothers are rather contrite and apologetic about it, but I told them it would probably be best that they waited until you got home before they groveled and begged for their lives.*

Ginny snorted a laugh.

*In truth, they are sorry. The potion to counter the curse was supposed to be packed in your belongings by Helga or Inga. But the other set of twins didn't like what our twins had in mind and figured that getting them in trouble with you would be a perfect prank in itself.*

*Give Neville his potion, the counter should work immediately, and so should Neville. (Are you blushing now, my daughter? Did you think Fred and George had the monopoly on teasing?) Please be safe. I know you'll be back soon, but I miss you and my new son-in-law.*

*With love,  
Dad*

"The window's open, eat and drink your fill, then let yourself out again," she told the owl. Then, opening the small box, she looked at the dark liquid in the crystal vial. With the vial clutched in her hand, she strode into the bedroom.

She smiled when she saw Neville stirring.

"Good morning, Mr. Longbottom," she said, bouncing on the bed next to him.

Neville smiled up at her and reached up to caress her cheek.

"Good morning."

"Open your mouth, my love. The counter potion arrived a little while ago," she said with a impish grin and she held up the vial.

Neville blinked in surprise, then opened his mouth. She poured the potion in and he instinctively swallowed, then grimaced at the taste. She handed him a glass of water, which he gratefully accepted.

"All better now?" she asked.

"I guess so... I hope this isn't another prank," he said in an unsure tone.

Ginny straddled him, her gaze suddenly turning very predatory.

"Ginny?"

She ran her hands over his well muscled chest and closed her eyes.

"For nearly three days now you've left me a gasping heap on this bed using nothing more than your fingers and mouth. Well, now it's my turn for a little old fashioned Weasley revenge..."

Neville paled and swallowed nervously. She looked down at him and licked her lips. She'd been waiting for this moment for so long, she had the urge to rip his boxers off with her teeth.

Neville smiled weakly at her and ran one hand up her flank, causing her to shudder. She bent down and gently nipped at one of his nipples, causing him to suck his breath in. Neville pulled her closer and all thoughts of revenge on her brothers fled.

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## **The Montmartre, Paris, (August 4th)...**

It was war, plain and simple. Terry stepped from the building with Susan hanging on his arm. Both were blushing furiously. A casual passer-by might even think they were competing for the biggest blush. They had just finished their evening with a trip to the Moulin Rouge, a cabaret recommended by Hermione, and had been shocked to discover that the show was blatant in its sensuality and sexuality.

This was the culmination of their day. One which, despite having been recommended by Hermione, had turned out very successfully.

Terry tried to signal a cab, but he and Susan were laughing so hard it was difficult. Somehow during the show their newlywed status had been discovered and several show girls had come down before the show to teach Susan how to dance for her husband.

At first, Terry had thought the idea funny, but when Susan actually started to grind in his lap, he turned a wonderful shade of red. Privately, he had the courage to admit he rather liked what she was doing, but he would have preferred it to be in a less public place.

A cab finally pulled over in front of Terry and Susan and they piled into the backseat. Susan sprawled on the seat and laughed. She was more than a little tipsy.

"Hotel du Louvre," Terry said, trying not to laugh at Susan and help her sit up.

The cabbie grinned in his rear view mirror and nodded.

Behind them, as the cab pulled away from the curb, a man stepped out of the shadows and watched with a feral grin.

"Hotel du Louvre," he whispered. "Now we have them."

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### **Haven School (August 6th)...**

Millicent Bulstrode looked up from her breakfast when she heard the soft sound of wings and watched two owls fly into the dining hall. Her eyes narrowed when they flew to Jack Palmer and Mindy Joyner and delivered letters. This was the third morning delivery the two had received, and Millicent had been waiting for it.

As had become their habit, Palmer and Joyner stood up and left the hall quickly, letters clenched tightly in their hands. Once they'd left the hall, Millicent followed them, though her pace was slower. She knew their routine and knew where they were headed.

Once outside, Millicent turned away from the path to the owlery building and quickened her pace. The path she took would take her to a small grove of trees where she could conceal herself, but still see the owlery. Once there, she squatted down, pushed the anticipation she was feeling aside, and waited.

She didn't have to wait long. Two owls took wing from the owlery building. It was time to act.

Concentrating carefully, she formed a picture in her mind and focused her power inward. In just a matter of seconds, a sleek, fierce Gyrfalcon replaced the large, rather ugly looking young woman. With three hopping steps, she was airborne and winging her way towards the two owls. She remained behind the other birds, waiting for her moment. Once they'd passed over the school and out of sight of anyone watching from the windows, she acted.

With a quick burst of speed, she caught up with her pray. The owls, finally realizing they were being hunted, split up, and the falcon chose her target. Following closely, she increased her altitude slightly and, with a savage cry, reached out with her talons and sunk them deeply into the wing muscles of the owl.

With an screech of agony, the owl tried to turn and face his attacker. The falcon, realizing they were losing lift, clamped her talons tighter and beat her wings furiously. The owl struggled and, with a ripping sound, the falcon's talons were torn from his flesh. He tried to pump his wings to regain altitude, but found it useless. The letter clamped in his own talons fell from his grip as he plummeted towards the ground.

Swooping down, the falcon caught the letter and spiraled in a lazy circle for a moment, watching as the owl hit the ground and bounced. With a triumphant scream, the falcon dove towards the ground, landing lightly next to the motionless owl.

Releasing the letter, the falcon hopped onto the owl and tore into his feathers, stripping them off to reach the meat below.

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### **Cairo, Egypt (August 6th)...**

Harry approached Hermione and tried to wrap the long scarf around her head.

"What are you doing?" asked Hermione in confusion.

"Shhh... I'm getting you presentable," he murmured, as he tied the large scarf over her head, covering her hair entirely. Then he transfigured her shorts and tank top into a full length heavy robe.

"But I don't understand," she said, protesting the hot scarf and robes.

"We're going to see the library, but the culture is unlike any you're used to. Minerva and Filius both briefed me on this," he replied, then he wrapped both arms around her, pulling her close to him. She felt a momentary sense of dislocation and knew he was apparating both of them someplace.

The dizziness quickly passed and she blinked in the blistering sunlight. Off in the distance she could make out the great pyramids of Giza. Nearby was a collection of tents, clustered around a small oasis. She could hear bells from a herd of goats and could see several small children tending the herd atop a nearby rise.

Harry grabbed her hand and led her forward, weaving his way in among the tents as if he was looking for something in particular. Finally, he stopped outside a tent and examined the markings along one side of the entrance.

"Say nothing unless someone speaks to you," he whispered. Hermione bristled behind the hot scarf and robes she wore.

Still holding her hand, he walked forward, pulled aside the flap and entered the tent, pulling her in after him. Inside were several men, seated in a circle on plush cushions. In the center of the circle was a bowl filled with a pungent smelling sauce.

"Marharba," Harry said, carefully pronouncing the unfamiliar word.

The oldest of the men looked up at Harry and smiled, showing many gold capped teeth.

"Ahlan wa sahan," he replied, before switching to English. "Please be seated. My house is your house during your stay."

Harry led Hermione over to an open spot and he sat on the cushion. Hermione moved to sit next to him and he subtly shook his head at her. Her

eyes flared behind her scarf and he winced internally. He was in so much trouble!

"You were expecting us?" Harry asked in surprise.

The old man laughed. "Yes. My good friend Filius owed us that you might be visiting. Please, Mrs. Potter, be seated. We appreciate your trying to accommodate our customs, but we are more cosmopolitan than our muggle counterparts. I am Sheik Alim Hosary, head of our Department of Magical Antiquities."

Hermione sat next to Harry and shot him an angry glare before turning her attention back to their host and smiling gratefully. Harry had the grace to look apologetically at her.

"Your English is quite good, your Excellency," she murmured.

Hosary smiled at her comment, then he turned and clapped his hands. A flap opened in the back of the tent and several young women entered, carrying bread and fruits. An older woman stood by the entrance and watched the girls carefully. Harry got the impression that the older woman was the one in charge of the girls.

"I graduated from Hogwarts in 1901, Mrs. Potter," he said with a grin, "After that, I attended Cambridge. Come, let us eat and talk of business."

Harry eyed the many women who were setting up the food. He had expected a Wizarding home, even if it was a tent, to be staffed with elves, not humans.

"I see you're noticing my wives, Mr. Potter. They are a great comfort to me in my old age," Hosary said merrily. "When you have six wives, you will know what I mean."

Harry blinked and a quick vision flashed before his eyes of multiple wives dressed in filmy scarves, then changed into a vision of Hermione dressed the same way. He shook his head trying to clear his thoughts.

"Do not get any ideas," Hermione said in a quiet voice, though not quietly enough judging by Hosary's laughter.

"I wasn't... Well, not seriously," Harry protested weakly.

"Good, because I don't share," she replied primly.

Hosary eyed the two for a moment, his eyes danced with mirth over their comments. "Filius said you would be interested in visiting the library, yes?"

Harry nodded. "Yes, that is our desire. My wife is something of a scholar and since we were in the area we hoped we might be able to arrange a visit."

Hosary raised his eyebrows at Harry's 'in the area' comment. The Egyptian Ministry was well aware they had come from Anafi. Then he nodded and gestured to one of the girls who came forward and offered him a tray from which he selected a small stone.

"The library is one of our greatest national treasures. We were fortunate that there were several powerful wizards on duty in the library the day Emperor Theodosius the First ordered all pagan temples, including the Library, destroyed. In desperation the head librarian, Achmed Assim, an arch mage, caused the library to sink into the harbor. His efforts not only put the library out of reach of the muggle defilers, but he protected the library by enveloping it in a protective bubble. He died saving his library, using the last of his magic to move thousands of scrolls from the muggle area of the library to the Wizarding one.

"Even though the library is submerged, powerful magics protected it. Unfortunately, those wizards who helped Assim save it also lost their lives in the effort. Consequently, the library was only rediscovered thirty years ago."

"Excuse me, Excellency, but if the library is submerged..." Hermione began.

"How can anyone get to it?" he asked and she nodded in reply.

"Via a special portkey, like the one in my hand," he replied with a gentle smile. "We have only a few rules for the library. You may not remove any scroll or book from the library. If you want to remove something, one of the librarians will make a copy of the book or scroll for a minimal fee. The Ministry of Magic has declared the library to be sanctuary. Within the library there can be no fighting. To do so will result in death. Even the casting of magic is generally frowned upon without permission from a librarian," Hosary said solemnly.

Harry and Hermione nodded their understanding.

"Excellent! Let us finish our meal, then you can depart to the library. A librarian will provide you with the necessary translation charms when you arrive."

Over the meal, Harry and Hermione found Hosary to be a well educated man who was very interested in what they had accomplished in Haven. Harry spoke of that, while Hermione quizzed their host on the local history. She learned that the great pyramid of Giza, with its single, unused burial chamber had, in fact, another chamber. The real burial chamber was protected by an ancient version of the *Fidelius* charm, explaining why the muggles never found it.

As the meal was cleared away, Hosary sipped coffee and contemplated his guests for a long moment. Hermione, in particular, found his scrutiny somewhat disconcerting and she was glad that Harry was there.

"We here in the middle east have a growing problem for a quite a while now, Mr. Potter. There is considerable debate over it in our Wizengamot, as well as our brother Arab Ministries."

"I do not mean to offend Excellency, but may I ask what the debate is about?" Harry asked cautiously.

Sipping his coffee he eyed them for another minute before replying. "Some factions within our governments wanted to side with Voldemort, others wanted to side with you. Still others wanted neutrality. Some in our government see you as a threat to our way of life. Tell me, what course do you think we should take?"

Harry leaned back on the cushion, glad of Hermione's comforting presence next to him. "It would be presumptuous of me to suggest a course of action for your government, Excellency. Both Voldemort and I represent change, that much is true," Harry said softly, then he looked upwards at the tent ceiling. "I have seen the change that Voldemort represents first hand. Under his rule, he will crush everyone he considers different. He will force his ideas and his values on those who will accept them, and kill those that will not.

"I know some of what the press has said about me, but all I truly want is to live my life freely, to have a family and see them grow up in peace and harmony. People look to me to set an example and I find that difficult. This is not something I asked for," Harry replied.

"And yet here you are, married to a muggle born," offered Hosary, then he shrugged apologetically at Hermione.

Harry's eyes hardened and the tent shook slightly as the wind kicked up outside. "I did not marry Hermione to set any sort of example, unless marriage for love can be called such. I married a woman whom I loved more than life itself. Her skills and knowledge surpasses that of most pure bloods. Lineage is important when determining inheritances and royalties, but it is what we do with our power that defines us, not our blood. Take Voldemort, for example. He slaughters muggles and half bloods when he himself is a half blood. That makes no sense to me, except to prove the man has lost all sanity along with his humanity. As to my choice of mate, she is the one I want to spend my life with. I chose her not because of her blood, but for her spirit and courage, her sense of self and because she loves me as much as I love her,"

As Harry spoke, the tent rattled and his eyes glowed eerily. Hermione reached up and touched his shoulder and he glanced at her. Looking into her eyes and understanding her thoughts, he closed his own and drew a deep breath, calming himself. She was right. Anger here would solve nothing.

Several of the other men who had been observing Harry had backed away nervously.

Hosary smiled at Harry when the younger man opened his eyes again. "Not all change is something to embrace, but I can sense the good in you, Mr. Potter. Few men among our culture would speak so openly of their feelings for their mates. I am pleased to hear you do so and I am pleased we had time for this conversation. But now, it is time for you to visit the library."

Harry nodded as Hermione accepted the small stone from their host. With a nod of thanks to Hosary, Harry reached over and touched the stone and moment later they were gone.

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### **Haven School of Witchcraft and Wizardry (August 6th)...**

When the knock came, Minerva nearly growled in aggravation. The students were able to enjoy their summer break, but the Headmistress quickly found that she had more work than ever. Schedules had to be made for the next year, the proper forms filed with the Ministry, lists of food, potions and other supplies had to be created. The work seemed endless, and interruptions didn't help.

"Come!" she barked out and her eyes narrowed when she saw the woman who entered. "Good afternoon, Miss Bulstrode."

"Headmistress," Millicent said with a nod. Closing the door behind her, she drew her wand, then raised an eyebrow in question.

Nodding her permission, Minerva sat back and watched the young witch ward the door against entry and eavesdropping.

Slipping her wand back in her pocket, Millicent turned and walked to the chair in front of the McGonagall's desk.

With a wave, Minerva motioned her to sit, then she leaned forward. "What can I do for you today, Miss Bulstrode?"

"I have some information, Professor. Usually I would give it to Draco, but he's gone at the moment and I don't think it can wait. I thought I should bring it to you." She reached into the pocket of her robe, pulled out a wrinkled and battered letter and placed it on Minerva's desk. "I'm sure you'll find this interesting."

Picking up the letter, Minerva noted the bloodstains, but held her questions for the moment. Reading the recipients name, she scowled and quickly opened it.

*Dear Mum and Dad,*

*I told you, no one knows what Jack and I are doing. These people are easily fooled by a few pretty words of remorse and are too trusting for their own good. But that's to our benefit, so I certainly won't complain. As you always say, Dad, give me a stupid enemy every time!*

*Yes, the odd creatures that appeared during the Dementor attack are still around. We have one here on the school grounds but I haven't been able to get close enough to it to examine it. When I try, it moves away rather quickly. I don't want to draw attention to myself by chasing it down, so I can't tell you any more about them than I already have.*

*Now, for my news. Potter and his friends seem to have left Haven. I don't know where they've gone, but they all left the same day. You should tell Mr. Malfoy that if he still wants to get his hands on Draco, now is the time. I haven't seen Narcissa, but I'm sure she'd come running if Draco was in danger.*

*I'm also hearing rumors that have filtered up from town that Dumbledore was here in Haven and that he and Potter fought. I'm not sure what happened, except that Dumbledore fled and Potter was injured, although his injuries don't seem to have been that serious.*

*Any news on when Jack and I can get out of this place? We hate it here, surrounded by muggle-lovers and blood traitors!*

*That's it for now. I want to get this out before breakfast is over and people start wandering the grounds.*

Love,  
Mindy

When McGonagall raised her eyes, Millicent smiled nastily. "It's always nice to know what others think of one, isn't it?" she asked the Headmistress.

"Hmm, yes. But it works to our advantage. I'm surprised that Miss Joyner sent this in the clear."

"She didn't. It took a bit of work, but I was able to remove the encryption charm on it."

"Nice work, Miss Bulstrode. However, I do have a few questions," Minerva said, her eyes sharpening.

"Ma'am?"

"How did there come to be bloodstains on the letter? I certainly hope, as a former Slytherin, you didn't do anything obvious, like bashing Miss Joyner over the head."

Millicent looked offended. "Of course not! The blood is from the owl sent to deliver the letter. He didn't want to give it to me. We fought, he lost."

"So succinct," McGonagall murmured. Then, sitting forward, she pinned the younger witch to her chair with just a look. "You'll have to help me, Miss Bulstrode. I was under the impression that, once airborne and on a delivery, owls stop for no one."

When Millicent remained silent, Minerva pressed on.

"Hagrid tells me that he's been finding a lot of dead birds and rodents on school grounds lately. I had my suspicions, you understand, but I wasn't sure who might be the cause. With this," the Headmistress said, holding up the letter, "I think I've found the answer. Tell me, Miss Bulstrode, when did you become an animagus?"

Millicent sighed and slipped down a bit in her chair. "My cousin taught me the summer after fifth year," she said quietly. "I only managed to get everything put together correctly just before we evacuated Hogwarts."

"And your form?"

"A falcon."

Minerva's eyes narrowed. "What kind of falcon?" she asked intently.

"A Gyrfalcon."

When the Headmistress growled and stood up suddenly, Millicent flinched back.

"You!" Minerva sputtered.

"What?" Millicent exclaimed as she stood up and put the chair between herself and the older witch. "What did I do?"

"You were the one dive bombing me two days ago out near the greenhouses!"

"Dive bombing you? I would never, Headmistress, I swear it. I was out near the greenhouses two days ago in my falcon form, but I was only playing with a cat...OH!" Millicent's eyes widened and she took a quick step back. "Oh, Professor, I'm so sorry. I didn't realize..." She trailed off and swallowed nervously.

"From this moment on, Miss Bulstrode," Minerva said through clenched teeth, "you will limit your *hunting* to wild animals and kindly leave the domesticated species alone!"

"Yes...yes ma'am. I promise." Millicent said fervently, twisting her robes in her hands and trying to figure out a way of fixing such a blunder.

"Oh, sit down, girl!" Minerva told her as she fell back into her own chair with little grace. Watching her student sit, she shook her head. "Remind me to inform the house elves to feed you more. You've obviously been sampling the local wildlife too much. Now, we have work to do and we've wasted enough time today as it is."



“Remus? what are you doing back so early?” asked Narcissa.

Remus spotted Narcissa and Amelia having tea in the sitting room and he entered the room with a smile.

“Tonks wanted to spend a little time with her parents. We promised each other that we'll go on a real honeymoon when we have the chance,” he replied.

Narcissa waved him to a seat and poured him a cup of tea, which he accepted gratefully.

“You wouldn't believe just how difficult it is to get a decent cup of tea in Rome,” he said with a smile. “It's almost as bad as what the Yanks drink.”

Amelia chuckled and nodded wisely. “I will admit privately that it is hard to find decent tea on the continent.”

“At least you didn't have to put up with the French and their version of tea,” Narcissa offered. “I've tasted stronger water than what they offer.”

Remus nodded. “I just hope Susan and Terry can put up with it for a few more days.”

Amelia leaned forward in her chair and her expression paled. “They went to France?” she gasped.

“Yes,” Remus replied. “I set up the honeymoons for all our couples. Harry and Hermione are in Anafi, off the coast of Greece, staying at the Potter vacation home. Susan and Terry are in Paris, staying at a hotel that Harry's family owns a controlling interest in. Draco and Luna are doing something similar, but in the Carribean and Neville and Ginny went to New York. I know everyone was upset about keeping the destinations secret, but Miles insisted we do it that way for security.”

Amelia's hands started to tremble and she had trouble putting her tea down without spilling it. Remus and Narcissa looked on with alarm.

“Amelia? What is wrong?” asked Narcissa.

“France,” she whispered. “The French customs service has been compromised.”

Remus bolted to his feet. “I'll go talk to Miles right away. If necessary, I'll contact Susan and Terry and we'll bring them home. But let's see if we can put a few Aurors out to watch over them first so they can enjoy their honeymoon in peace.”

Amelia nodded weakly and Remus walked quickly from the room.

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## **The Sunken Library at Alexandria...**

They arrived in a open air courtyard surrounded on all four sides by marble columned buildings. The light had a flickering, shimmering quality about it and Harry looked up, then blinked in surprise.

Above them he could clearly see the most massive shield he had ever come across in his life. It shimmered and wavered, causing the sunlight to do the same. Above the shield was water, about thirty feet of it, and he shuddered involuntarily.

Hermione gasped when she followed Harry's gaze upwards. This was magic the likes of which she had only read about.

Harry was distracted by the approach of two men who stopped a few feet away from them. Both appeared to be wearing uniforms, one more ornate than the other. The more ornate dressed man bowed his head slightly and spoke.

“Welcome, gentle visitors. I am Malik, head librarian and chief of the restoration. Sheik Alim Hosary alerted me to your visit,” he said.

Harry and Hermione smiled. Hosary had been true to his word and made good on his promise to make their trip as easy as possible.

“Thank you for your welcome, Malik. I know we'll find our visit an enjoyable one,” Harry replied.

“The Sheik tells me your wife is a scholar. I have assigned one of my assistants to aid her. Is there any particular subject she wants to examine?” asked Malik.

“Yes,” said Hermione. “I know most of the library consists of middle eastern lore, but I am interested in seeing what, if any, material you might have from the pre-Christian Britons, especially Celtic or Druidic lore.”

Malik smiled broadly. “I think you will be surprised to find what materials have been collected over the years, Mrs. Potter. My aid will show you the relevant sections and help you in your search.”

Harry turned to look at Hermione. “Do you have enough money on you? Anything you want to copy will cost something.” he asked with a smile.

Hermione patted a purse tied to her belt. “I should be fine. If I need more I'll come find you.”

When Harry shook his head and grinned, she turned away and followed Malik's assistant to one of the buildings. Harry turned back to the smiling Librarian.

And what of you, Mr. Potter?"

"It pains me to admit this, but my wife is a far better scholar than I am. I admit I find the shield interesting and I am interested in the restoration effort. Is it true the library was only rediscovered thirty years ago?"

Malik nodded and his eyes lit up with interest. "Yes, the library was hidden to protect it. Thirty years ago we found it as the charm hiding the library finally wore off."

"Really? It wasn't a *Fidelius* charm then?"

"No. Unfortunately the spell used has been lost to the ages, but it successfully hid the library since the third century when the pagan temples and libraries were ordered destroyed. Now days, we use obscuring charms and anti-muggle repellers to keep away unwanted guests," replied Malik proudly as he led Harry through one building into another atrium.

Harry nodded and looked at the shield overhead once more.

"Would you like to see more of the grounds, Mr. Potter? I would be pleased to show you around," offered Malik.

"Yes, I would like that Malik," Harry said softly, looking around. Something was bothering him, but he couldn't put his finger on it. "Tell me, Malik, how often are the wards and that shield checked?"

Malik stopped and looked at Harry warily. "The wards and shields are checked daily, Mr. Potter. Why?"

"I'm not sure. It's just a feeling I have that something isn't right. I know we're not supposed to perform magic here without permission. May I perform a passive look?" Harry asked worriedly. The feeling of impending doom had increased with their arrival in the atrium.

Malik nodded worriedly and he fingered a dagger at his belt.

Harry extended his senses and looked overhead at the shield. Looking at the aura of the shield he could see a wash of black sweep over it every few seconds. Looking around, he could see the library complex surrounding the atrium on three sides, the fourth side opened to the sea.

With a scowl, Harry began walking to the source of the wash of black flooding the shield several times a minute.

"Malik, do you see that outcropping of rock?" he asked, pointing beyond the shield towards a pile of rocks on the sea floor.

He turned to look at Malik when the man didn't respond, and was surprised to see nearly a dozen librarians and others standing in the atrium, their wands drawn and pointed at him. "Malik?"

"Sorry, Mr. Potter, but we cannot allow what you have learned to be spread around," Malik said in an acidic tone.

Harry blinked in surprise, then he started to scowl. "I am trying to help you, but if you don't want my help, fine. I'll gather my wife and we'll leave immediately. This place isn't safe and I do not intend to let her stay here any longer than necessary now that I know that," Harry replied. Then he looked at the other librarians holding wands on him.

"Put them down and get out of my way, or use them," he growled at the men surrounding him as his magic flared within him, causing his eyes to glow eerily.

"HOLD!" thundered a voice. Harry whipped his head up to see Hosary and over a dozen Aurors approaching. Behind them were four more Aurors protecting Hermione, and Malik's assistant, who was now in chains.

Malik paled and snapped out a command.

Several of Malik's men fired off curses, catching Harry and the Aurors by surprise. A bone crushing hex hit Harry's arm and he gasped in pain, then his anger, and his magic flared.

A shield snapped into place and he gestured with his other hand. Three of Malik's men fell to the floor, gasping for air as Harry banished every bone and piece of cartilage in their bodies. Without immediate help, they would suffocate.

Harry shielded Hermione and the Aurors protecting her, then he turned his attention to the fire fight going on between Malik and the Sheik's men. He was forced to dodge several killing curses while he moved closer. He had an idea he had been itching to try for a while. Rolling to one side, his vision danced with spots when he rolled on his injured arm. The arm started to bleed from several places as pieces of bone pierced his skin.

Harry raised his good arm and his aura flared brightly. There was a flash of red light like a flash bulb going off and the atrium fell silent. His wide area stun field had stunned Malik and all of his men, and at least six Aurors.

Harry pushed himself painfully to his feet and looked around carefully. He could see the Sheik and his men advancing carefully, disarming Malik's men. Most of the Aurors watched Harry warily.

"Harry!" Hermione yelled and rushed past the Aurors to his side. "You idiot! What were you trying to do? You know there's no fighting in the library," she fumed at him.

He swayed slightly and looked at her for a moment in disbelief. No fighting in the library? Honestly, it wasn't *his* fault! Then understanding twisted its way through the pain and he almost smiled. Hermione always babbled when she was worried.

While Hermione berated him, Sheik Hosary had come up beside her.

"I think, Mrs. Potter, we can make an exception in this case," Hosary said softly. "Mr. Potter cast no spells until Malik and his men attacked. Besides, most of his actions were clearly defensive."

As the Sheik spoke, Harry broke out into a cold sweat and his skin paled. The Sheik's eyes widened when he spotted the blood dripping from his arm. He turned and snapped out a few orders in Arabic. Hermione stepped back and looked at him with concern, then she conjured a chair for him to sit on.

He dropped into the chair heavily. His vision kept graying out on him and there was a buzzing sound in his ears.

Those Aurors still conscious were busy binding and moving Malik's men away from the area. Harry looked up when he caught a bit of the conversation between Hermione and the Sheik.

"I'm sorry, Excellency, but even if I did know the spell he used, I doubt I could counter it. He is so much stronger than I am and many of the spells he's been creating of late are beyond my ability to perform," Hermione said, sounding apologetic.

"Wide field stunner," Harry murmured groggily.

"Can you revive my men, Mr. Potter?" asked the Sheik.

Harry nodded and waved a hand. Around them the stunned Aurors started to move. A healer pushed his way forward and cut the sleeve from Harry's shirt, then started to work on his arm.

"The shield... under attack..." Harry moaned and both Hermione and Hosary looked at Harry in consternation. "The shield... weakening... outcropping..." When the healer started to bind up his arm, Harry groaned and passed out.

Hosary looked over to the shield and pulled out his wand. He cast several charms, his expression growing grimmer with each spell. Finally, he turned back to Harry and Hermione. "Mrs. Potter, I must ask that you and your husband to leave the library immediately. My personal healer will take you and your husband to a place of safety."

Confused by the turn of events, Hermione could only nod as the healer pressed a rope portkey into her hands. Her last view of the library was that of the Sheik snapping out orders and dozens of other wizards apparating in.

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## Haven Operations Center...

Miles frowned at the man before him. His idea was coming back to bite him and now he had to do something about it, and do it fast.

Remus paced in front of Miles' desk, his expression clearly worried. The two were waiting for both Amelia and Caleb to arrive. The door opened a few minutes later to admit the worried Minister, followed a short time later by the Auror.

"Caleb, we may have a problem and I need to know if we can pull any of the Aurors we have training for the protective service detail and put them in the field right away," Miles said grimly.

Caleb scowled and sat in one of the empty chairs. "The PSD is brand new, Miles. We have several men who are experienced, but we're using them as instructors. All the trainees are fully qualified Aurors, but have no PSD experience. Why don't you tell me what's going on and I'll see if I have anyone who fits your needs?"

Amelia sat hunched in another chair, clearly frightened. Susan was her last living relative and she loved the girl like a daughter.

Miles wiped his face with one hand and nodded to Caleb. "As per usual security, we kept the honeymoon destinations of Harry Potter and his Brotherhood secret. I'll stand by that decision, mostly, but it turns out it was a mistake. The Minister's niece and her husband passed through the Calais customs checkpoint six days ago, Caleb. We now have confirmation from two different sources that the checkpoint is dirty."

Amelia knuckles turned white on the arms of chair she was gripping.

Caleb nodded for a second. "Are you looking for an extraction? Or for someone to protect and cover them? They're due back when? The tenth?"

"The eleventh, actually, but as to the mission," Miles hesitated and looked over at Amelia. "It's really your call, Minister. If we perform an extraction like we've been doing in Britain, it will be on foreign soil and could be considered an act of war. However, a discrete protective detail may not be capable of fending off an all out assault on them. I think it might be necessary to break a few laws by giving your niece and her husband portkeys which bypass the customs points as an emergency measure."

Amelia frowned. "I hadn't considered the possible consequences. If we were to put a protective detail on them and then also give them an emergency portkey?" she asked looking around.

"A portkey won't be necessary," Remus said. "They already have them."

Miles raised an eyebrow and looked at Remus curiously. "Since when?"

"Their Brotherhood medallions are set to be portkeys. Susan and Terry can activate them. They will also activate automatically if the wearer suffers any major physiological change."

Amelia sagged in her chair, the relief evident in her posture.

"Look, this should be straight forward. We have three instructors training a total of fifteen students. I'll inform the instructors that tonight they will be beginning a live field exercise with their students. They can pick up their charges and follow them discretely from there," Caleb offered.

Miles looked up from his desk and glanced over to Amelia. "That works for me," he offered.

Amelia nodded in agreement and allowing Caleb to leave to set up the details.

"Should we send someone after the others?" asked Amelia worriedly.

"I don't think it will be necessary, Amelia. They all know about their emergency portkeys and I think they're all capable of taking care of themselves," offered Remus in a confident tone.

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## Cairo, Egypt (August 7th)...

The first thing Harry felt was a bone tearing pain shooting up and down his arm. He moaned and tried to roll but someone prevented him from moving. A cool cloth was placed on his forehead.

"Hermione?" he asked in a pained whisper.

"Right here, Harry. Try not to move. You've been dosed with Skele-grow. That's why your arm hurts so much," she replied.

Harry opened his eyes and blinked them clear. Hermione sat next to him and she was dressed oddly. The pants she wore were tight at the waist and ankle, but billowy everywhere else. Her shirt was loose fitting and short, just covering her breasts, which swayed with each movement she made, but exposing her stomach to the navel. Both shirt and pants were blue in color and the material was very sheer, nearly transparent.

Pulling his gaze away from such an enticing sight, he looked around and noted that they were in a walled off section of a tent and his bed had rolled up mosquito netting. "Where are we Hermione?" he asked in a worried tone. He couldn't help but notice the bags under her eyes from lack of sleep.

"His excellency set us up in a tent near his own so his healer would be able to visit you several times during the night. He says the Skele-grow should wear off soon and you'll be as good as new then..."

Hermione paused and then angrily dashed tears away from her eyes. "Damn you, Harry Potter!" she said, then punched him in his good arm. "Am I going to spend the rest of my life watching you get injured?"

Harry winced slightly at her punch and pulled her down to him with his good arm. She nestled into his shoulder and wept softly. He held her with his free arm and kissed the top of her head. "I'm alright Hermione. It's just a minor wound. You said it yourself, I'll be as good as new in a few hours, right?"

Unable to speak, Hermione nodded against his shoulder instead. His hand was stroking her hair, relaxing her. He was alive. He would heal. They were safe.

Within a few minutes she was asleep in his arm. Harry smiled and looked up at the tent roof, thinking about the night before. He didn't get far in his thoughts when he joined his wife in sleep.

Several hours later Harry awoke feeling someone prodding his arm.

"Ah, you're awake, Mr. Potter," said the stranger with a comforting smile.

"Er..."

"I am Sheik Hosary's personal healer, and I have just finished checking over your arm. I'm pleased to say you're fully healed, although one wonders if sleeping with your wife might have sped the healing process," the healer said with a grin.

Harry blushed, it didn't help that Hermione was still asleep on his shoulder and that one of her hands was under his shirt.

"His Excellency asks that you join him as soon as you're able. Your wife was up most of the evening helping you, so I'd let her sleep a little while longer. There is a fresh change of clothing for you here," the healer said, pointing to a pile of clothes.

"Please tell his Excellency that I'll be there shortly," Harry said, then he began the painstakingly slow effort of squirming out from under his wife without waking her.

The healer smiled knowingly and left the tent.

Harry dressed slowly. His arm was stiff and some of the clothing was unfamiliar to him. He had just finished dressing when Hermione woke up.

"I like the look of that," she murmured, admiring him in his outfit.

Harry blinked. The loose pants and knee length shirt made him think, in his mind, that he was wearing over-sized pajamas. Hermione stretched and rolled to a sitting position.

"Why are you dressed liked that?"

"The healer came by and said my arm was fine and told me the Sheik wanted to see me. While he didn't say it was urgent, from his tone it sounded like it might be important."

"Are there clothes there for me as well?"

"What's wrong with what you're wearing?" Harry asked with a twinkle in his eye.

Hermione glared at him for a moment before breaking out in laughter. "These are pajamas, Harry. It's alright for my husband to see me dressed this way, and someone like the healer, but I can't go out in public like this. I'd set East-West relations back a thousand years if I did," she joked.

Harry picked up the extra clothes and tossed them to her. "Remind me to get you some pajamas like that," he said in a soft tone.

Hermione looked up from picking through the clothes and blushed at him while she changed. Once she was dressed they left the tent and quickly located the Sheik's tent in the encampment.

Harry held the flap and let Hermione enter the tent, then he followed her in. It took a moment for their eyes to adjust to the darkened interior. The central chamber of the tent was unchanged with pillows and platters of food scattered around in the middle. There was one incongruous change.

Sitting next to Sheik Hosary was a man dressed in a perfectly pressed three piece suit. The conversation came to a halt when people noticed Harry and Hermione standing, unsure, in the entrance. Then the man in the three piece suit stood and strode forward purposefully.

"My word, Lord and Lady Potter. I am so pleased see you up and about, my Lord. I was just discussing bringing our embassy doctor here to check you over and maybe relocate you to more comfortable quarters," said the man while pumping Harry's hand furiously.

Harry and Hermione exchanged a glance, then he turned back to the man. "Ummm... I'm fine, really. And you are?"

"Oh, introductions! Of course, how rude of me. Rupert Cinan, Deputy Assistant Charge d'Affairs, British Embassy. We received notice from your Department M that you might be visiting and were asked to offer any assistance. When we learned that you had been injured, the Ambassador thought it best to send me out insure everything was alright," said Cinan, puffing up.

Harry smiled slightly at the man. "Please tell the Ambassador that we're fine. It was a minor accident and his Excellency here has been a most gracious host, seeing to our needs in every way. We intend to conclude our business here with his Excellency and then return to our vacation home in Anafi for a few more days before moving on."

As Harry spoke, Cinan pulled out a small notebook and scribbled his message furiously. He looked relieved to see both of them in good shape, then he bowed to the Sheik before leaving the tent.

Harry and Hermione looked at each other for a moment before they both started to laugh. Harry couldn't help but compare Cinan to Percy Weasley, as they both seemed to be cut from the same cloth. He shot the Sheik an apologetic look.

Hosary shook his head and waved them towards the pillows. "Please, sit."

Once his guest were comfortable, Hosary looked at them curiously. "I thought I knew all the departments within the British Ministry, but Department M?"

Hermione shrugged in confusion and looked to Harry.

"That must be what the muggles call our Ministry or maybe it was Remus Lupin," Harry commented, then he looked at Hermione and explained. "He did say he would take care of all the details for each of us."

"Ah, of course. Your chief of staff," Hosary said sagely.

Harry blinked in surprise, then he smiled. He never really thought about him in that manner, but it really did fit what Remus did for him.

"Excellency, can you tell us what happened after we left the Library last night?" Hermione asked.

Hosary smiled broadly at the two of them. He waited while one of his wives served them chilled fruit juice and candied figs, then he began to explain.

"We, that is, my Government and I, owe you a powerful debt, Mr. Potter. As you had surmised, the shield was under attack and was weakening. It took several hours of interrogation, but I believe we have managed to piece together what was happening."

Harry and Hermione both leaned forward in interest.

"Our Library, like so many other libraries of magical texts, has one section open to the public, and another, closely guarded section, which contains powerful and dangerous magics. This section is restricted to only a few researchers and Government employees.

Malik, as it turns out, was a member of the Blood Jihad, a group not unlike your own Death Eaters. They have goals similar to Voldemort's, although we do not believe they are currently allied or even working together. The Blood Jihad was planning on stealing as many texts from our restricted section as possible, and they planned on hiding the theft by flooding the library. Up until your arrival, no one was suspicious of what Malik was doing. He was a trusted Librarian and Restorer. Then you arrived."

The Sheik paused and looked at Harry curiously, causing the younger man to flush under such scrutiny.

"I was curious, Excellency. The idea of the library being underwater intrigued me and so did the shields and wards. When I want to, I can see the aura of magic, so I looked at the shield, examining its aura and I noticed a wash of blackness that came a few times a minute. It didn't seem to be part of the shield, which led me to that rock outcropping and... Well, you know what happened from there," Harry said softly, looking at his feet. Hermione reached out and gripped his hand in her own, showing her support.

"How did you happen to know there was a problem in the Library, Excellency?" asked Hermione.

"Our culture is not without bad elements, Mrs. Potter. One of the custodial employees is actually an employee of our Department of Magical Law Enforcement. He noted the problem with Mr. Potter and sounded an alarm, which alerted me and a phalanx of Aurors we keep on standby," he replied, then he turned back to Harry.

"However it happened, Mr. Potter, we are forever in your debt. You helped save the lives of our Aurors and saved one of our national treasures. Many in our Government have taken note of your actions and have changed their minds concerning our position. As of this morning, our Ministry has contacted your Ministry and offered its support in the struggle against Voldemort. Word of the change of our position and the reason behind it is spreading throughout the Middle East. A number of countries look to Egypt to lead the way and are following suit," Hosary said seriously.

Harry looked shocked. It amazed him how such an innocent trip could result in major changes.

"We are busy trying to rebuild a staff of Librarians and people to complete the restoration. But I'm afraid, for the foreseeable future, the library will remain closed. I have contacted several trusted, retired librarians and they have agreed to find the materials Mrs. Potter was so eager to find and send copies to you. Is that acceptable?"

"Oh, yes, your Excellency! That's much more than I expected," Hermione said with a catch in her voice. "I was afraid we'd be banned at the least for using magic and fighting in the Sanctuary."

"Not at all, Mrs. Potter. I realize that, to an outsider, our laws appear harsh, but they are not without exceptions. Your husband fought to defend himself and others. In doing so, did us a great service. It would be uncivilized of us to punish either of you for that," replied the Sheik with a grin.

Harry smiled at Hermione's reaction. She was practically bouncing on her cushion.

"With that cleared up, I think it is now time for us to part ways, my friends. You have a honeymoon still, and I have to help get the message out that my Government will aid your cause," Hosary said as he stood up and bowed slightly.

Harry stood and helped Hermione to her feet, then he looked at his host. "I hope, Excellency, that someday you will do us the honor of providing you with hospitality when you visit Britain."

The Sheik looked pleased and he raised a hand. "That is in the hands of the almighty, Mr. Potter. But I think that someday it will come to pass."

Harry nodded and pulled Hermione into a tight embrace. She smiled up at him and they vanished from the tent.

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### **Hotel du Louvre, Paris (August 8th)...**

Terry lounged on the day bed in their suite and watched Susan. She wore an outfit she had purchased for what she called their 'private time'. Right now she was busy trying to remember the moves some of the show girls had shown her several nights earlier. She was not pleased with her efforts, and oblivious to the fact that Terry was practically drooling as he watched her move.

They had a muggle radio on, playing a loud dance melody which Susan was dancing to. She was playing with Terry, getting close enough for him to try to remove her clothing and then dancing away.

She danced closer to Terry and he lifted up a glass of wine for her to drink with one hand while his free hand caressed her bum. She laughed and danced out of his reach.

In a suite below, four men prepared to apparate. The fifth man of their team was several floors below, planning to light a fire to cause panic in the hotel. The sixth and final team member was on the roof of an adjoining building, waiting for the team to arrive with their targets. He had their portkey, which would take them directly to Britain.

A well executed assault can be accomplished in seconds if everything goes exactly to plan.

Unfortunately, this one didn't go to plan.

Susan danced close enough for Terry to get a good grip on her. She tried wriggling from his grasp, but since the music had stopped playing on the radio she figured she was ready for a new game. The popping of four apparations into the suite was like a gunshot in the silence provided by the

radio. Terry heard the noise and his training under Harry and Echo took over. He pulled Susan tightly to him and rolled off the day bed, casting a stunning spell aimed at nothing as he went. The idea was to make the attackers react by ducking his spell. When they hit the floor, he cast a shield. Susan rolled out his arms and looked around frantically for a moment. Her wand was by the bar, across the room.

Terry kicked over the day bed to give them some cover. He could feel the hotel shake from an explosion many floors below him. Somewhere, a fire alarm started to scream. Terry popped up and fired a blasting hex in the general direction of the attackers. The attackers finally realized that it wasn't going to be an easy job and had taken cover, from which they returned fire.

One man set the day bed on fire, while two others kept a steady stream of curses flying, pinning Terry and Susan next to the burning bed. Terry glanced at Susan for a moment and his expression hardened. Susan was frantic because she was unarmed, and close to panic. Shouts came from the door and Terry spun to cast a sealing spell on the door. The last thing they needed was more attackers at this point.

"*Reducto!*" Terry shouted, popping from behind the burning bed. There came a scream from the other side of the room. Terry staggered under the impact of a bludgeoning hex, but he managed to quickly get behind the cover of the burning bed.

"*Filiolus pango frendo,*" shouted one of the attackers. Susan and Terry were both thrown heavily back as the day bed exploded in a powerful blast that tore a hole in the floor and ceiling. Terry rolled with the blast coming to a stop atop an unconscious Susan. Struggling to stay conscious, he grabbed her Brotherhood medallion and they both vanished.

There was a moment of shocked silence, then the door to the suite burst inward and the Haven security team entered, firing hexes. Within minutes all four attackers had been subdued and restrained. The lead officer of the protective detail looked around in panic. Except for blood stains, there was no sign of his charges.

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### **Anafi, Mediterranean Sea...**

Harry leaned across the table and placed the strawberry in Hermione's mouth. Both laughed silently, feeling silly for doing something so cliché. Hermione reached out and selected a strawberry, then she looked at Harry and licked her lips. He started to smile at her, then froze for a moment before frowning. Hermione froze a moment later, then shivered.

Harry reached for his medallion, which trembled and burned against his chest. He abruptly stood. "Sippi!" he called.

The ancient elf appeared with a pop and Harry turned to address him.

"Sippi, pack our belongings into the trunk. Hermione and I must leave immediately. I'll send an elf named Dobby to pick up the trunk," he said.

Sippi's eyes grew enormous. "Master won't forgets we here?"

Hermione smiled and knelt down next to the little elf who had told her so many stories about Harry as an infant. "Of course we won't, Sippi. You and Tippi are part of our family just like Dobby, who you'll meet soon. Once we're back in England, in our own home we'd love for you and Tippi to come stay with us."

Sippi looked up at Hermione, the devotion obvious in his eyes and she hugged him. Harry knelt down and hugged him as well, then he pulled Hermione into a tight embrace.

She looked at him in confusion. It was too far to apparate tandem without exhausting him! Harry closed his eyes and held her tightly. A bright aura burst into being around him and it slowly expanded to include Hermione, as well. The light was so bright she buried her face in his chest.

There was a shimmer and a loud humming noise from the two of them and suddenly they were gone from the vacation home. Hermione had the impression of being shot out of a long tunnel at an incredible speed.

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### **Padfoot Manor...**

Harry and Hermione arrived to complete and utter chaos. Hermione stared at Harry in consternation. However he had transported them, it hadn't been apparation. It was far too slow for that, and about half the speed of a portkey. Harry's glow slowly faded and he watched for a moment, scowling, at the people running around, shouting to one another.

"SILENCE!" Harry thundered.

Everyone screeched to a halt and stared at him. "Remus, what's happening?" he asked in a soft tone.

"Susan and Terry just arrived by portkey, Harry. They're both injured."

"Where are they now?"

"They arrived at the medallion point, in the basement," came the reply.

Fine. Get some elves to move them into their room. Set them up with twin beds for now. Tonks, you and Narcissa apparate to the hospital. Tell them we have an emergency involving two patients and that we require two healers. If they give you any problems, just grab a healer and apparate. Emma, you and Hermione start up the cauldrons, I'm sure we'll need some potions so it won't hurt to get a potion base simmering."

For a moment there was complete silence as people gawked at him.

"Move, people!" he barked. "Don't just stand around staring at me, for Merlin's sake!"

When people jumped and began scrambling from the room, he shook his head and pinched the bridge of his nose. He hadn't exhausted himself using the travel spell, but it left him with a wicked headache. He went into the sitting room and extinguished the lights, choosing to wait in the dark.

One by one other Brotherhood members arrived and joined him, waiting for news. All had been alerted to the problems by the medallions. The first to arrive were Neville and Ginny, then Draco and Luna.

Luna paused in the doorway for a moment before turning around and disappearing back into the manor. She returned a while later and handed Harry a goblet containing a steaming potion. He looked at it warily while everyone else looked on sympathetically.

"Go in one gulp, Harry. That's what works for me," offered Neville with equal parts sympathy and humor.

Harry tried to glare at him, but thanks to his headache, he failed miserably. Gathering his courage, he tipped the goblet up and downed the potion. He gagged several times, but his headache started to recede almost immediately.

"I told you that spell would give you a headache, Harry," Luna told him smugly.

Harry turned to look at Draco. "Did you have to bring her back with you mate?" he asked plaintively.

"I'm afraid so, Harry. I've sort of grown fond of her," Draco replied with a grin.

"Oh, really?" asked Luna with a mischievous glint in her eye. "I specifically remember you shouting out how much you loved me last night. In fact, you spent nearly an hour moaning about how you loved me and what I was doing."

Draco blushed and buried his head in his hands. He remained that way for a only a moment before Luna walked over and pushed him back in his chair, then sat in his lap.

"Can't win for trying," quipped Neville with a small laugh.

The group sat quietly, talking and waiting for news for nearly an hour. Everyone turned when Hermione finally entered the room. "The healers say it's alright for us to come up now."

Harry was surprised to see Amelia and John and Jenny Boot filing out of one of the other rooms. Apparently they weren't the only group waiting for news. Hermione led them to a second floor bedroom where Terry and Susan had been taken. Inside was Danni McNeil, Harry's personal healer, and an auburn haired woman he didn't recognize.

Eocho floated through a wall to join them and Harry frowned. He looked quickly between the white, translucent figure of his teacher and the auburn haired woman before moving forward, a spell already on his lips to erase her memory. Ginny stopped him.

"Don't, Harry. I vouch for her and I'll speak to her about this. She's a really good friend of my father."

Harry scowled at Ginny, but she simply smiled sweetly in return. Then his eyes widened when he realized how much emphasis she had put on 'really good friend'. Ginny looked at him and nodded.

Amelia and John pushed their way to the front of the group but they stopped when both healers motioned them to be quiet. Jenny, who'd followed her husband through the crowd, reached out and took John's hand.

Danni took one last look at Terry, then turned to the people anxiously waiting for information.

"They're both going to be fine, so everyone can relax," she said with a smile. "Healer McKinney and I have healed what we can and both are now out of danger. Mr. Boot has suffered nerve damage in one of his legs and in an arm and will require many months of healing before he's fully recovered, but he will recover.

"Mrs. Boot had several broken bones, which we've fixed. She'll have a bad scar on her arm, probably because Mr. Boot rolled on top of her, trying to protect her, and inadvertently forced the broken bone through the skin. But that's mostly a cosmetic thing. She also had some concussive damage from a powerful blast which resulted in some internal bleeding, but we've taken care of that as well.

"We don't think her pregnancy has been compromised, but until we're absolutely sure, we're going to confine her to her bed," Danni finished with a smile. All in all, she thought, it was very good news.

Everyone stared at Danni, then at Susan sleeping on the bed.

"Pregnant?" whispered both Amelia and Jenny.

"Oops... looks like someone's been naughty," quipped Draco in a hushed tone. Luna serenely smiled at the news of Susan's pregnancy and elbowed Draco in the ribs.



Danni looked at Amelia sharply. "Yes. About six weeks, I'd say. Didn't you know?"

Amelia and the Boots shook their heads mutely and both healers frowned at them. Melinda McKinney stepped forward.

"Alright, I know this has come as a shock to you and maybe you're angry. But I'll hex you myself if you speak a single harsh word to these two. They've just come through a traumatic experience and the last thing they need is anyone yelling at them. We don't know what state Susan will be in when she wakes, but her frame of mind is important to her health and the health of the baby," Melinda said fiercely.

Ginny stepped forward and placed a hand on Melinda's arm. "I think they get the message," she said softly, grinning at the healer.

Amelia moved over to Susan's bed and sat gently on the edge of the bed. "I didn't know," she whispered. "A baby!"

Harry turned to the others. "I think it's time for us to leave. We found out they'll be alright and that's what matters."

"A baby," murmured Luna dreamily, causing Draco to pale rather dramatically.

"You are so toast," Neville muttered to him.

Harry looked at Ginny, who wasn't filing out of the room with the rest of them and frowned.

Seeing it, she shook her head. "I'll be along after I speak to Melinda," she told him.

He nodded once in understanding before leaving the room. He felt strangely upbeat about the turn of events, even though they'd all had to cut their trips short.

Everyone followed Harry back downstairs to the sitting room. He collapsed into a chair and pulled Hermione down into his lap.

"Oh, this is wonderful," Hermione exclaimed. "I saw a book in the library that was all about pregnancy and magic. It had all sorts of spells to help the mother and baby."

"I'm just glad they'll be alright," said Draco. "You know, with Terry injured and Susan pregnant, they won't be able to do very much."

"They're still part of the Brotherhood and our friends, Draco," Harry said firmly. "We'll just have to see that they're taken care of until they can resume their duties, or pick up with something new."

"And a party," Luna said with a huge smile.

"A party?" Harry asked.

"Of course. Susan's going to have a baby and we have to celebrate that. Babies attract Flying Tangbiters, and everyone knows Tangbiters are good luck," she told him dreamily.

She never noticed the pitying looks Draco received from nearly everyone as she contemplated the idea of a baby.

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## Parliament Building, London (August 9nd)...

Cyrus Hammersmith smiled at the scene. It had taken longer than they had expected, but the results had been worth it. Dudley had lost most of his weight and converted the rest of his bulk to muscle. He wasn't a tall lad, but he was well built and his gaze was eerily intense, if slightly unfocused.

"Are you sure he's ready?" asked Hammersmith.

"Oh, quite, sir! The lad is as good as he is going to get," replied one of Dudley's trainers.

"Very well. I will inform Lord Malfoy of this news. In the meantime, put him on a training regime to keep him sharp," he replied.

Hammersmith turned and swept from the room. Lord Malfoy would be pleased. And if this plan worked, the Master would be pleased with all of them.

A few hours later a lone owl flew from a window of Parliament building. It circled several times before getting its bearings. Turning, it flew south, its precious message beginning a circuitous route to its final destination.

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## Authors Notes:

Yes, the Longbottoms and Lockhart were rescued along with the rest of the patients at St. Mungos. We have no plans to bring either of them out soon, but they are safe in Haven.

Bigdrunkguy: You might want to check that rocket fuel you're drinking. If you want to see a story where Harry is killed you'll have to look elsewhere.

You won't find that here. Frankly we like stories which have happy endings.

Why doesn't Harry chop off his leg and replace it with a silver one like Wormtail has for a hand? Well here's the poop on the leg chopping. NOT GONNA HAPPEN. How do you even know Harry knows which spell Voldemort used? Next dumb question please.

The barrier. Yes Voldemort has no dark mark, unless its engraved directly onto his soul. So yeah he could cross the barrier, but it would make him very very very sick to do so. Besides, he doesn't know anything about the magic or the spell used to create the barrier. Consequently he's not going to run any risks of crossing the barrier.

How important Luna is to the Brotherhood is only starting to become clear. She's powerful in ways that none suspect. Each of the Brotherhood has something to contribute, but Luna will hold a special role throughout the story.

Yes it was necessary for Dumbles to escape again. Harry and Dumbledore aren't finished yet, but I needed to put him out to pasture while other things happen. Having Dumbles off healing solves that problem nicely.

The treating of religion in fan fiction is largely ignored. We opted to deal with it, but at a subtle level. Hermione grappling with her upbringing in light of what she learns from Eocho is merely one part of that storyline. Harry's experiences with religion are nil. He doesn't know enough to believe or disbelieve. Perhaps Hermione will ultimately sway him to her view point, perhaps they will find some middle ground. In any case religion has impacted the Wizarding world for a long time, and not in a good way. Exploring that aspect in light of a more moderate Christian point of view is interesting.

What the others did for their wreaths is available from Alyx who spent the trouble to write all that up. If you want that information, drop her a note on our yahoo group. The language was Gaelic.

Alastor Moody gets a brief cameo in this chapter. He's alive and in hiding. Do not expect him to play any significant role in the story though.

*Bobmin*  
*FanficAuthors.net*

# Sunrise Over Britain

## Chapter 12 - Wives speak out and an Azkaban Field Trip

### Standard Disclaimer:

Snape prodded Amy in the back with his wand and forced her onto the stage. Amy looked around wildly in her fright, then squealed in terror when she noticed the foreboding group of black hooded figures.

Once center stage Snape conjured an uncomfortable wooden chair and two of the figures dragged a screaming Amy over and strapped her into it. Another figure calmly wired electrodes to her quivering flesh.

Snape stepped forward and scowled at Amy for a moment before turning to the audience. "The Authors of this pitiful piece of dragon dung they call fan fiction wish for me to demonstrate what happens to an author that does not tell people they do not own the rights to Harry Potter and the Potterverse. These authors make no such claim of ownership, but this... this Hufflepuff did, and now she is to be punished for your entertainment."

Snape paused while a house elf held up a sign that read. "The following scene has been rated gory by that dumb rating group everyone hates. If you have small children, you might want to send them from the room now."

The lights on the stage dimmed until nothing was visible, then there came the sound of a chainsaw and someone screaming. This lasted for nearly sixty minutes and people could hear someone continually casting healing spells so that the torture could be prolonged. When the lights came back up Snape was in pieces on the floor, and the figure holding the chain saw pulled back his hood revealing a grinning Harry Potter. The rest of the figures pulled off their hoods as well.

Harry blinked in surprise at the corpse of Snape and looked over to Hermione who seemed strangely aroused by the sight of the body. "I never did have good night vision," he said, then he tossed the dripping gory chain saw into Amy's lap. Amy promptly fainted.

"Shall we get lunch, then go shag?" asked Hermione.

"Why not?" Harry replied with a grin. "Fish and Chips or perhaps Sushi?"

Alyx turned and glared at Bob. "Are you just going to leave Amy tied to that chair?"

Bob looked up from checking out the aerodynamic features of Miss June. "Um no, I'll let her out for our next Q Branch scene. In the meantime she can't get into any trouble where she is."

"Thats mean!" Shouted Alyx angrily.

"It's safer that way," Bob said smugly. "Safer for Amy."

"Are you sure?"

"I swear it!" Bob said in protest.

Alyx stared hard at Bob for a moment, then stomped away muttering under her breath. Once she was out of sight Bob stood and walked over to the stage. Once there he bent down and opened a hole in the stage allowing millions of fire ants to climb out, then he retreated quickly. The theater emptied quickly to the sounds of Amy screaming.

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### Sunrise Over Britain

#### Chapter 12

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#### Padfoot Manor (August 9th)...

Narcissa looked up from the volume she had been reading when the door to her sitting room opened. Draco and Luna were tugging on the hands of someone that seemed reluctant to enter. With one final tug, they pulled Andromeda Tonks into the room and Narcissa's face paled. She and Andromeda had not talked in nearly twenty years!

"Sit," Draco said in a commanding tone to his aunt.

"Dray," cautioned Luna.

"No, Luna, not this time. This is the stupidest thing I have ever seen. My mother and my aunt haven't talked to each other in forever. I barely know my aunt and she's the closest family I have besides Mother. Harry's already told me he's reinstating my aunt back into the Black family, so it's time to put this feud to an end!" Draco said vehemently.

Both older women looked at Draco, surprised. He was practically shaking in anger. Luna smiled gently at her husband and place a calming hand on his arm. He glanced at the two older women, then back to Luna.

"Why don't you let me handle this, Dray?" she said, smiling sweetly at him. "You're too close to the problem."

Draco looked at her for a moment, then nodded. He kissed her cheek, then walked out of the room. Fortunately for him, he didn't slam the door behind him.

Luna smiled fondly at him as he walked out, then she turned back to the two older women. "I haven't been married long, but I don't like things that upset my husband and the two of you refusing to speak to one another upsets him greatly. He loves his mother enough that he put his life on the line for her, and he'd like the chance to love his aunt, as well."

Andromeda looked indignant and was about to protest when she saw Narcissa looking down at her hands, her expression was filled with shame.

"We said a lot of hurtful things to each other the last time we were together, Andy. I wish I could take back everyone of those words. I wish I had listened to you and I'm sorry for the horrible things I said," Narcissa said quietly.

Luna moved to sit next to Narcissa and placed one of her hand over her mother-in-law's. Narcissa glanced at her, grateful for the show of support.

Andromeda sighed and seemed to deflate in her chair. "That particular fight wasn't exactly one of our better moments, Cissy. I was so sure that you were making a huge mistake..."

"And you were right, Andy. The only good to come out of that nightmare just left this room," Narcissa said sadly.

Andromeda looked at Narcissa incredulously. "You're kidding, right? There were no good times?"

Narcissa lowered her eyes and a tear rolled down her cheek. "Not really. It didn't take long for Lucius to display his cruel streak. When I complained to Mama, she told me that it didn't matter. I was his to do with as he pleased."

Andromeda looked aghast. "Oh, Cissy, I had no idea. Mother always was a vindictive witch. I was so glad to get out from under her thumb."

"She cared little for our problems. I always suspected that Father treated her as bad as Lucius treated me. But by then we had fought and weren't speaking to each other. My pride... prevented me from talking to you, from apologizing. And Lucius was an expert at putting on public and private faces and if you didn't follow his rules, he made his displeasure known... violently."

Andromeda reached out and grasped Narcissa's free hand in hers.

Narcissa looked up in surprise and felt something inside herself break. She felt as if the years of anger and resentment she'd built up were draining away. She'd never be able to reconcile with Bellatrix, but to reconcile with Andromeda was a gift beyond her comprehension.

There was a moment of silence as the two women looked at each other, then they fell into each others arms. Luna released Narcissa's hand in time to prevent being dragged into the hug. Standing, she walked over to the fireplace before summoning a house elf. A few minutes later, elves were placing a tea service and a light snack for four on the coffee table.

Several minutes more passed before the two women regained their composure. Narcissa sat back in her seat and looked at Luna. She had been about to say something to the young girl, but her posture stopped her. Luna stared up at the ceiling, her body language said clearly she was doing something. What ever it was continued for nearly a minute before the sitting room door opened to reveal Draco, who went straight to Luna.

"You called me?" he asked quietly.

Luna turned and took his hand. "They're ready for us now," she said simply.

Draco, dragging Luna with him, walked to Andromeda and Narcissa and looked at them both hopefully. Andromeda looked up from her tea and smiled broadly at him.

"For many years I've wondered what kind of man my nephew was growing up to be. I feared he'd be just like his father. I know now that I should have had more faith in my sister. My nephew has grown up to be a fine man with a beautiful wife," Andromeda said softly, then she laughed softly at his blush.

"I was proud of him before, but never more so than now. Thank you, Dray," Narcissa said softly, her eyes dancing with laughter. "And I am positively delighted with my new daughter."

Luna blushed and gripped Draco's hand tighter, while he stared at his feet for a moment.

"It's like Harry says, we're family..." he told them simply as he looked up.

"Come on, Dray, let your Mother and Aunt spend some time catching up. We can go visit Ginny and Neville," Luna told softly. "We can visit with your Aunt and Mother later."

He nodded, sent a quick look at both women, then followed his wife from the room, leaving two sisters with nearly twenty years of catching up to do.

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## **The Weasley Cottage, Haven...**

Two figures approached the house stealthily, both dressed in black from head to toe. Even their faces were covered with black knitted ski masks. They paused for a moment at the rear door, then the door swung open.

The pair snuck into the kitchen and from there made their way towards the stairs. The shorter figure led the way to the stairs, where the figure

stopped. The taller figure bumped into the shorter one, causing the shorter figure to turn around.

"Watch it!" hissed Ginny quietly.

"Sorry," muttered Neville. "I'm sort of new to this pranking stuff."

"Just be quiet and follow me. The twins use the first and second bedrooms on the left."

"Right. Lead the way."

Sneaking up the stairway and turning left, Ginny paused to drop a warning ward that one of the Twins had erected a while back. The ward sparkled for a moment then, recognizing Ginny as a family member, dropped without complaint. She smiled evilly and motioned for Neville to follow her.

They stopped at the door and Ginny cast a few detection charms before opening the door as softly as possible. Entering the room, she was shocked to find her brother asleep, with his girlfriend in the same bed, and neither were dressed. She slapped a hand over her mouth to suppress her laughter.

Neville, spotting her predicament, stepped up behind her, thinking he could help. He wrapped an arm around her, but she tried to pull away. In the ensuing struggle, his hand slipped upwards to cup her breast and she stopped fighting almost instantly. Turning around in his arms, she reached down and gently cupped him, kneading lightly. He could have he felt her purring!

Her eyes were filled with lust and she mouthed to him. "Later."

Then she turned around and began casting her complex curse on the sleeping pair. Neville watched her, waiting for his turn. Five minutes later, when she finished and left room, he began dropping green pods on the floor as he slowly backed out of the room, making sure to surround the bed with pods.

They grinned at each other in the hallway, then turned and repeated the same procedure for her other twin brother, who was also sleeping with his girlfriend.

Stifling their laughter, the pair made their way downstairs again and out the back door. Once outside, they removed the black ski masks and started to run back to the manor. They were cutting across a field when Ginny tackled Neville, knocking him to the ground. She straddled him, then sat down.

"I didn't know you had it in you, Neville," she whispered huskily. Then, to his surprise, she peeled off her black shirt.

"What a rush! Trying to grope me while we're pranking? I nearly ripped your clothes off right there in my brother's room!" she exclaimed. Then she leaned down and kissed him hard, her hands fumbling with his belt.

Neville was glad it was dark. Making love in the middle of a huge field where hundreds passed every day was not something he had ever dreamed of doing. However, this was his Ginny, and he'd do anything for her.

*I didn't know I had it in me either*, Neville thought as he began to make love to his wife. *It's amazing what a slipped grip can do.*

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### ***The Weasley Cottage, Haven (August 10th)...***

Fred woke to the unusual sound of whimpering. He glanced over at Inga and found that she was under the blankets. Sliding his head under the covers, he looked at her.

"Hullo, love. What could possibly be wrong this bright, wonderful morning?" he asked.

When Inga looked at him and shivered in fear, he realized that what ever was wrong, it was serious. Then he caught a whiff of something. He sniffed deeper and blanched. He rolled away from Inga and peeked out from under the blankets. The smell was slightly stronger, but the breeze through the open window was clearing away the smell nicely enough. The floor, however, was covered with cacti. And not just any cacti, but carnivorous cacti.

Carnivorous Cacti were small and grew in clustered colonies. They were too small to affect humans, but their needles had a nasty sting and an even nastier hallucinogenic gas they sprayed when disturbed.

Inga had been hit with the gas, which explained why she was huddled under the blanket. Fred's mind raced as he considered his options. He could not reach his wand. It was on the dresser, to far from the bed. He thought about apparating to the dresser top, but the dresser really wasn't that sturdy.

"GEORGE!" he bellowed at the top of his lungs. Inga whimpered louder.

"Hang on, love," he murmured.

"GEORGE!!" he bellowed again. Then he realized, the silencing charm! He had silenced the room the night before.

There was no help for it. He'd have to try tandem apparating Inga and himself out of the bedroom. In theory, he could do it, but he was very limited in how far he could take them. He figured the outside hallway would be his best bet. He rolled again until he was under the blankets with Inga, then wrapped an arm around her as she buried her head in his shoulder. He closed his eyes, concentrating on extending the apparation field around the both of them, then he pushed.

Fred and Inga appeared in the hallway and Fred breathed a sigh of relief, which lasted all of about two and a half seconds.

"Sweet Merlin! What is going on here?" bellowed Arthur. Behind him, grinning like the proverbial village idiot, was Bill.

Fred jumped to his feet and pulled Inga up into his arms. She whimpered against his chest.

"Dad! Um... It's not like it seems to be... I swear!" Fred protested. Inga made a motion with her head and she suddenly shrieked in his ear before fainting dead away.

Arthur and Bill stared at the naked Fred, now trying to hold the limp and equally naked Inga in his arms, when another pop was heard.

George and Helga appeared. Both were naked and both were lying at Fred's feet. It was then that Fred realized exactly why his father and brother were staring at him so oddly, and why George stared up at him with a look of both panic and horror on his face.

Besides the cacti filled room, someone had cast swapping spells on their genitals! Fred took one look down and joined Inga in her faint. The sight of having the wrong equipment down there was too much for him to bear.

Arthur looked at Bill, shook his head and grinned. "You know, this has Ginny written all over it."

"Looks like it to me, too."

"Breakfast?"

"Why not? We can fix them up later. I'm never quite right without my morning coffee." Bill replied as he followed his father down the stairs.

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### **Padfoot Manor...**

Amelia looked down on her niece and frowned. Susan had been kept unconscious since her return from France two days ago. Terry wasn't in much better shape. He had been allowed to wake up a few hours earlier so they could evaluate the nerve damage he had sustained. He was so distraught about Susan that they'd had to give him a calming draught. When that had no effect, they had no choice but to knock him out once more.

Susan rolled to one side and slowly opened her eyes. Looking around. It took her a moment to recognize she was back in the manor, in the room that she normally shared with Terry. Then it hit her. She bolted upright in her bed. "Terry!"

Amelia jumped in surprise, then she moved to sit on the edge of the bed and gently pushed Susan back down. "Hush, child. Terry is fine, he's sleeping at the moment," Amelia said in a strangely gentle voice.

Susan looked at Amelia suspiciously, her tone wasn't normally this soft. "Aunt Amelia?"

"You're safe now, Susan, both of you are. We haven't pieced together the entire story, but as near as we can figure, one of the French crime syndicates was working for Voldemort. They had intended to kidnap the both of you, presumably to send you both to Voldemort, but the kidnap attempt went very wrong for them right from the get go.

"Terry managed to hold them off long enough for them to change to more lethal tactics, abandoning the idea of kidnapping, I expect. When that high powered explosive hex was cast, Terry rolled on top of you, trying to protect you, then he activated your Brotherhood medallion portkey." She glanced at the other bed where Terry slept, her expression one of gratitude.

"He's a brave man, and a resourceful one," she whispered, then she shivered thinking about what might have been. Finally, she turned her gaze back to Susan and smiled gently.

"After you portkeyed back to the manor, we had healers patch you both up. They've been keeping you both asleep to help you heal. Terry has some injuries that will have a lasting impact, I'm afraid, but you are going to be fine," Amelia said. Then her expression turned stern. "And so will your baby..."

Susan gapped for a moment as a blush crawled up her cheeks. "You know about that?"

"Of course she knows," said Melinda McKinny as she bustled into the room. "You can't hide that sort of thing from a healer."

Susan looked at her stern aunt with trepidation. Amelia Bones was a gruff woman who seemed to be capable of intimidating anyone, including her niece. She was also very traditional in her attitudes.

"Oh, don't look at me as if I'm going to bite you, child!" snapped Amelia.

Melinda shot the Minister a stern look and Amelia took a deep breath.

"Susan," Amelia began again, more gently this time. "I'm sorry. I was just surprised to discover you were pregnant before your wedding. You and I are the last of the Bones family, and here you're extending that line. Something I thought may never happen."

"You're not angry with us? With me?" asked an astonished Susan.

Amelia shook her head. "I know I should be, but after seeing you both coming back from Paris, injured and bleeding, how can I be? There are more

Important things in life. I had hoped you'd wait a bit, but we'll make do."

Susan glanced over to where Terry lay sleeping and frowned. "What's wrong with him?" she asked in a low voice.

"He has some nerve damage in his arm and in his leg. He's alive and in no danger, but it will take him a long time to recover, I'm afraid," Amelia replied.

Susan's expression grew pained. "Will he be crippled?"

Amelia frowned. She hadn't asked any of the healers that question.

"No, he will not," Melinda said, glancing up from checking on Terry. "His injuries weren't as life threatening as yours were, but the damage done to two key nerve junctions was severe. We cannot fix nerves as easily as we can bones, so it will take some time to regenerate the nerves. He'll be walking well before you have that baby."

"How soon can I get up?" Susan asked worriedly.

Melinda hesitated for a moment before replying, "Well, that will depend on what you mean by getting up. You can leave the bed and go sit with Terry if you want, or do a little light walking for the next couple days. Your body took a massive blow when it was pinched in between the wall and that explosion. We want to make sure you're fully healed before you do anything strenuous. Please do as we tell you, Susan, for your sake and for the sake of the baby."

Susan's eyes widened and she placed a hand on her belly. "My baby isn't in danger, is she?"

Amelia smiled at her defining the gender of the baby already. It was a little known talent of the Bones family. The women always knew what the gender of the child was well before birth. In fact, one of the Bones women had helped develop the first of the gender testing charms used routinely by healers world wide.

Melinda smiled at the young woman. "No, your baby is fine and in better shape than you were when they brought you in here. It's our job to help you keep it that way," she explained as she pulled out a potion, which she handed to Susan. "Drink this. Your husband will be waking shortly and I'm sure you'll want to be there."

Susan took the potion and drank down the vile tasting concoction with a grimace, then she threw the covers off the bed and sat up. She experienced a moment of dizziness and was surprised to feel her aunt wrap an arm around her shoulders.

Amelia stood and helped Susan put on a light robe over her nightgown. Then she looked at Susan questioningly.

"I want to sit with him," Susan said firmly, her eyes fixed on Terry.

Amelia nodded and floated a comfortable chair next to the bed so Susan could sit, then she followed closely behind her as she moved unsteadily to the chair. Susan ignored the chair and sat on the edge of the bed. Her eyes filled with tears and she brushed Terry's hair away from his eyes.

"He was magnificent, you know," she told her aunt, who had sat down on the other side of the bed. "I was unarmed. We were celebrating and a little drunk. I could see his love for me in everything he did," she said, choking back a sob.

"We were lucky. The attack happened just at a point where the wireless was switching songs, so it was quiet. Terry immediately started defending us. And I couldn't do anything about it! I tried casting a wandless shield, but my wandless magic is pretty limited. I felt so useless!"

"You weren't useless, Suse," Terry murmured sleepily.

"Terry!" Susan exclaimed as she leaned over him and kissed his brow. "How are you feeling, love?"

Terry opened his eyes and his expression grew panicked. "What's wrong with me, Susan? Why can't I move my fingers? Why does my leg feel numb?"

She looked into his eyes, trying to stem his incipient panic. "Terry!" she said firmly, "Listen to me. You're going to be alright, it's just going to take time. The healers say you have damaged nerves in your left arm and leg, but they already have you on the treatment needed to fix things." She shot Melinda a questioning glance and the healer nodded in reply.

"You're going to get better, love. You'll be back on your feet before the baby is born," Susan told him firmly.

"Your wife is quite correct, Mr. Boot," Melinda said, watching him closely from the foot of his bed. "We already have you on the proscribed course of treatment. It will take time, but you will be able to walk into the delivery room to see your baby being born. In the meantime, we'll be starting you on a crutch in a day or two. You need to start walking to keep the muscles strong."

Terry glanced at Melinda, then he turned and searched Susan's eyes, looking for the truth. She nodded tearfully and he pulled her into a one armed hug.

Amelia watched the young couple, soon to be parents and considered how close things had come. Miles was still interviewing the protective detail that had been on duty, but there were gaps that only Susan and Terry could explain. Amelia decided she'd inform Miles that he could see them in a day or two. Right now, they needed some time to heal emotionally.

Susan turned to Amelia, "Aunt, did anyone find my wand in the hotel suite?"



"Yes, it's by your nightstand now. The Protective Detail found it after you had left," Amelia replied, then smiled when Susan breathed a sigh of relief and snuggled closer to Terry.

Standing, Amelia nodded her thanks to Healer McKinny and walked out of the room. She wanted to talk to Harry before returning to her office, but at least she had the peace of knowing that her niece was safe, and her niece's new husband would recover.

Walking through the manor she was unable to find anyone until she entered the first floor kitchen. There she found Harry, Hermione, Remus, Tonks and Hermione's parents, Dan and Emma.

Harry waved her to a seat and Emma handed her a cup of tea. Harry wore a bright yellow t-shirt with "I Bet Voldemort's Mother Had A Loud Bark" emblazoned across the front in bright green letters, and Amelia had to stifle a laugh when she read it.

"How are Susan and Terry?" asked Hermione. The abrupt switch from honeymoon to crisis had startled all of the Brotherhood and, at some level, disturbed them all. Hermione spent half the night pouring over old volumes on wards, trying to see if there was anything they had missed that would make Haven safer. Harry finally took away her book when she started talking about putting up anti-leprechaun wards, something which was illegal in Ireland.

Amelia stirred her tea for a moment, lost in thought. "They're shook up, but better, I think. They'll weather this. Terry's scared right now. He just found out about his injuries. But Susan will help him work his way through it."

"I'll talk to him," offered Harry in a quiet voice. "I know where he's coming from to have to deal with a disability, even if it's just for a short amount of time."

Amelia nodded, thinking about Harry's leg. Unlike Terry, Harry's injury was permanent. The healers could do a lot to help someone, but in the case of Harry, the spider bite resulted in the major loss of muscle mass. What muscle they had managed to regrow, was misshapen and caused him pain and loss of mobility. If anyone other than Susan could help Terry, it would be Harry. Then she brightened a bit. "Oh, the healers say he'll be walking well before the baby is born. He'll be on a crutch in a few days."

Everyone smiled at the news.

Amelia turned to Harry, her expression serious. "Can you possibly explain why I have an offer from the Saudi Arabian Ministry of Magic to supply us with one hundred inferno-camel cavalry? And why the Egyptians are offering us fifty Aurors and a trained Nundu and its handlers?"

Harry gawked at Amelia for a moment and Hermione chuckled. The others just looked baffled. Amelia smiled at Dan and Emma's confusion in understanding, knowing they'd never heard of such beasts. She was coming to greatly respect these muggles-turned-wizards. They brought a fresh outlook to everything in the Wizarding world.

"An inferno-camel is a magical camel. The Saudis are one of the few peoples who have managed to tame these fire breathing creatures and use them as part of their military. As for the Nundu," Amelia explained with a slight shiver. "Short of a dragon, it's one of the most dangerous creatures I can think of. It's breath is full of diseases, horrible diseases, and it's incredibly powerful. It can take up to one hundred wizards to subdue a small Nundu. The one offered by Egypt has been raised by wizards from birth."

Harry scratched at his chin for a moment, while both Grangers looked on wide eyed. "I don't think we really want a Nundu. That could get away from us. The last time one was used in a war it caused the black death in the thirteen hundreds," he said thoughtfully. Hermione gasped and stared at him.

"What?" he asked. "I didn't sleep through all of History of Magic, you know."

Amelia coughed politely, reminding them that her question still had to be answered.

"Ummm... Well, we sort of made friends with the Sheik in charge of one of the Egyptian Ministry departments," Harry said lamely.

Hermione stared at Harry incredulously for moment. "Made friends? Harry Potter, I'd swear you'd call meeting the Queen a brunch with a neighbor!" she exclaimed, then she turned to Amelia. "Harry and I met with the Sheik in charge of their Department of Magical Antiquities. He arranged for us to visit the Library at Alexandria. When we went to the Library, Harry foiled a plot to destroy it. My oh-so-modest husband would have you believe that we made friends, which I admit we did do. But his actions influenced the Egyptian Ministry into changing their position on whether or not to support our cause. As the Sheik said, what Egypt does, so does the rest of the Arab nations."

Amelia stared at Harry, dumbstruck. She had more than a dozen people trying to convince the middle eastern countries to support them, and Harry did it with a visit to a library.

"Hmmm... Yes, well... I suppose the Aurors would be a help, but Merlin knows what we'd do with one hundred cavalymen or a Nundu," Amelia said pensively.

"Actually, this sounds more like a decision for Miles, Amelia," Harry offered. "I'll pass it along to him and tell him you'll craft the appropriate reply to what he can and can't use."

Amelia nodded her agreement and picked up her teacup to take a sip, but froze when Hermione's words finally sunk home. "Wait a moment. Do you mean to tell me we can expect more countries to follow Egypt's example?"

"That's what the Sheik said," Harry replied with a careless shrug.

Amelia sat back in her chair gapping at him for a moment. Then a slow grin spread across her face and her eyes danced merrily as she looked at the unassuming young man before her. "Merlin's balls, Harry, you sure work quick!"

Tea sprayed across the kitchen as Harry, Hermione, Remus and Emma all choked at the Minister's exclamation.

An hour later, Emma and Dan were sitting alone at the kitchen table reading textbooks. Emma was reading about potions, while Dan read about charms. Emma finally sighed and closed her book to look at her husband.

Dan looked up at her questioningly. "What's wrong, Em?"

"This bit with Susan being pregnant. It's got all of the girls excited to one degree or another," she replied worriedly.

"And you're worried about becoming a grandma?" Dan asked with a smile.

Emma nodded and looked at her empty tea cup. Dan reached over and grabbed one of her hands. "Don't be worried. Our incredibly smart daughter has that problem already addressed. There is no way that can happen for a quite a while."

"Oh?"

"The normal contraceptive charm lasts up to a month. But the more powerful the caster, the longer it lasts. Hermione figures her charms are good for six months, but she's recasting the charm every three months. And Harry's taken a potion which leaves him shooting blanks until he takes the antidote," he said smugly.

Emma looked at Dan and breathed a sigh of relief while Dan's expression turned to a frown.

"Dan? You don't want Hermione pregnant this early, do you?"

"Good Lord, no, Em. It's just... Well, I think Harry is afraid of the idea of having children, at least now."

Emma looked confused.

"Look at it from his point of view, Em. He's an orphan, no parents, he lost his parents in what they call the last war. Right now I think he's afraid of leaving his own children under the same circumstances," he explained.

"Oh, Dan, that would never happen. He and Hermione," Emma trailed off as Dan's explanation became clear in her mind and her complexion paled.

"It will be alright, dear," Dan said. "I know how studious our daughter can be, but I also know she wants to give Harry a family of his own. When the time is right I'm sure she'll have no trouble convincing him."

Emma nodded. Days went by in Haven when things seemed so blissfully normal. But they weren't. And she found it odd that the specter of war could raise its ugly head at a time like this, when the manor was quiet and seemed so peaceful.

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### **Operations Center, Briefing theater (August 12th)...**

Miles walked into the briefing theater and up onto the stage. The theater looked fairly empty, as only twenty people were present for the briefing. He stepped up to the podium and the lights in the room dimmed. Everyone settled down and looked up at the stage.

"Good morning. Today begins the planning for what we are calling Operation Breakout," Miles said as the screen behind him lit up, showing a photo of a large, forbidding fortress.

"Azkaban prison lies on the island of Azkaban, roughly ten miles off the western coast of Wales. The island is three miles long by one mile wide with little to no appreciable vegetation, except for some scrub pine forest. For nearly six hundred years the fortress has played the role of prison for the Wizarding community.

"The prison is quite formidable. The walls are twenty seven feet thick at the base, up to a thickness of twelve feet at the top. Because this is a Wizarding prison, the moat, which in ordinary times is filled with water, can be instantly changed over to burning pitch when under attack. The full scope of its defenses are unknown, but there has been six hundred years worth of experimentation on the fortress to find the best wards and other, physical defenses to thwart any breakout attempt.

"The normal compliment of guards was twenty-five Aurors and thirty-five trained civilian guards. We believe that has been replaced by an all Death Eater guard. Cleaning and food services is handled by a house elf staff, housed in the lowest level of the prison. The number of Dementors based at Azkaban used to be numbered in the hundreds or higher, but that has significantly changed. Elf scouts have counted less than thirty Dementors now based on the island, most of whom stay at the prison.

"Our objective will be the new, lesser protected facility one mile to the north of the prison. The 'holding pens' are guarded by wizards only. For reasons we have yet to determine, the Dementors assigned to the island no longer leave the fortress. In the past they used to patrol the island and surrounding waters, but they don't do that anymore.

"Our goal is simple. We are here to begin the planning for an assault on these holding pens. We will overwhelm the forces protecting them, then we will break out the prisoners, portkeying them back to Haven.

"Accomplishing this mission will allow us to rescue valuable resources from under the enemy's nose and deal a blow to him publicly that he won't be

able to recover from. I know you all hate the idea of the operations overview. It's up to you people to plan this. Questions?" Miles asked as he gathered his notes.

Harry sat in the back of the theater, listening. He had already decided he would be one of the people going on the mission along with Caleb and Miles. Starting tomorrow he'd be joining the Aurors in their training for Operation Breakout. Harry, Neville, Draco and Terry had been training with the Aurors all along, but this would be the first time they were formally attached to a unit.

Miles wanted Harry to get an idea of what it was like to lead a mission, so he was going along as Caleb's second in command. Draco and Neville would be participating in other ways, as well. Draco was attending today's meeting and would design the deception plan using the elves at his disposal. Neville was attending as well. He and Sylvia August, Haven's chief healer, were trying to determine what medical supplies would be needed, both in the field and at the hospital. Harry was determined to insure that the Brotherhood helped as much as possible with this, but in some ways, it was out of his hands now. It was no longer just his fight.

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### Padfoot Manor...

Susan padded into the dining area in search of lunch. Healer McKinney was upstairs teaching Terry the exercises he needed to know for his therapy. As much as she wanted to stay, the healer had sent her away, reminding her that she was no longer eating for one.

"Susan! Come, sit down and join us," Luna said with a dreamy smile. Since the announcement of Susan's pregnancy, Luna had been walking around with a dreamier expression than usual on her face.

Susan sat next to Luna and looked around. "Where is everyone?"

"Hermione and her parents are with Eocho and Harry is over at the Operations Center with Draco and Neville. Ginny is on her way back from town and should be here any minute. But what about you two? How are you feeling? And Terry?"

Before Susan could reply, Ginny, Tonks and Remus walked in and took seats. Ginny looked at Susan and smiled weakly.

After greeting them, Susan turned back to Luna. "Terry's fine. He's upstairs working with Healer McKinney right now. She sent me down here to get some lunch for myself."

Tonks nudged Susan and placed a few extra slices of cheese on her plate. "That's right. You're not just eating for yourself any more."

Remus leaned back in his chair, eating his lunch and watching as his wife gently teased Susan and the other girls. He chuckled as Tonks changed into a fully grown baby before changing back.

Ginny gasped and dropped her drink, causing the glass to shatter on the hard wood floor. She blushed and mumbled an apology while several house elves competed to clean up the mess.

Tonks eyed Ginny carefully for a moment, then poked her in the shoulder with a finger. "What is your problem today, Gin? You're too quiet and for a Weasley. That means you either have a prank going on, or you're sick."

"Tonks, be nice to Ginny. She's worried she'll catch Susan's spooaged infection and end up pregnant too," Luna said airily.

Everyone laughed at the joke, until they noticed that neither Luna, nor Ginny, was laughing.

Susan turned on Ginny with an astonished look on her face. "You can't be serious! You really think you can catch my pregnancy?"

Ginny scowled. "Of course I don't! It's more like a Weasley curse, anyway. My mum told me about it, so did my Dad's gran. There's just something about us Weasleys. If you put a Weasley anywhere near a pregnant woman, we start breeding like bunnies."

"Well, that might be true for a Weasley, Ginny, but you're a Longbottom now," Luna said with a sniff. "Besides, that curse died out a long time ago. The Weasley family just didn't realize that it hadn't passed through the generations and did their best to fulfill a curse that no longer existed."

While Ginny stared at Luna in disbelief, Tonks pulled out her wand and cast a few spells on Ginny. "I don't detect any curse," she said in confusion.

Susan started to giggle, though she did her best to muffle the sound behind her hand. Remus, after seeing Ginny's expression, carefully put his teacup back on the table, sat back in his chair and howled with laughter.

Ginny shot him an evil look, then started to grin sheepishly as she realized that someone must have pranked her family a long time ago, and that the family had been keeping it alive for generations.

"Luna, how is it you know about an old curse placed on the Weasley family?" asked Remus several minutes later as the laughter subsided.

"Daddy did an article in the Quibbler back in our second year about old family curses. The Weasley curse was just one of the examples he used. He also used the Fudge family's curse, explaining how they really are were-Heliotropes and the Snape family's tendency towards greasy hair. He wanted to include our family, but he couldn't think up anything interesting except for the tendency of our women to be Children of Gaia."

Ginny's eyes bugged out and she stared at the pretty blond. "You don't really consider being a Child of Gaia a curse, do you, Luna?"

Luna stopped to examine a fork suspiciously, then she pushed the fork as far away from her plate as possible before replying. "Oh, not really. There are some inconveniences. For example, it took Draco and I forever to figure out how he could control my emotional broadcasts enough for us to

make love properly. It's sometimes annoying, but it has its side benefits," she murmured, then her attention was drawn to a dish full of strawberry jam, which she examined carefully. She could have sworn it was identical to the grape jam dish, and that disturbed her.

Everyone exchanged an embarrassed look. This was the Luna they were familiar with. Then the door to the room opened and Draco walked in, looking rather pleased with himself and the world in general.

Luna smiled up at him and her eyes seemed to focus. Draco sat next to her after planting a kiss on her cheek and she helped fill his plate. She carefully avoided the malignant strawberry jam.

Draco reached over and grabbed her hand for a moment in thanks, then he dug in.

"Good meeting, Draco?" asked Remus. He had been informed of the meeting earlier but hadn't been able to attend.

"Yes, it was interesting. If it works out, it should give Voldemort quite a public black eye," he replied with a grin.

Luna turned and looked at him for a moment. "We're going to talk about this, Draco," she said primly.

He blinked in shock and looked at the others for a moment before turning back to Luna. "Talk? What do you mean?"

"Don't try it, Draco, I know you're planning on going with Harry. You want to join the fight by going on this new mission and we're going to talk about it. Besides, Hermione and Ginny haven't given their permission yet either, so none of you may be going," Luna replied in a steely tone.

Ginny's eyes narrowed as she watched the pair. "Should I be planning on yelling at Neville for something?"

"Perhaps," replied Luna. "All three of them are looking to go on a mission with the Aurors sometime soon. I don't know the details, but I don't think they were planning on telling us until the night before. Or, at least, Draco wasn't planning on telling me until then," she concluded with a frown at her husband.

Draco managed to look sheepish and suitably embarrassed at the same time. "Now Luna, I was going to tell you, but nothing is decided yet. In fact, we only just started planning for this today."

Luna placed a hand on his arm. "I know, love, but we're still going to talk about this. Who knows? We might surprise you by coming along for the ride," she stated firmly.

"Oh, crap," Draco muttered, then flinched when he realized he was on the receiving end of four heated glares.

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### **Hermione makes a mistake...**

Hermione climbed out of bed and walked towards the large open window. Harry lay sleeping in the bed. Despite everyone's belief, the two had not fought over Harry's decision to go on the Azkaban mission. Nor had Harry even attempted to hide it from her. Before they'd turned in, he'd sat her down and for more than a hour he spoke of the mission and what they hoped to achieve. Harry knew the broad outline of the operation because he and Miles had worked together to design it. Hermione also knew the Brotherhood needed to show its presence on the mission.

Eocho had spoken of this sort of thing with her on a few occasions and Hermione was coming to terms with the idea that her husband was the Maglios, the warrior king of the Brotherhood, and that this was his fight. She didn't like it, but she was coming to accept it.

She turned back to look at Harry on the bed. He was still asleep, but he reached out for her now and again. She padded silently back to the bed and slipped between the sheets. Almost instinctively Harry wrapped an arm around her. She propped herself up on one elbow facing him and closed her eyes. Luna had told her about some of the other uses she had discovered for communing and Hermione was eager to explore them for herself.

Reaching out to Harry with her mind, she gently wrapped herself around his shields. When Eocho had taught communing to her and the others, Harry had modified his shields to allow her free entry, so she wasn't surprised to discover she could still pass those formidable barriers while he slept.

Once past his shields, her perceptions changed. She felt as if she were on a vast plain and she was drawn to a towering pillar of power. The currents of air swept past her as she hurried towards it. Somehow she knew this pillar. It was central to Harry's very being. In some strange way, it *was* him. Images flashed past her of Harry in various stages of his life, but she was unable to consider them. She was swept ever closer, unable to stop herself.

As her speed increased Hermione began to panic. She tried to change her course, or even just slow down. She looked wildly about and, with a primal scream, plunged into that massive pillar of power.

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### **Harry...**

Harry shifted slightly in bed as his dream changed. He felt a presence both comforting and terrified and he reached out to comfort it. As he did, his dream shifted again. There was a bright light fluttering nearby, like a firefly. He reached out and cupped his hands around the spark and gently brought it close to him. He could feel its terror and confusion and he tenderly held it close, trying to send it feelings of comfort and love and safety.

He wasn't sure exactly what was happening, but as he held the spark in his hands he could see flashes of Hermione, which both reassured him and

gave him strength. The images were strange, almost as though they were scenes from her life before Hogwarts. Harry gathered his power about him and in his dream he changed slowly, his body fell away leaving pure Harry. He could feel the spark nearby and he reached for it again, merging with it, comforting and driving away the fear.

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## Hermione...

Hermione lay flat on the bed, her hand firmly gripping Harry's. She arched her back and screamed a soul searing scream, awakening the manor the crisis now upon them. A bright glow surrounded the both of them and they lifted up off the mattress. While Harry slept peacefully on, Hermione writhed and whimpered in pain.

The door to the master bedroom burst open and Remus and Tonks ran in, each holding wands at the ready. Dan and Emma were close behind, also holding their wands. Seeing no obvious danger, they turned their attention to the couple on the bed.

Harry and Hermione floated several feet above the bed, a bright nimbus of energy surrounding the both of them. But where Harry appeared peaceful, Hermione was obviously in agony.

Melinda McKinny stepped into the room, her wand drawn. She had been staying nearby to help Terry and came as soon as she heard the screaming. Seeing Hermione writhing, she began casting diagnostic spells on the young woman.

"You cannot interfere," intoned a voice.

Everyone turned to see Eocho float through a wall. "You cannot interfere," he repeated, staring at the healer.

Melinda glared. "Listen, spook," she began angrily, gripping her wand tighter. Whatever else she might have said to the floating phantom was forgotten when Emma spoke.

"Revered Teacher, what's happening to our daughter and son?" she pleaded.

Eocho looked at Emma and smiled sadly at her. "Your daughter's mind is a powerful one, my child, but in her curiosity she has tempted fate and is being rewarded... and punished... for her audacity. In her pride she thought to reach out to the Maglios while he slept, to know him better as any mate would wish to know their mate better. The Maglios is powerful and his mind and experiences are overwhelming her. She did not take the proper precautions and because she did this without his knowledge or consent, she is reliving his experiences while he relives hers."

"Will this hurt her permanently?" asked Dan.

"It will change her in ways she had not anticipated, my son. Your daughter is merging herself for a while with the Maglios and when they are done, both will share a part of the other, forever. To get to that point, however, she must live what he has experienced and he has not had a good life," replied Eocho.

Dan and Emma both turned to look at their daughter trembling before them and wondered how long she'd have to endure Harry's life before this ended.

Realizing more people had gathered in the room, Remus turned and ushered them out, leaving only himself, Tonks and Hermione's parents in the room with Eocho and the young couple. They took seats at the breakfast table to wait for the process to complete itself.

Remus looked at Eocho. "Honored Teacher, can you tell us more about what has happened?"

Eocho floated to the table, a frown marring his features. "Hermione waited until the Maglios had fallen asleep, then she began to commune with him. There are few that the Maglios will freely commune with, but your daughter is perhaps the one he trusts most of all. Even while his conscious mind slept, he allowed her entrance. But his mind was asleep, hence she bypassed it entirely and delved right into the core of his being. Had he been awake, he would have protected her from his inner being.

"Within each of us exists a core. It is what makes us unique from everyone else. It is the source of our power and of our souls. Hermione was drawn to this source like a moth to a flame. She has joined bodies with the Maglios, now she joins her very being with his. Truly, the trial she now faces is of her own doing, as is the pain she now endures. I had thought better of her," he said harshly as he turned away.

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## Harry...

At first the spark was uncontrollable in its terror. Harry held it close to him and tried to comfort it as best he could. For a long moment he felt the spark sputter and nearly go out. That drove a spear of fear through him and he fed power to the spark along with all his feelings of love. He knew instinctively that this was somehow key to what Hermione was and without it, she would be no more. The spark seized onto his power, gulping it in large amounts.

Slowly the spark grew brighter again and he could see the channel he had opened between them widen as his emotions poured through it. He felt a tentative caress, like a light breeze, come back up the channel and it widened further. He could feel the terror receding, leaving behind an intense longing and a sadness. Harry reached out and the longing vanished but the sadness remained.

Without realizing what he was doing he solidified and stabilized the channel between them, then he slowly guided the spark back out of his being. There was a momentary pang of separation and then acceptance, then the spark receded from his perception. The channel remained, however, like a permanent echo of the spark's passing.

Harry slowly reconnected to his body and he could tell he was levitating both himself and Hermione. They both floated in a state of semi-awareness as he lowered them both gently to the bed. He opened his eyes and looked around in surprise. Hermione rolled into his shoulder and started weeping uncontrollably. She was trying to talk, but he couldn't make out what she was saying. He wrapped both arms around her. He could still feel that strange connection to her, and her emotions flooded through the connection when he held her. Sadness, anger, outrage, shame, embarrassment. Harry tightened his grip on her and tried to comfort her as best he could.

Hermione's feeling overwhelmed him, reducing his thoughts down to the single thought of *protect and comfort*. He stroked her hair with one hand and tried to push past the torrent of emotions she was channeling at him, returning his own love back to her.

"*Tell her she's going to be alright,*" he thought.

"*I heard that,*" came another voice, sounding surprisingly like a shocked Hermione.

Harry's jaw dropped and he pulled slightly back from her to stare into her astonished face. The shock had completely driven away her anguish.

"Did you say something?" he whispered to her.

Mutely she shook her head. "*No, I certainly didn't,*" she thought to herself.

"*I could have sworn I heard you say something,*" A voice in her mind said.

Hermione blinked and her eyes widened. She stared up at Harry, who was staring back down at her. "*Harry?*" she thought.

"*Yes? But how is this possible?*" came his reply echoing through her mind.

"*I'm not sure, but first I think we need to deal with our audience,*" she replied back to him.

Harry lifted his head looking around. Next to their bed stood Hermione's parents, looking very worried, Remus and Tonks looking unsure and Echo. The door to the bedroom opened quietly and Luna slipped in with Draco close behind. Luna carried a small vial of potion in her hands.

Echo looked at Luna with a puzzled expression.

"It's a calming draught, Honored Teacher. I figured Hermione would need it," Luna said in a soft voice.

"Most perceptive of you, my daughter. Perhaps you knew Hermione would attempt this tonight?" Echo asked sternly.

Luna blinked in surprise at his tone and her face flushed. "No, Honored Teacher. Hermione and I spoke of the bond that existed between Draco and myself, and we theorized that communing might be one way of creating such a bond, but I did not know she would attempt such a feat, at least not yet..."

Draco placed a hand on Luna's shoulder, offering her support and Luna lifted her chin defiantly as she faced Echo. He stared at her for a moment longer, then he chuckled to himself.

"Thou art willful, my daughter, but this is not always a bad thing. Administer the potion and then we shall all speak of matters of the heart and soul."

Luna nodded and turned to Hermione, bending over to reach her. "Take just a sip, Hermione. It will help keep your emotions under control for a while."

Hermione nodded and sipped at the vial Luna offered. With a grimace, she rose and slipped a robe over her nightgown.

Harry sat up and put on his own robe as he climbed out of the bed.

"Sit," Echo commanded.

Remus conjured a few extra chairs and everyone gathered around the table. There was a small popping noise as Dobby and Winky appeared, each carrying a tray with tea and cups.

Echo looked at Hermione and he frowned. "My child, what you have done tonight was not something done lightly. For one thing, you have violated the sanctity and privacy of your mate by doing this without permission. For another, it could have killed you both," he said harshly.

Hermione looked at him with a pale face, her hands trembled slightly. Harry reached over and pulled her, chair and all, close enough to wrap his arms around her. "You overstep your bounds, Honored Teacher," he hissed at Echo. Harry's anger fed his magic and the room shook as he glared at the spectral teacher.

"What Hermione did, unknowingly, she did out of love, not malice. Yes, it could have failed horribly, but it did not. I would not allow it. What she did, she did out of ignorance."

Echo stared hard at Harry for a moment, then looked at the both of them. Hermione had buried her head in Harry shoulder, as if afraid to face the rest. Everyone else stared at Harry, shocked at the tone he'd used with Echo. He was protecting Hermione even after she'd bonded herself to him without his permission.

"So be it, then. I will leave her punishment in your hands, though it goes against my better judgment. You cannot ignore this misuse of Brotherhood

powers, however. You spared her life tonight not allowing her clumsy, foolish attempt to fail. I sustained her long enough for her to get back to her own body where her life force was the strongest. But even now you sustain her as she leeches off your power," Eocho said, his contempt for the young woman's actions thick in his tone.

Harry and Eocho locked gazes and everyone sat silently, observing the contest of wills. Dan and Emma both were alarmed by Eocho's insistence that Hermione be punished. They'd both spoken to Eocho about the laws governing Brotherhood members in his time and realized, perhaps more than the others in the room, that the penalties for what Hermione had done could be very harsh, indeed.

"She is my mate, Honored Teacher. I will not harm her for a misjudgment that she will likely never repeat again. I assure you I will speak with her, and you may caution the others about using our abilities, but I will not condemn her for a mistake," Harry said. His voice was hard and his body tense. Hermione trembled in his arms.

Eocho and Harry stared each other down for a moment, then Eocho tore his gaze away from Harry's. "It will be as you wish, Maglios," Eocho said moving back slightly and bowing his head in acceptance, though his voice still carried an echo of both contempt and anger.

The tension bled from the atmosphere in the room and everyone breathed a sigh of relief. This was the first time someone had defied Eocho, and he had backed down, acknowledging Harry's authority, the same authority that Eocho had given him.

"Honor Teacher, I am confused," Emma said carefully. "You speak almost as if they have created something new."

Eocho looked at Emma and his gaze softened. "My child, you are wise in the ways of the muggles, and knowledgeable about their science and technology. But this is something alien to muggle life. Long before the rise of the cross lovers, man knew it was possible to merge oneself with a life mate. Such a merging created a bonding. My daughter here," he said, gesturing to Luna, "has one type of bond with her mate. It is part of her magic. With that bond, each gains benefits. With Luna, she had to bond in order to marry, although she bonded months before she did so."

Emma turned to Luna who, for the first time in anyone's memory, managed to look ashamed.

"Like Hermione, I bonded without the permission of my mate," she said. Then she hesitated. Draco leaned forward and frowned at her. He placed two fingers under her chin and lifted her face until their eyes met.

"You did it to save my life, Luna," he said gently. "I already loved you and would have willingly bonded with you anyway."

Luna shot Draco a grateful glance and grabbed his hand before turning back to Emma. "The bond for a Child of Gaia is very strong, Emma. Draco protects me and helps me focus in the here and now. In exchange, he knows intimately my heart and what I feel for him. We can 'talk' to each other via the bond, but it takes a lot of concentration. The love we share is so strong that, should I die, he would never be able to love again. My poor father is one such example. After my mother died, I helped keep him alive beyond the point where he would have considered suicide and, in a way, I've condemned him to a lifetime of loneliness. He misses my mother terribly and no woman alive can give him even a fraction of what he lost when she died," Luna concluded sadly.

Draco copied Harry's idea and pulled Luna and her chair close enough to comfort her. "He doesn't regret it, love," Draco said in a barely audible voice. She leaned into him and smiled softly.

"So Hermione created a bond like this with Harry?" asked Dan.

Luna shook her head. "No, the bond Draco and I share is unique to my magic. What Hermione created is different. There are many types of bonds that we know about and others I'm sure we still have to discover. What Hermione did tonight was unique. I don't know of any similar case, nor do I know what sort of bond they have created or the benefits they may reap from it."

Luna looked directly at Hermione, who had been listening to the conversation. "I tried to warn you, Hermione. No gift is without price."

Hermione nodded shakily, her eyes looked haunted. "I know that now, Luna. I'm still trying to understand the price I paid tonight."

"Perhaps if you describe what happened, it might help us understand, my child." Eocho suggested. He had apparently taken Harry's edict to heart, as his voice held little reproach or contempt towards the frightened young woman.

Hermione nodded and sat up in her chair. "Like Luna pointed out, I communed with Harry while he slept. To be honest, I thought I'd see his dreams but instead I entered his mind to find it blank. It was a vast open plain containing nothing but a towering column of light. He wasn't dreaming, or maybe I had somehow bypassed his mind and delved right into his subconscious. The light pulled me in. I experienced..."

Hermione shuddered and she looked around, her expression haunted. "I experienced his life. All of it. Every kick, every slap, every insult, every doubt. I lived a thousand nights alone on a small mattress under the stairs. I learned that to cry would earn an even greater beating, I learned that praying to God was a futile gesture, as God didn't care about a six year old boy with an untreated broken wrist and busted ribs..."

Harry gripped his hands together and stared down at the table, refusing to meet anyone's eyes.

Hermione looked over at him and her anger and revulsion fled. "I learned to understand things about my husband that he never could express in words," she said softly. "I felt his joy at making friends who couldn't be taken away from him, and his absolute conviction that he was unworthy of such friends, or anyone else, for that matter. I felt his wonder when he discovered he had fallen in love, and his crushing fear that it wouldn't be returned, or that I'd wake up one day and decide he wasn't worthy of my love..."

"Hermione," Harry said in a pained voice. "Please don't."

Hermione reached over and touched his hand for a moment. He looked at her and there was a moment of silence. Then, still holding his hand, she

looked at the rest of them.

"I learned how special he really is. Unique would be a more appropriate word. Despite all the terrible memories and events in his life, he never once strayed from his path, simply because he never believed it when he was told that his parents didn't love him," she said softly, then she reached out to embrace him.

*"It's all right, my love,"* her voice sang in his mind. *"It will be alright and I will always be here for you. My heart, our soul..."*

Harry shuddered in her grip and the others gave him a respectful moment to compose himself. Finally, he pulled away and looked around the table. The things Hermione described were beyond the reckoning of most. Hermione had been given a glimpse through a window into Harry's very being that most married couples would trade their souls for. She had paid a heavy price and several around the table wondered if they would be willing to pay it if given the chance.

"This would have happened sooner or later, anyway," Harry said carefully. He looked around, his expression a mix of confusion, joy and resignation.

Eocho turned a questioning gaze on him. "What do you mean, Maglios?"

"I have touched her aura on several occasions in the past year, and each time it became increasingly difficult for me to break the connection. Making the connection was easy, but after I did what I had to do... Well, she didn't want to let me go. We discussed it not long ago and she asked if it would be a bad thing if the connection never broke. It was a question neither of us had an answer for."

"So a bonding was inevitable," mused Luna. "You have been dancing around the edges of it all along."

Harry nodded at the blond. "I think it's possible it would have happened anyway."

"You don't seem to be upset about the bond, Harry," Draco asked.

"Don't let him fool you," Hermione said, frowning. "He's upset because of what I went through. I witnessed things he never wanted to share with anyone, even me."

"Alright, so a bond would have been created. I've heard a lot about what Hermione had to pay to create it. Now my question is, for the price she paid, what is the gift? Or was this just a major blunder on the part of my daughter?" asked Dan, his annoyance plain.

Hermione glanced at Harry and he nodded at her.

"We don't know all of what this bond does, Daddy, but when Harry and I touch, we can speak to each other, like a form of telepathy," she replied.

Eocho and Remus looked up at that. "Indeed? That could be most useful," Eocho murmured. "I would think that as the bond matures they will eventually gain the ability to speak to each other's minds without touching. Perhaps even be able to sense the wellbeing of the other."

Luna looked intrigued. "Are you reading everything Harry thinks, or does he have to direct the thoughts?"

"Right now it has to be directed, but it's not just thoughts. I can sense her emotions, even send her emotions," Harry said after a moment's thought, then he yawned.

Remus pushed away from the table and stood up. "I think we should continue this discussion in the morning. They can't possibly know everything their bond can do for them and it's nearly one in the morning.. We could all profit from a good night's sleep."

Harry waited while everyone slowly filed out of the room, then he turned to Hermione. She looked at him and could feel the reproach in his gaze.

*"Why didn't you ask me first, Hermione?"*

*"Honestly? It never occurred to me that this would happen. I thought I'd probably run into your dreams or just touch your mind. Luna claimed that she had achieved a greater understanding of Draco..."*

"But Luna and Draco were already bonded via her magic. It's normal for a Child of Gaia to bond with her mate," Harry said, switching to normal speech.

"Yes, they were."

"And you spoke to Luna about her bond? How communing could have created something similar for us?"

Hermione sighed and looked deep into Harry's eyes. She could feel several emotions coming from their link. She looked away when she realized that in among the constant feeling of love she felt, she also felt no small amount of hurt, anger and sadness. He wasn't upset that she created the bond between them, he was upset that she had done it without asking him first.

"I'm sorry," she whispered.

He nodded and lifted her chin with a finger so that their eyes met. "Maybe Eocho was right. I should figure out a way of punishing you," he murmured. His eyes sparkled at her and the lopsided grin she so loved spread across his face. Then she saw a brief flash of images flooding through the bond. Hermione in the pajamas she'd worn in Egypt and her in several other costumes. She blushed and suppressed a delicious shiver as a torrent of desire flooded through the bond.



"I never knew you were such a pervert," she gasped in delight.

Harry stood and picked her up in his arms. She leaned her head in and breathed in his scent. It was intoxicating to her.

"*Only for you, my heart,*" he murmured in her mind as he laid her gently on the bed. She opened her arms and mind to him and he fell into her embrace.

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### **Operations Center, (August 17th)...**

Harry sat next to Miles' desk, going over the map of Azkaban with him when the door opened, admitting Luna and Draco.

Draco looked apprehensive. He had been asked to bring his wife to the meeting, but no reason had been given for the request.

The couple took the chairs in front of the desk and Harry then cast several privacy charms, as well as sealing the door. Miles glanced at Harry and nodded to him.

"Draco, I want you to relax. Nothing is going to happen to you or Luna. We asked you to bring Luna here because we have some questions we feel only she can answer," Harry said calmly. He wanted them to relax. Her contribution to their planning would be minimal, but it was critically important.

Draco nodded and Luna smiled serenely at Harry.

Harry walked over to an easel and pulled back the cover, showing a large drawing of the island of Azkaban. "Luna, I don't know how much Draco has told you about what we're planning to do, but we think we can use your help for a piece of this mission," he said, then he turned to the drawing and bisected the island with a quill.

"The fortress is currently protected by approximately thirty Dementors, as well as at least sixty wizards. For some reason, which we haven't determined, the Dementors rarely leave the fortress area and never approach these holding cells north of the prison..."

"Harry, you know why they don't come out of the prison," Luna said, chiding him gently. He stared at her blankly and she shook her head.

"You know sometimes I think if it weren't for Hermione you'd be unable to figure out which shoe goes on which foot," she said with a laugh. "When you rescued Miles from Azkaban you fatally injured more than a dozen Dementors. They died slowly. It shook the survivors terribly and they are now afraid to enter that area."

"If that's true, why couldn't I take care of the Dementors that attacked Haven?" Harry asked in confusion.

"What you did at Azkaban you did instinctively. When the Dementors attacked Haven, I borrowed your power before you could act. Remember?" Luna replied sweetly.

"I think we're getting off track here, Harry. Let's explore this later and get back to business," Miles murmured after making a note to send the information to Remus.

Harry shook his head. "Yes, of course, Miles. Getting back to the problem at hand, then. If the Dementors respond like we think they will, once we begin the attack they will surge into the holding pen area at the urging of the wizard guards. Our initial plan was to set up a line of defense close to the holding pens that would hold off the Dementors using the Patronus charm. It's a good plan, but if there was some way we could get Angels to the island..." Harry trailed off and looked at Luna hopefully.

Luna stood and examined the map carefully, then she rooted through the maps on Miles desk until she found one showing Ireland, Britain and Azkaban, off the British coast.

"It's a long way for them to fly on their own. And there is no place for them to rest," Luna murmured.

Harry and Miles exchanged a disappointed look.

"Wait a moment. Let's not throw out this idea yet," Draco said, then he looked at Luna. "If we can get them there, would they be willing to help?"

"Oh, I'm sure they would. They hate Dementors something terrible. But it's too far for them to fly, their still mostly babies, you know," she said in protest.

Draco's eyes took on a mischievous glint. "What if we could take them by boat?"

"Oh, very good, Dray," Luna replied, her eyes lit with excitement. "But I'd have to be on board the boat to keep them there until we reach Azkaban."

Draco started as if he had been kicked and his complexion went chalky. Luna, noting his distress, smiled reassuringly at him.

"Honestly, Dray, I'm the only one who can convince them to help and we have to guide them to the island. Without me on the boat, it may arrive at the island empty," Luna explained.

Harry looked at Miles. "Can we do this? A boat? It's going to need to be a fairly large boat in order to cross the Irish sea and come back."

Miles leaned back in his chair and considered the possibilities. "Perhaps with help from the Irish we can charter something. I don't care for the idea of having Mrs. Black on board, but she puts forth a strong argument for her being there," he said, then he paused for a moment and considered the

stricken look on Draco's face. "Given the situation, I could not, in good conscience, allow her to be on a boat without additional security."

Luna smiled sweetly at Miles. "He's a lot nicer than you said, Dray. I'm sure he'll take care of us and make sure we're protected."

Harry froze, then turned slowly to face Luna. "Us? We?" he asked in a constricted voice.

"Oh my, yes. If you boys are going ashore with the Aurors, it's only fair that we girls get to ride in the boat. I'll tell Hermione and Ginny all about it when I get back to the manor."

Harry shot Draco a baleful glare and he cringed under Harry's look. Miles looked like he had swallowed something distasteful. Luna seemed oblivious to the looks being exchanged among the men. Harry shook his head and tried to ignore the slightly alarmed curiosity coming from Hermione. Their bond hadn't reached the point of being able to send thoughts without touching, but it was possible to send emotions back and forth over distances.

Harry sat in a chair for a moment, his head in his hands, then he lifted his head. "Very well, then. If we're going to do this, then we're going to do it right," he said firmly. "Miles, I'll get back to you later. For now, plan on Draco, Neville, and myself joining the assault teams. The rest of the Brotherhood will be providing off shore support for the assault. That will include Hermione, Ginny, Luna, both Grangers, Remus and Tonks. We'll pack extra supplies aboard the boat and use elves to ferry them to the island. In the meantime, Draco, Luna, tell no one about this. I'll handle it tonight."

Luna beamed at him and both Draco and Miles looked at Harry as if he'd grown a second head.

Harry noted their looked and became irritated. "This is exactly what the Brotherhood is all about people, so snap out of it. We have work to do and I still want to meet our scheduled assault date. Draco, Luna, tell everyone I want a full Brotherhood meeting tonight in the manor after dinner. Miles, please join us for dinner."

Harry stood and removed the privacy charms, as well as the door seal, then he walked from the room stiffly.

Miles looked shocked and he shook his head while he tried to figure out exactly what had just happened. "You know," he murmured, "up until ten minutes ago, I thought I was in charge of our war effort."

Draco shot Miles a rueful grin and shrugged his shoulders.

"You shouldn't really let it bother you, Miles," Luna replied. "Harry doesn't want to run things, but I backed him into a corner and he did exactly what he was supposed to do. It wasn't fair to the other Brotherhood members to exclude us from our rightful places in this war."

Draco stared at Luna in horror. "Why... why... you minx! You set us up!"

Luna laughed lightly. "No, I just showed you what you should have been doing in the first place. Now, come along, Dray. I need to visit the school and talk with the Angels there first so they can contact the others. Then we can drop in on Minerva and visit while having lunch at the school."

Draco stood dumbfounded while Luna linked her arm in his and led him from the room.

Miles watched them leave, the corners of his mouth ticking upwards as he struggled to control his composure. "Now I know why I never married," he grumbled to himself.

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## **The Brotherhood meets...**

It was rare for Harry to ask all Brotherhood members to attend dinner together. Normally people would be off having dinner with their families or visiting with friends.

Harry waited until everyone was assembled in the dining room before entering. He had given Dobby specific instructions not to set the table or serve dinner until he told him to.

Once everyone was assembled, Harry walked into the room and all eyes turned towards him. A moment later, Echo floated through one wall.

"Thank you all for coming on such short notice. Today we had a change of plans that I need to tell you all about," Harry said in a serious tone.

He waved a hand, dimming the lights in the room and a scale projection of Azkaban Island appeared on the table.

"This is Azkaban Island, home to the Wizarding prison and the largest internment camp for wizards. Prisoners are held in two locations on the island. The first location is the prison fortress at the southern end of the island. The second location, one mile to the north, are these holding pens containing an estimated five hundred prisoners. When I rescued Miles from the pens they were mere cages open to the elements. The cages have since been shored up with wooden planking and roofing, providing some protection from the weather.

"Our objective will be to assault the force around the holding pens, overwhelm them, then proceed to break out as many prisoners as we possibly can. The fortress is defended by at least sixty wizards and at least thirty Dementors. The holding pens are guarded by as many as fifty wizards. And that, Ladies and Gentlemen, is the problem. The Dementors will almost certainly be compelled to move north and attack our forces. One assault company will form a defensive line at the southern edge of the holding pens to hold off the Dementors and any wizards who might sortie from the fortress.

"Luna will direct a group of Angels to the island. That is where many of you are going to come in. In order for this to work, we will need to load the

Angels onto a boat at least twelve hours in advance of the attack, then sail the boat to Azkaban Island," Harry concluded, looking at Miles.

Miles stood to give his report. "I spoke with our friends in the Irish Ministry this afternoon. They know where they can put their hands on a boat that will meet our needs and a crew that will ask no questions. It won't be a cruise ship, but from what I've heard it should suit our needs."

Harry smiled grimly at Miles. "Thanks. Keep me informed as you learn more about the boat."

Miles nodded and sat back down.

"Neville, Draco and myself will accompany the assault forces. Caleb Newman will be in overall charge of the operation, with myself as his second in command. Neville will be with Able company, which is tasked to set up the defensive line between the pens and the fortress. Draco will be assigned to Baker company, which will assault the holding pens.

"Susan? Terry? I'm sorry, but neither of you are going on this mission. Susan, if you want to volunteer, the hospital will probably have it's hands full and could use your help."

Terry looked up at Harry, his expression both remorseful and grateful. He knew that, with his injuries, he would be unable to help in this fight. He was able to hobble about using a crutch, but the numbness in his hand and leg made long distance walking nearly impossible and fighting was out of the question.

Susan looked ready argue with Harry, but Luna leaned over and placed a hand on her belly. Even though Susan was not visibly pregnant, everyone was acutely aware of her condition. She looked at Luna and her lower lip trembled slightly. Luna had, in a single gesture, driven home just why she couldn't go on the mission.

"I'm sorry, Susan, but you now have a different mission than the rest of us. The child you carry is special to you and Terry, but to the rest of us she's a symbol of hope and better times. I think I can speak for everyone here when I say none of us are willing to risk either of you," Harry told her.

Susan looked at him for a moment as Terry gripped her hand tightly in his good hand. Then, with a sigh, she smiled weakly at Harry and nodded, accepting his decision.

Harry waited another minute, then continued. "Luna will be in charge of getting the Angels onto the boat. Luna, that means you need enough time to gather them, so plan accordingly. Dan, Emma and Ginny, we're going to load up the boat with medical supplies and a half dozen elves. We'll use the elves to ferry supplies to the island. It will be up to you three to make sure that runs smoothly.

"Remus and Tonks, you are security for the boat. Mind you, once the recall signal is given by the Operations Center, I want everyone to portkey back to Haven. The crew will take the boat home without your help. Hermione, I need you to provide us with some distracting pyrotechnics, talk to Fred and George about it, and even more importantly, let's steal a page out of Voldemort's book. You know your Celtic cross projection spell you worked up? I want you to rework it so that it's larger, brighter and lasts longer. I want this to be a direct challenge to Voldemort and his power. I want it visible at high noon.

"I want to make one thing perfectly clear from the outset. If you are assigned to the boat, you stay on the boat. Not one of you is to step foot on Azkaban Island."

Harry stopped and looked around him. He was surprised to see several people looking very unhappy.

"Oh, sure, all the women get stuck on the bloody boat," muttered Ginny angrily.

Harry's head whipped around and he glared at the red head. "I put you in the boat because none of you have the necessary training to go on this mission," he said through gritted teeth.

Tonks stood and walked over to him, placing a hand on his shoulder and looked deep into his eyes.

"Harry, let me," she said softly to him. He glared at her for a moment, then he nodded and took one step back.

Tonks turned to look at the others. "I hate this plan. I'm an Auror, but I'm also not trained to go on a mission like this. My training was to capture those wanted by the DMLE. I've seen the training that Harry is talking about and it's nothing like that. The people going on this mission will be shooting to kill, not capture. The Aurors who've trained for missions like this are no longer Aurors, but soldiers. Of the Brotherhood members, only Harry, Draco, Neville and Terry have had this training.

"If I insist on going on this mission, I would be a danger to everyone there because I lack the skills needed," Tonks said softly, then she looked around meaningfully. "We all lack those skills."

Ginny looked defiant for a moment before dropping her eyes, while Hermione looked thoughtful.

"I'm sorry," Harry said carefully, stepping forward. "But the boat is an integral portion of the mission. I'm not shunting any of you to the side, I'm just putting you where you can do the most good."

Harry stepped back and the lights returned to normal while the island projection faded. "Now we're going to have dinner. I want everyone to think about what we've planned, and see if you can find a way to make it better. Miles and I will be taking notes, but don't be afraid to toss out ideas, even if they might sound crazy at first."

As he spoke, elves filed into the room and began to lay out the place settings and the meal.

When Harry sat down, Hermione reached out and grabbed his hand. "So that is what had you so concerned today."

"Yes. I realized it wasn't right to keep everyone out of the fight. I was stupidly trying to protect you and the other girls, but Luna made me realize that this is as much your fight as it is mine."

"Harry, if you truly realized that you, wouldn't stick us all out on that boat," she chided him silently.

She was startled to hear a little mental chuckle. "Consider it a training mission, my heart. I have no doubt of your ability or willingness to fight, but other than Draco, Neville and I, none of you have trained for this yet. And of all of us, only Remus and myself have been forced to kill."

Hermione frowned for a moment before conceding the point. "You are right about that. Perhaps we all should start more dueling training?"

"Couldn't hurt," came the reply. Then he turned his attention to the others, dealing with the questions and suggestions people were throwing at him.

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### **Blackrock, Dundalk Bay Ireland, (Evening of August 24th)...**

In the end it had taken the combined efforts of both the Irish and British Ministries to safely move the forty Angels through the town of Blackrock and onboard the Fillie B, a modest ten thousand ton commercial vessel. No one had anticipated the problem that many Angels would cause as they moved through the unsuspecting muggle population. The euphoric feelings resulted in traffic accidents where victims sat smiling, despite their injuries.

In the end, it took several healers and a team of Obliviators from the Irish Ministry to see them safely aboard ship for the trip.

Remus looked up when Dan entered the small office just outside of the ship's forward cargo bay.

"Everything and everyone is on board, Remus. We had a little trouble with the elves. They didn't like the idea of being on a boat, but eventually they settled down," Dan reported.

"Actually," Remus murmured reflectively, "I think a boat of this size is called a ship."

Dan shot Remus a sour look before consulting his notes again. "As I was saying, the Angels are all in the aft cargo space. Luna is with them and if I didn't know better, I'd say she's trying to teach them to speak."

"They wouldn't be the first species to learn to speak with humans, Dan. Centaurs, Merpeople, even some of the totally alien species can learn how. I remember Harry describing his conversation with Aragog back in his second year."

"Aragog?"

"He's the king Acromantula in the Forbidden Forest around Hogwarts. Think spider, but with a twenty foot leg span."

Dan shivered at the idea, then his expression brightened. "Oh, I almost forgot to tell you. We haven't even left dock and your wife is already heaving her lunch over the side of the ship. Hermione is looking a little queasy too, but she hasn't joined Tonks yet. Michael O'Dalley is on board acting as our liaison to the crew, which, fortunately for us, is made up of Irish squibs and wizards."

Remus winced at the news of Tonks and her sea sickness and he wondered if anyone brought any motion sickness potions.

Dan sat in one of the other chairs in the small room. "It's funny. Back in Haven we have some four hundred and twenty people who, tomorrow morning, will jump the nearly five hundred miles in just a matter of seconds. Meanwhile, we have only one hundred and thirty miles to go and it's going to take us ten hours to do it."

"Yes, I thought that strange myself. But, then, none of this would have been necessary had it not been for the Angels," Remus replied. He was in a bit of a sour mood tonight. One reason was the approaching full moon. It always put him on edge, even though he never suffered the transformations anymore. The other reason was because Harry had placed him on the ship, rather than letting him join the fight.

*I'm an ex-Defense Professor and I get to play security guard,* he thought angrily.

Dan looked at his friend curiously. "What's troubling you, Remus? Are you worried about this mission?"

Remus waved a hand at him. "Oh, no, I think we'll be just fine. There are nearly thirty wizards on board, if you count the crew. I'm just a little disappointed that Harry didn't want me to go with the assault teams." He ran a nervous hand through his graying hair. "I used to teach Defense Against the Dark Arts for Merlin's sake! Now I feel like I'm being put out to pasture."

Dan chuckled at his friend's discomfort and Remus shot him a killing glare.

"Remus, I'm not trying to make fun of your situation, so don't be offended. Emma and myself were very surprised when Harry asked us to come on this mission. On one hand, I'm grateful. On the other, I'm scared out of my wits. Had we stayed behind, we would have worried about Hermione and Harry and the rest of you lot."

Dan paused and he looked reflective for a moment. "Harry's changing, Remus. He still sometimes rushes into situations without thinking, but Miles and Caleb have taught him some valuable lessons. Harry didn't include you because, like the rest of us on this tub, you haven't been training to fight. Not like they do. You've been involved in the day to day operations of Haven and the war as a bigger picture. Make no mistake, my wolfish friend.

The teams assaulting the island won't be taking prisoners tonight. When they cast, it will be to kill, not to capture or maim.

"The Brotherhood will always be capable of defending ourselves, but Harry's responsibilities extend beyond just the Brotherhood. As Maglios, he has a duty to use us to the best possible benefit. And that is exactly what he's done. He hasn't insulted you Remus, and he's certainly not putting you out to pasture. He put you in charge of protecting the one person he lives for. Hermione. He knows you will do anything and everything to protect her, because you know she is his weakness. Without Hermione, Harry would probably pack a bag and vanish, leaving us to deal with Voldemort all by ourselves."

Remus leaned against a bulkhead staring at Dan in surprise. He had not considered fully what Harry had done.

"In a way, Remus, Harry has given you a great compliment. He's placed his future into your hands, knowing you'll value it as much as he does," Dan concluded softly. Then he stood, placed a hand on his friend's shoulder and smiled for a moment before turning to leave the cabin in search of his wife and daughter.

Remus sagged against the bulkhead and bowed his head. Dan was right and he had missed it completely. A rush of shame surged through him, but he allowed himself only a moment to wallow in it before shaking it off. Standing upright, his expression grew determined.

The deck plates under his feet started to vibrate and he could feel a motion to the ship. With a better understanding of what he had to do, he left the cabin for the upper decks. It was his first time aboard a ship and he wanted to experience it as best as he could.

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### **Haven Operations Center...**

Harry tossed and turned restlessly on the camp cot. Around him were a hundred other people trying to catch sleep before the coming day. It was the first time Harry had been separated from Hermione since their handfasting and he was having difficulty getting comfortable enough to sleep. He turned and glanced at his watch, frowning. Zero two hundred and they weren't due to turn out until zero five thirty.

Fluffing up the flat pillow again, he closed his eyes and ran through several Occlumency exercises, which calmed him for a moment. Then his mind drifted back to her and his anxiety increased all over again. She was several hundred miles away, too far for the link created by the bonding to work. He could sense her, a faint echo and a tug in a direction, but that was about all he could sense. Over the last week the bond had grown and they found they could speak to each other without touching, but they had to be close together, no more than a room or two away. Echo and Remus both believed that eventually the distance would improve, but they had no way of knowing what its limits would be.

Unable to obtain any solace from the bond, Harry slept fitfully, tossing and turning. All around him, members of Charlie Company experienced the same pre-mission jitters disturbing their sleep.

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### **Aboard the Fillie B, Irish Sea...**

Remus sat quietly on the bridge of the Fillie B. Her captain was a sturdy sort, but he was also very strict. Initially, he did not want to admit Remus to the bridge and it was only after he promised to stay out of the way did he relent.

Remus glanced at the clock on the bulkhead. If the time was correct, they were roughly forty miles away from Azkaban.

"Radar contact! Range, twelve miles," said one crewman in a tense voice.

Remus looked at the Captain worriedly. Captain Parker noted the look and smiled to himself. Land lubbers, be they wizard or muggle, were a pain in his book.

"Don't you fret none, Mr. Lupin. We're probably picking up one of the picket ships for the quarantine. We know how to handle this," Parker said as he leaned forward in his chair, his eyes scanning the bridge intently for a moment.

"Darken the ship," he said in a calm voice. A crewman jumped to obey, opening up a fuse box and killing all the deck lights.

Remus took a sharp breath as the ship plunged into darkness. In the dim glow of the bridge instruments, the Captain laughed.

"We just presented them with a puzzle, Mr. Lupin. They can see us on radar, but the anti-muggle and notice-me-not charms make us effectively invisible to the muggles. They can't even see our wake."

"Contact closing. Course, three zero five. Speed, nineteen knots. Distance, eleven miles," said the crewman in a quiet voice.

Finally Remus couldn't help himself.

"Won't they just follow the radar target?" he blurted.

"Not likely. Once they close enough to get a visual, they'll assume they have a radar malfunction and turn around," replied the Captain.

The atmosphere grew tense as the range to the naval vessel dropped. Nine miles, five miles, finally one mile. The Captain picked up a pair of binoculars and scanned the horizon.

"Irish Navy, Eithne class. It's one of their fisheries patrol boats. I guess it's a good thing they didn't have their helo deployed," murmured the Captain. "Anything bigger, like one of the American or French ships, and we would have had to shut down our radar, as well."

The ship closed to nearly one thousand yards before veering off. Remus found he wasn't the only one breathing a sigh of relief. The Captain leaned back in his chair, obviously pleased with himself and his crew.

"One problem dealt with. Next comes the barrier, which we'll hit at the twenty two mile mark out here," the Captain mumbled to himself, then he turned to Remus.

"Mr. Lupin, barring any unforeseen circumstances, I expect we'll arrive on time. As planned, we'll hold station ten miles off the island until five in the morning, then we'll make a speed run to bring us within a mile. After that, it's all up to you and your people."

Remus nodded. "I'll go check on my people and let them know. Thank you, Captain."

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### **Haven Operations Center...**

"UP! UP! UP, YOU ASSHOLES! IT'S TIME TO GO EARN OUR PAY CHARLIE COMPANY!" a voice shouted from the far end of the room. Lights flared and the room filled with the sound of men and women waking.

Harry rolled out his bed and sat on its edge for a moment. Then he lifted up his leg and proceeded to wrap it in a bandage provided by Danni. The healer had developed the wrap just for him. It was coated with a wand activated heating potion, along with a mild pain killer. The wrap was designed to help keep the muscles in his leg from cramping up on him. It did little toward increasing his mobility, but it went a long way towards keeping the leg from going lame on him.

Glancing at his watch, he saw he had thirty minutes to get dressed and get breakfast. Reaching under the bed he pulled out a rucksack and withdrew his second skin, which he quickly donned. He assembled his gear on the bed and was nearly fully dressed when he heard a familiar voice.

"Lord Potter?"

Harry turned to see the American Healer, Sam, looking at him incredulously.

"Hello, Sam, and I prefer to go by Harry," he said with a smile.

Sam sat down on the empty cot across from his. "Well, don't this just beat all! I never would have expected to see you out here, especially attached to this outfit."

Harry cocked an eyebrow at the healer. "I did most of my training with the British, so you probably wouldn't have noticed me before today. Besides, what's wrong with this outfit?"

"Second Battalion, Charlie company of the 806th Animagi division. We're the animals," Sam told him proudly.

"You mean you're all animagi?"

"Oh, not all of us, sir. But we have a higher percentage of them than anyone else. We're also a pretty unruly bunch," he said with a laugh.

Sam eyed Harry as he snapped a small utility belt containing potions around his waist. Harry was dressed in combat robes, which allowed for greater freedom of movement while keeping the wearer cool or warm as needed. And unlike the others, he wore muggle style combat boots. Sam's eyes widened as Harry flicked his wrist, releasing his staff into this hand and expanding it at the same time.

"A staff? No wand?"

"I nearly burned out my wand several months back. Besides, the staff is sturdy enough to provide support if my leg needs it. As it is, most of my casting is wandless, anyway," Harry replied. Hermione had told him that Sam had noted his leg injury after he had fought with Dumbledore.

Sam shook his head. He had trouble wrapping it around the idea of someone being capable of casting wandlessly and doing it at any significant power level.

"Come on, Sam. Let's get some breakfast while we still have the chance," Harry said.

---

### **The War Room, Haven Operations Center (August 25th)...**

Miles walked into the room and looked around in satisfaction. As promised, Q branch had refit the room with several glass panels that would act as repeater screens for key fairy fliers used by the assault teams. That would enable him to see and hear what was occurring as the battle progressed. Another innovation of Q branch had been the portable floo, which they would use to communicate with the teams on the island.

It was just fifteen minutes shy of six in the morning and already the room was a bustling center of activity. Miles glanced up at the big board where someone had placed a map of the island. On the center table was a floating three dimensional projection of the island.

Miles glanced up to see Amelia Bones and Arther Weasley take seats in the observation room.

"Alright people, listen up. We have all teams landing in a few minutes. I want updates as quick as you can get them," Miles growled.

He watched the clock carefully as it ticked down to five fifty on the nose.

"Begin the elf diversion," he commanded. One of the people at the big table whispered into a hand held floo and then placed a marker on the map of Britain.

From the Operations Center more than two hundred elves apparated into Britain and started casting Wizard style magic. Some elves set delayed action explosives made by Q branch, others started fires.

Within minutes every Death Eater camp in the country was emptied of its capture teams as they ran around chasing ghosts across the countryside. In London, the building used by the Army as it's headquarters exploded, resulting in many casualties. An elf had left an incendiary device, which was supposed to cause a diversion, in a room full of ammunition. The resultant fires burned out an additional three square blocks before they could be brought under control.

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### **Haven Operations Center...**

Harry rechecked his equipment then stood nervously next to Caleb. The men were formed into rows and running down each row was a single thick rope which had been enchanted into a portkey. From where Harry stood he could make out Draco standing with the commander of Baker company. Harry caught Draco's gaze and he gave him a thumbs up. Draco grinned weakly back at him, then turned to talk to his commander.

A bell rang loudly and all conversation ceased.

"One minute warning! Pick up the portkey!" shouted a voice.

Harry bent over and picked up the rope. Caleb grinned at him. "Nervous, Harry?"

Harry swallowed and nodded. "A little. Normally my fights just sort of happen. I've never been on one that was pre-planned before."

Caleb chuckled. "Don't sweat it. After my first mission I had to change my shorts. It's a common reaction."

Harry frowned at him. "If you're trying to make me feel better, it's not working."

Caleb's reply was lost as the one hundred and forty men of Charlie company vanished without a sound.

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### **Neville and Able Company, South of the Holding Pens...**

Able company had the difficult task of holding a line with the possibility of being attacked either from the north or from the south. The company consisted of five twenty man squads and two American heavy weapon squads. The rest of the company was made up of healers and other support personnel. Since the island was barely a mile wide at that point, the commander of Able company, an American named Stanton, opted to split his forces. Two squads would face south and the threat from the fortress, another two squads would deal with the northern threat. The fifth squad would be held in reserve.

Neville crashed down along with the rest of Able amidst the stands of scrub pine that existed between the holding pens and the fortress. Stanton made a hand gesture and men spread out, trying to stay in the shortening shadows of the trees. Neville, like Harry and Draco, was there to act as a second in command. In Neville's case, he worked under a lieutenant who everyone, appropriately enough, called, 'Lt'. Neville followed his squad mates to their assigned position and immediately started to make some cover for himself.

In the distance, Neville could see the fortress looming like an ancient monument to evil. Above the fortress floated several Dementors. At the moment, no one knew they were there, but that would surely change soon.

Within minutes all of second squad had gone to ground. Neville heard few noises about him as everyone disappeared from sight in their shallow holes. Disillusion charms covered what was above ground.

Able company was in place and ready for action. Now it was a matter of waiting.

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### **Draco and Baker Company, East of the Holding Pens...**

Baker Company had the hardest job. The company would arrive due east of the holding pens and begin the assault on the pens. To both the eastern and western sides of the pens there was little cover, so the assault would have to begin immediately upon arrival.

Draco was attached to third squad. Despite his having trained with the Aurors longer than either Harry or Neville, it had been decided to place him in a secondary role under a lieutenant named Sampson, rather than with Caleb Newman.

Draco swayed for a moment as the effects of the portkey wore off. Immediately his squad moved forward down one avenue created by the walled off cages. So far, the assault was going according to plan. What they didn't expect was the reaction of the prisoners as they crept up the avenue.

"GUARD! Guard!" shouted one prisoner. One of Draco's squad tried to motion for the man to be quiet. A second later there came a shout from the north, then someone fired off a spell and another person shouted. Draco shivered as he heard the killing curse being cast and he hunched lower, trying to concentrate on covering his own squad mates. Somewhere in the distance a bell began to ring loudly. A quick glance towards the fortress in the distance showed the number of Dementors hovering over the fortress increasing.

All around him the pens were waking from their nightmares and shouting for help. It was a terrible sound and it added to the confusion on the rapidly

expanding battlefield. Draco tried hard not to look inside the cages. To see so many wizards and witches reduced to near animal levels shook him to the core.

Suddenly one of the cages nearby exploded in a shower of wood, metal and body parts. Someone in another avenue had destroyed the cage. Draco saw one of his squad mates slowly drop to the ground, clutching his side. He ran up to the stricken woman and pulled her hand away from the wound. He immediately regretted the large breakfast he'd eaten. Fighting back the urge to vomit, he reached around himself and pulled a bandage out of his belt medical kit. He slapped the self-sealing bandage on the wound and gave the woman a sip of pain relief potion.

"Healer! Healer!" he called, then stepped over her. He had done all he could for her. Now it was in the hands of the healers.

"Third squad, forward! Cover the intersection!" came the order from the squad leader.

He moved up, then got too close to one of the cages. A hand reached out and snagged him, holding him pinned to the cage.

"Save us!" moaned someone piteously from within the cage. Several other voices chimed in, but he couldn't make them out over the noise.

"We're trying, you bloody effing moron! Now let me go about doing my job!" Draco hissed.

The prisoner refused to release him, then someone else from Baker spotted his predicament and stunned everyone in the cage, releasing him.

"Thanks, mate," Draco muttered, then he moved off again, in search of his squad.

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### **Harry and Charlie Company, North of the Holding Pens...**

Charlie company had two tasks and, because of them, had the lowest number of combatants than the others. Landing north of the holding pens they were in a position to catch any of Voldemort's Death Eaters who might try to escape by running to the docks on the northern edge of the island. Their other mission was to enter the pens as soon as the all-clear from Baker company had been sounded.

Harry stumbled and pitched to his knees when he arrived. The link between him and Hermione flared to life and he could feel her delight at him arriving and an intense fear for his well-being. As he stood, he tried to send her some calming emotions, but his own emotional state prevented that. The two had to be content with knowing that, for now at least, both were alive and well.

Harry looked around carefully, then he turned to one of his men. "Let's set up the command post over by those rocks," he said, pointing to one side. "We need to get the links to Haven up as soon as possible, then get a security detail out to secure the area."

Caleb looked up from talking on a portable floo to the commander of Baker company and nodded in approval at Harry's commands. Several men ran over to the rocks Harry had pointed out. One man reached into a rucksack and pulled out a large cube, silver in color. He blew a whistle, then tapped the cube with his wand before running away from it.

The cube quivered for a moment, then it began to expand. There was a grinding noise as the expanding portable headquarters building ground the nearby rocks to powder. Harry and several others ran for the open door as soon as the expansion ceased.

Harry watched as several fairy fliers were put into operation and the screens on the wall flared to life. He picked up a portable floo and made a mental note to talk to the twins about making them smaller and lighter. Right now their latest invention was still too bulky and heavy, weighing in at over fourteen pounds.

He lifted the floo and pressed the lever to release the floo power.

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### **The War Room, Haven Operations Center...**

A floo flared to life and everyone could clearly hear Harry Potter's voice. "Haven, all companies on the ground. Fliers have been deployed. Charlie and Able report all secure. Baker has engaged the Death Eaters in the pens."

Miles nodded and swallowed another gulp of black coffee. Running these missions had become increasingly difficult for the aging former Unspeakable. He tried to ignore the burning in his stomach as the wall screens flared to life.

Glancing up at the observation platform, he could see Amelia calmly sipping her tea. She smiled encouragingly to him. Miles nodded and turned back to the board.

---

### **Aboard the Fillie B...**

Luna laughed and danced a little jig as the doors to the aft cargo hold slid back, revealing a room full of the glowing creatures.

"Up! Up, my Children! It's time!" Luna cried to them. One by one the creatures floated up from the cargo hold and turned translucent in the morning sun. Everyone aboard the Fillie B had been shocked over the number of Angels she had managed to gather together. Miles and Harry had estimated that they might be lucky if they could get twenty of them, but they were hoping Luna would be able to gather at least ten.

What no one had counted on was that the Angels seemed to be able to summon others of their kind over great distances. Luna had started by speaking to the Angels at the school. It was the same pair she had been hoping to teach to communicate. The next day there were four Angels, then



eight and so on. Finally, Luna, with the help of several Haven, and Irish Aurors, led nearly forty Angels from Haven. Haven retained it's original three pairs of Angels, much to the relief of Harry and the others. The gentle creatures had quickly become a favorite of the children in town.

The mass of Angels floated for a moment in the early morning sun, almost as if they were disoriented. Then one Angel turned and spotted the Dementors hovering over the castle across the mile of open water. It unfurled its wings and pumped them powerfully, moving away from the ship. A moment later, the remaining Angels were following the first.

Luna stood breathless, watching as the Angels eventually moved too far away to see properly. Hermione stepped up behind her, placing a hand on her shoulder. "You did good, Luna," she said. "Now would you like to help Remus, Tonks and I?"

Luna nodded and smiled dreamily. Hermione couldn't help but wonder how different she was when Draco wasn't nearby.

"Oh, sweet Merlin," Remus moaned behind her. Hermione turned to look at him curiously, then she followed her gaze and gasped.

In the distance she could see Dementors boiling from upper windows of the fortress. Someone had made a critical mistake! There were a lot more Dementors than they had thought.

Remus turned to Tonks. "Get on the portable floo I left it in the dinning room. Tell Haven to warn the people on the ground!"

Tonks nodded and took off at a dead run.

"Come on, girls. We have to set up the racks for those rockets," Remus said in a worried tone.

---

### **Neville and Able Company, South of the Holding Pens...**

Neville flinched slightly when he heard the sound the alarm bell ringing. That sound awoke the guards at the fortress, who added their own bell to the din. He checked his watch and hoped that Luna and the others had arrived on time. Otherwise it would be up to Able company to hold off the Dementors with the Patronus charm until the Angels arrived.

"Mother puss bucket!" gasped someone up the line. Neville turned and his eyes widened in shock. The fortress was barely a mile away and he watched the mass of Dementors as they seemed to boil out of the castle. It was almost as if there was a black cloud above the fortress. Then the dam broke and they spilled over the side of the high walls like running water.

"ALL SQUADS TO THE SOUTHERN LINE!" shouted Stanton, the company commander. There was a mad rush as those watching the pens pulled out of their positions and took up new positions facing south.

"WHERE ARE THE ANGELS?" shouted a voice fearfully from up the line. The Americans had become adept at casting the Patronus charm, but casting it on a heavily controlled and warded Dementor at the Irish Auror academy was different than dealing with over a hundred of them. Someone nearby moaned as the temperature started to drop.

Another man bolted from his hole in a panic. Neville reached out and tripped him as he ran by, then he rolled over the man, grabbing him by his shirt.

"We don't have time for your cowardice," Neville hissed. "Now defend yourself and your mates!"

Neville stood. "For Britain! EXPECTO PATRONUM!" he cried, whipping his wand out to face the oncoming horde. There was a brief pause, then a giant glowing bear emerged from the wand. The bear growled and charged the oncoming Dementors. All around him arose a variety of shouts, whoops and hollers as the mostly American Able company rose to the challenge. In later years, Neville would recall the incident fondly and shake his head in wonder at the ingenuity of how many ways the Americans could combine obscene words to make their war cries.

Up and down the line the members of Able cast their Patronus charms. Those that failed took heart from their fellow fighters and some were able to cast the spell on a second attempt. Neville glanced over his shoulder and he could see the man he had tripped, now proudly directing his own Patronus. The man turned a steely, determined gaze at Neville and nodded in thanks. Neville returned the nod, then turned back to the task at hand.

The Dementors recoiled under the onslaught of nearly one hundred Patronus charms. Able company was fulfilling it's mission, keeping the pens from being reinforced from the castle.

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### **Draco and Baker Company, In the Holding Pens...**

For the second time that morning Draco wondered how he had managed to get mixed up in such a mess. His left arm hung useless, the result of a bone breaking hex from one of the guards. He had replied in kind with a blasting hex that had struck the guard in the neck, tearing away most of his throat. The last he saw of that guard, the man was bleeding out on the ground and his eyes were darting around in panic.

The fight for the pens was turning into a vicious slugging match. Baker company out numbered the guard by at least two to one, but the layout of the pens allowed for the guards to control large sections simply by covering several key intersections. And unlike the guards, Baker company was reluctant to use any big spells, for fear of killing off the prisoners.

"Orders group!" came a call. The leader of third squad gave Draco a few hand signals and he nodded back.

He crouched down next to a cage full of dead prisoners and waited with the rest of third squad while squad leaders tried to make their way back to

the command of Able for new orders.

Twenty minutes later, they were listening to their new orders.

"Alright, you blokes, listen up. According to the man, we have cleared out almost all of the pens, except for one area up ahead. From what we know, we're coming up on the barracks for the guards. Thirds got point again, so don't muck it up."

"Black, are you able to do this? You should have evacuated out when you hurt your arm," asked the squad leader.

Draco looked around at the hard, tough men and women of third squad and he saw something he hadn't noticed before. Approval. For whatever it was worth, they considered him to be as good as they were. He grinned grimly at the squad leader.

"I'm alright. It's just a scratch. Let's do this..."

Several others nodded in agreement before turning to do a quick equipment check on their own gear.

"Right then, three minutes, people. Check your gear... Get ready."

---

### **Harry and Charlie Company, North of the Holding Pens...**

Harry stepped out of the small headquarters building and looked around. The line that Charlie had put up to contain any of the Death Eater guards who tried to escape hadn't seen any action as yet. So why did he feel like something was creeping up on them?

"Sir, Able is reporting more Dementors than anticipated. They are followed up by a strong force of Death Eaters." said one floo operator.

Harry turned on the man. "Has there been any word from the boat team?"

The operator paused and looked down at a note someone passed him. "Yes, the boat team reports release of the Angels ten minutes ago. Also, Haven warns there are more Dementors than we thought..."

The man trailed off and looked chagrined at having passed off a message too late. Harry shrugged and nodded at the operator.

"Contact the boat team. Tell them to aim the rockets just north of the fortress, rather than at the fortress itself. I want those rockets coming down between Able and the fortress. Maybe it will break up the Death Eaters behind the Dementors. I'll inform the commander," he said tersely, then he walked off in search of Caleb.

He found Caleb walking along the western end of the line, talking with the men. Caleb looked up at Harry and arched an eyebrow questioningly at him.

"Able is getting hit hard. There are more Dementors than we expected, Caleb, and the boat crew was late getting the Angels off. Right now, Able's holding, but they have a large contingent of the Death Eaters following the Dementors. I've send word to the boat to target the area between the fortress and Able company with those rockets of theirs. That won't stop the Dementors, but it might break up the Death Eaters following them," Harry reported tersely. As he spoke, his eyes roamed over the area and he rubbed at his arm, almost as if it was hurting him.

Caleb eyed him carefully, noting his worried look. "Is something bothering you, Harry?"

"I don't know. I just have this uneasy feeling..." Harry paused and glanced down at his arm as the sleeve tore away. Padfoot bounded from his arm and grew to his normal size. The large Grim looked around fiercely, then growled low in his throat as his hackles rose.

Instinctively Harry reached out a hand to Padfoot. "Easy, boy," he murmured. Then he closed his eyes and reached out with his senses. Several moments later, his eyes sprang open in shock. "Caleb! They must be changing guard shifts today! There are at least fifty Death Eaters heading up from the docks. They'll be here any minute."

Caleb's eyes widened, then he turned, looking north towards the dock area. Turning back, he looked at the line for a moment. Charlie company had the smallest number of fighters and a large number of healers and medics to deal with the prisoners.

"AXIS SWITCH! EVERY OTHER SQUAD MOVE NORTH THREE HUNDRED FEET!" Caleb shouted.

Men scrambled to move and find decent cover while spreading out to fill in the gaps.

"Harry?"

"I've got them, Caleb," Harry replied to the unspoken question.

"You must hold the line," Caleb urged.

Harry nodded and then trotted away to meet up with the men now under his direct command. He could feel Hermione's anxiety increase dramatically in response to his own emotions and, somewhere to the south, he could hear banshee whistling created by incoming rockets from the boat. Shaking his head, he called for an orders group and ducked down, waiting for the squad leaders to show up. Padfoot prowled nearby, growling.

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## **Aboard the Fillie B...**

Remus had just finished laying down the racks that held the rockets before they fired them off. Each rack held five rockets, and they had two racks. Hermione and Luna were busy levitating the rockets into the racks when Tonks ran up with the target change. Hermione staggered for a moment, feeling a rush of anxiety and worry coming from Harry. Luna glanced at her and nodded knowingly.

"You must work around what he's feeling," Luna said in an undertone, her own body screaming with tension.

"How did..."

"How did I know? I'm feeling Draco right now. He's injured," Luna said in a sad voice.

Hermione paled and looked at her friend closely but Luna was a very difficult person to read.

"There's something wrong with his arm, and he's limping somewhat, but he'll be alright," Luna said.

"Ladies, I hate to break this up," Remus said, listening to the two of them. "But we really need to get this show going."

Hermione blinked and checked the rack she was loading. "I'm loading the last one now, Remus. Have you checked the aim?"

"Yes. They're properly aimed, so if you're ready, we'll send them on their way," Remus replied.

Hermione nodded, then she tapped the rack of rockets with her wand before stepping away from it. On the other side, Remus did the same for the rack Luna had been loading.

There was a loud whooshing sound and a great deal of smoke. Tonks waved her wand, banishing the smoke so they could see. The rockets sped up in the air for quite a ways before they ran out of propellant, then they tipped over.

Hermione watched the island carefully. She could see the roiling mass of blackness that were the Dementors still being held by Able company. She could also see the flickering light caused by the many Patronus charms that were holding the Dementors off. Then came ten blinding flashes of light and dirt fountained up into the air. A few seconds later, she heard the crackling explosions.

Luna laughed at the display and turned to start reloading her rack. They only had thirty rockets. It was the best Q branch had been able to come up with in the time they had. It would have to do.

Hermione shook herself and tried to ignore the fact that they were killing people, while Luna's merry laughter rang in her ears.

---

## **Charlie Company, North of the Holding Pens...**

Caleb ran to the portable headquarters building. He could hear Harry and the others casting spells, holding off the Death Eaters coming up from the docks, and for the first time he wished they hadn't built this company with so many medical staff. Normally, Charlie had a full compliment of fighters, but this time they had left just over half of them behind and consolidated medical staff from all the other units into Charlie.

"Sir, Baker company is declaring the pens are taken. They have casualties are requesting assistance," said one of the floo operators.

"Damn! Very well, signal the medical teams to move into the pens. I want to start the evacuation yesterday! Detail some of them to help Baker company," snapped Caleb.

Suddenly the headquarters building shook and Caleb ducked from a nearby explosion. He darted out the door, looked north, and heard a piercing voice call out.

"ALL SQUADS, FALL BACK TO THE HQ LINE. PICK UP YOUR MATES!"

Caleb paled and wondered why Harry was calling for them to fall back, then he spotted Harry walking calmly across the battlefield. He was glowing from head to toe and what few spells that hit him seemed to vanish into the nimbus of light. His expression was that of thundering rage. He walked to the center of the island. As he did, both sides slowly stopped fighting as disbelief spread through the ranks of both armies at the sight before them. The few killing curses cast at him were deflected away by transfigured objects.

Harry turned and his nimbus began to glow ever brighter. He lifted his staff high into the air, then he brought it crashing down, striking the brilliant crystal end-cap against the ground.

"FILIOLUS PANGO FREND!" he shouted.

Caleb's eyes widened as he recognized the Hammer of God spell. He dove for the ground screaming, "Cover! Cover! Shields!" as the northern end of Azkaban Island exploded.

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## **The War Room, Haven Operations Center...**

Miles leapt from his chair as all of his flier screens wavered and went blank. He looked around, trying to ignore the nausea he felt. "Report," he said tersely.

"Sir, we..."

Miles pounded a hand against the table and he looked up in anguish to the observation room. Both Amelia and Arthur were leaning forward, watching with worried looks on their faces. Miles stepped back to his chair and he down heavily. "Contact the boat. See if you can get an idea of what happened to Charlie company," he ordered.

One of the other floo operators looked up in surprise. "Sir, Haven Hospital is reporting receiving prisoners from the pens, and wounded from Charlie and Baker companies."

"The boat is reporting a massive explosion at the northern edge of the island. They have no floo contact with Charlie, but claim Charlie is alright," Another reported.

"Thank Merlin for that, at least," he breathed, then jumped as the screens flared to life again. Up in the observation room, Amelia and Arthur leaned back and relaxed again.

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### **Neville and Able Company, South of the Holding Pens...**

Neville lost concentration on his Patronus when the first flight of rockets arrived. He ducked instinctively and Able company was showered with dirt and pieces of trees and Death Eaters. Unfortunately, the rockets had no effect on the Dementors. With so many of Able ducking flying debris, the Dementors turned and charged their line.

Shouts and warnings ran up and down the line as men scrambled to recast the Patronus. Neville jumped to his feet, sending his bear charging the incoming Dementors, but they were too close. He cringed hearing the screams of those about to be kissed, and the moans of those overcome by the Dementors effects.

To one side of the line there came a strange howling and all the Dementors paused. The howling grew louder. Neville tore his eyes away from the Dementors nearby to glance towards the source of the sound, then whispered a silent prayer of thanks. The Angels had arrived! Almost as one, the Dementors turned and fled back towards the fortress with the Angels in pursuit.

"Alright mates, now it's just Death Eaters and us," called Neville. He had no idea where his squad leader had gotten to. The Death Eaters had been hiding behind the Dementors, waiting for their chance to pick off anyone the creatures missed. The rockets had injured many, but they realized they were in a fight to the death.

Able company, even with its injured, outnumbered the Death Eaters by nearly two to one. But before the Death Eaters could get organized enough to attack Able, another round of rockets landed in their ranks. There was another two minute interval, then the final set of rockets landed.

The members of Able company slowly lifted their heads and stood up. As they did, clumps of dirt fell off them. The scrub pine forest that existed between them and the fortress had been sparse, but now it was gone completely. Smoking holes were the principle landscape feature. Here and there among the churned up debris a Death Eater staggered drunkenly, unable to understand what had happened. One moment there were over fifty Death Eaters waiting to attack the survivors of a Dementor attack, the next moment the few broken survivors were quickly stunned and disarmed. None of the Death Eaters could be taken prisoner, so the mission policy was to stun and disarm, and leave them where they lay.

Voldemort was a most unforgiving Master and did not suffer failure lightly. The Death Eaters left behind would die, but not by the hands of the Light.

Neville slowly sank to his knees and hung his head. He wasn't wounded, but he felt sick at heart. Several healers started moving among the men of Able company, pressing chocolate on them. Neville nibbled at his chocolate and wished for nothing more than a hot bath, and to lay down in his bed with Ginny by his side.

*I'm a herbologist, for Merlin's sake!* he thought.

"Neville?"

He looked up to see one of the scouts attached to his squad. "Hmmm?"

"I'm afraid the LT took a nasty piece from one of those rockets. He's being evac'd, which means you're in charge. We have orders to reinforce our positions and hold until told otherwise," said the scout.

Neville sighed and shook his head wearily. He checked his watch. It was just after seven in the morning. They had been on the island for barely an hour and he felt like he had been awake for days!

"Alright, Second Squad, let's dig in and hope no one wants to pay us another visit today," Neville called out.

He turned to start cleaning out the debris from his own hole when he heard someone shout. "Look!"

Spinning, he turned to face the fortress. The Dementors had fled to the top of the walls and were trying to escape into the building. All around them were the glowing Angels. The Angels circled the top of the building, every so often plucking a Dementor from the mass and dispatching it. Above the Angels, an enormous Celtic Cross hung in the sky, glowing brightly in the morning sun. It was the unofficial symbol of Haven, and the official talisman of the Brotherhood of Druidic Knights.

Able company broke into a cheer at seeing the huge cross. Then Baker and finally Charlie companies took up the cry.

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## Aboard the Fillie B...

Hermione would have slumped against the bulkhead had Remus and Luna not been holding her upright. She looked weakly towards the island and grinned foolishly when she saw the floating Celtic Cross.

At Harry's request, she had tinkered with that spell until she got it just the way she wanted it. Voldemort himself couldn't dispel that cross. It would linger for at least a month, maybe even two, before fading out.

"Wow, now that's magic," she said unsteadily, grinning madly.

"Is she alright?" asked Emma worriedly.

Remus looked at her in surprise. "Are you done sending those medical supplies ashore already?"

"Yes. Dan thought to shrink them down. That cut down the number of trips needed considerably," Emma replied, then looked at Hermione with concern. "Is she alright?"

Ginny pulled out a Pepper-Up potion and forced Hermione to drink it.

"Yes, she's just exhausted from that spell she cast. It took a lot out of her," Remus said while steam whistled from Hermione's ears and her face flushed.

"We're done here, aren't we, Remus?" asked Dan uncertainly.

"I think so, but we haven't received word yet," he told him.

"I'll phone home and let them know we're twiddling and diddling out here," Tonks offered saucily, then she turned and tripped. Ginny looked skyward, while most everyone else pretended to find the ocean scenery of the utmost interest. Tonks glared at everyone anyway, then walked away.

"I'm going to have cast a permanent cushion charm on her if she ever gets pregnant," Remus muttered to himself. Dan stared incredulously at him before sliding to the deck in laughter.

Luna walked over to the gunwale and leaned on it, looking out over the island. Hermione stood, with Emma's help, and walked over to her shakily. She knew that, in her own way, Luna was worried about Draco. She put a comforting arm around the younger girl's shoulders.

"He'll be fine, Luna," Hermione said softly.

"Oh, I know he will. Even now they're getting ready to send him back to Haven with the other wounded."

Emma's eyes widened and she gasped. "Draco?"

Luna nodded. "He'll be fine, or so he tells me," she said, staring off into the distance.

"Oh, lord, do we know... Hermione? Harry?"

Hermione smiled slightly. "He's fine, Mum. He a little ashamed of himself for blowing up part of the island, but he'll be just fine."

Ginny moved to stand with the other women and sighed mightily. "I've got to figure out a way of doing what you two can do. This not knowing is driving me insane."

Hermione and Luna exchanged a glance, and without a word they both decided that their sisters deserved to a chance at bonding as well. It would be a joint project, but they'd find a way.

"What will the Angels do when there are no more Dementors on the island?" asked Dan.

"Move on," Luna said simply. "They can see the coast line of Wales from here. It's less than ten miles away, so they will move on."

The group fell into a companionable silence. It had been a hectic morning and, for at least two of them, emotionally exhausting as well. The Fillie B drifted in the currents, her engines turning over just enough to maintain position.

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## Haven Hospital...

Susan had been put in charge of conjuring blankets and she did so, by the hundreds. As quickly as she and several other women could produce them, they were whisked away by other volunteers. The hospital was being swamped with injured. Hidden away in a little room with three other women conjuring, she had little clue as to what was happening in the rest of the hospital.

There had been several key flaws in their plan, and this was just one of them. Sylvia August had been the chief healer at St. Mungos and she watched in total dismay as the injured started arriving. She contacted her counterpart at St. Patricks in Dublin, asking for help. Soon the word was spreading of the humanitarian disaster in the making at Haven. From around Ireland Healers arrived and were quickly pressed into service.

The emergency room overflowed into the street with patients and healers. Townsfolk from Haven arrived, bringing potions and medicines they had. A triage was set up in the hospital lobby where the injured were sorted. A large number of the prisoners were in need of immediate medical

treatment for a variety of illnesses stemming from their poor food and malnutrition. The assault team wounded were checked over by several healers specializing in magical traumas.

Slowly, from the chaos, order emerged. Minister Bones arrived and rolled up her sleeves, pitching in. Even Olga Johansen arrived, bringing with her two of her oldest adopted children who walked around giving water to people.

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### **The War Room, Haven Operations Center...**

"Sir, Charlie company reports all prisoners have been evacuated, along with all wounded. They are sending back those killed in action now and are requesting the recall signal."

Miles looked up from his chair, his face ashen and dotted with perspiration. "Send the recall signal to all units," he said, then he stood unsteadily and walked out the door.

Up in the observation room, Arthur watched Miles with growing concern. The man was clearly ill, but he had held on the operation. Arthur stood and made his way to the exit. He didn't have to go far to find Miles leaning up against the wall.

"Miles? Sweet Merlin man, you need a healer!" he said in a rush.

Miles waved him off. "Not today, Arthur. All the Healers are busy at the hospital."

Miles straightened up and walked away from Arthur, who watched him doubtfully. He'd mention this to Amelia.

Meanwhile, on Azkaban Island, all three companies responded to the recall signal by portkeying back to Haven. The Brotherhood members aboard the Fillie B. portkeyed back to Padfoot manor, while the Fillie B. turned west and headed home.

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### **Padfoot Manor...**

It was a largely silent group that arrived back at Padfoot. Unlike Harry, Draco and Neville, the rest of the Brotherhood was able to return home directly. House elves scurried about, drawing baths and making a late breakfast. Nearly everyone agreed they would be napping today.

Luna cried happily when Narcissa wrapped her in a welcoming hug. It had been many years since she had lost her mother and Narcissa's acceptance of her was something she treasured greatly. Narcissa's heart filled with fear when Luna broke the news that Draco had been injured, but Luna reassured her. Even now he was walking up the lane to the manor, too tired to apparate, or even remember he wore a portkey to the manor. Both ladies waited breathlessly for him to enter the grand foyer.

Draco opened the door carefully. One arm was in a sling, the other holding a bag full of potions which the healers sent him home with. The Pepper-Up potion they had given him at the hospital had been enough to get him home, but it was wearing off quickly.

"Draco!" exclaimed Narcissa, then she rushed forward. She skidded to a halt when she saw the sling on his arm, allowing Luna to slide past her.

"Hello, love," he said softly to her with a roguish grin. Luna took the bag from his hand and peeked inside, then turned to Narcissa.

"Mum, he's got a bone knitting potion and a pain relief potion. Let's get him upstairs and then we'll dose him."

"Hospital's a bloody awful mess. Most of the prisoners we freed will need a lot of help recovering, and we had a fair number of troops injured in the fight..." Draco trailed off and his eyes looked haunted. He leaned against Luna, as if trying to borrow her strength.

The next to return was Neville. When he arrived, Ginny's squeal of delight was heard throughout the manor. Neville had returned with Able company, and he was proud to say they looked at him as someone worthy of being in their group. He had spent a few hours attending a debriefing session before being released to go home. Other than a few scrapes and bruises, he was uninjured, to Ginny's great relief.

It wasn't until early evening before Harry returned. He apparated directly to his bedroom and unceremoniously collapsed on the bed. Hermione found him there an hour later, snoring, still wearing his combat gear and his muddy boots. She called Dobby to help her undress him. They had only managed to pull off his boots and shirt when he started to wake.

"Hermione?"

"I'm here, Harry, but you can't sleep in all this stuff."

"I know. I was just resting my eyes. It's been a long day," he replied groggily.

Both Dobby and Hermione rolled their eyes at his 'resting' comment.

"Resting your eyes, eh? Looked like the rest of your body followed along for the ride," Hermione said, amused.

Harry shook his head. "I need a soak and maybe have something to eat before I can sleep," he said, then stood and limped his way into the bedroom.

Dobby looked at Hermione, who nodded at the little elf. Dobby popped out of the room to go get Harry something light to eat. Meanwhile, Hermione stared at the semi-closed bathroom door.

"Are you sure you're alright?"

"I'm fine. I'm just tired and a little sore. Caleb and Miles kept me most of the day because of what I did to the northern end of the island. Apparently, if you blow up a third of your battlefield, it takes extra time to debrief you."

Hermione chuckled at hearing the irony in his mental voice.

"I sent Dobby to whip up something light for you. It looks like your leg is really bothering you tonight." she sent hesitantly. Normally he tried to ignore it and rebuff all mention of it. But not tonight.

"It is. After I've soaked and eaten, I wouldn't mind one of your massages, and you can tell me all about your boat trip."

Hermione smiled to herself, the images he had sent her might have started with a leg massage, but they ended up considerably more intimate. If there was one thing the bonding had shown the both of them it was the depth of the desire each had for the other. They were both surprised by it.

Hermione poured them both a drink and brought them into the bathroom where Harry was soaking. He gratefully accepted the cool glass and drank deeply while Hermione sat on the edge of the tub. No words were necessary. For the moment, everything was good in the world and they relaxed with each other. Tomorrow would be a new day with new challenges.

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## Authors Notes:

Well there you have it, the longest chapter thus far. And it's ahead of schedule. Now we'd like to take the time to talk you about a pressing social problem which concerns us greatly. The war on illiteracy! I want all you people out there that can't read to go out and learn how to read. RIGHT NOW! I mean it, if you're reading this and don't understand a thing I'm saying, then it's time for you to learn how to read! And for those of you on drugs. Ahfgrycnskeo ajhdyrhencm ahegfe gee hahen!

There, now that I have that out of the way, we can get to the real meat of the notes. Why hasn't anyone sent us any donuts?

A note on the relationship issues. A lot of people leave notes saying things like they are confirmed H/G or H/Padma etc shippers. At first when we started this series we were die hard Harry/Ginny shippers. Now days I think we've matured out of any single mold. If the story is believable, the ship really shouldn't matter.

Bob's reply to Rob : Once again we deal with the issue of Harry being too powerful. But that was our original intent. We deliberately decided to over power Harry, then use the prophecy to prevent him from doing anything about Voldemort. Voldemort is using the ritual of Anthrokak to bring his power up to par with Harry's Which means ultimately that it will come down to Harry and Voldie going toe to toe while Harry's helpers have to deal with a boosted inner circle of Voldie followers. Some folks say we've not stayed within the bounds set up by JKR, it was never our intent to stay within those bounds. Frankly the Harry going into and coming out of book six is a weak wimp that is probably going to end up getting killed in book seven. Book six was a major disappointment in my mind and it turned the last book (and all fan fic based on book six) into nothing more than a treasure hunt. Harry still hasn't received any decent combat training, but he's expected to duel a wizard with 50+ years of experience. Bye bye Harry.

Alyx's reply to Rob : *It was not our intent to write a naturalized JKR novel with Sunrise and Sunset. We are not JKR, we do not write like her, nor do we wish to. JKR writes primarily for children. We write for adults. Yes, we're playing in her world, but we're remaking it as we see fit. We've done our best to stick with known canon facts up to and including book five. Book six is a non-entity and ruined the plot line, in our opinion. Also, as most of the people reading this know, we write, first and foremost, for ourselves. We enjoy the creative process. If people want to read our stories and find themselves enjoying them, that's just pure icing on the cake for us. We do appreciate those who've joined us on our journey, and love to hear from them but, in the end, if we're happy with what we've created, that's all that matters to us.*

*This series started as an experiment. We wanted to take characters from JKR's works that we disliked (Draco, for example) and try to come up with a convincing way of changing their personalities. We also wanted to see if we could take something we saw as improbable (A Harry/Hermione hookup) and make it work.*

*We also wanted to stretch our wings a bit and expand our story to include subplots. While we don't quite have a cast of thousands, there are times we feel as if we do. But that's what we wanted! There are a ton of stories out there where Harry and his shag-of-the-moment are the only real characters in the story and everyone else is relegated to supporting staff. Yes, this is a Harry Potter story, but there are other voices that should and will be heard in our stories. Some will be fluff, some will be purely plot driven. Some will be fully fleshed out, others will be the new ensign on the away team... someone to be met and killed off quickly.*

*Crewman six is dead, Jim! Bones exclaimed.*

*Now, to move on...*

Luna and Draco, and Ginny and Neville will start getting more 'air time' as their roles in the war effort increase. Luna is especially interesting since she can flip from semi-normal to completely ditsy depending on where Draco is at the time.

Amy's are evil and must be destroyed. (Just kidding Amy) Amy in an disclaimer? WHAT A WONDERFUL IDEA!

Luna had a wonderful time on the honeymoon. Draco did as well, except for Luna's tendency to confuse him... But he enjoyed himself otherwise. He sent us a couple postcards, quite nice of him considering it was his honeymoon.

For what it's worth, we have no plans of getting anyone else pregnant. Just Susan.

The Blood Jihad was a minor little sub plot, but it also illustrated the fact that there are groups besides Voldemort's with very similar beliefs. While I don't expect to see the Blood Jihad again, you never know.

Why didn't Terry accio Susan's wand? Ummm because (a) they were under continual fire from bad guys and (b) we didn't think of it, we actually wanted Susan unarmed for the encounter.

The medallions work for major physiological changes. Harry was wounded yes, but in no danger of dying. Susan on the other hand was in danger of dying, she had been pinned between the wall and the pressure wave of an explosion causing internal injuries. The medallions can be manually triggered, or triggered by severe injuries.

Does Susan know she's pregnant? That becomes a little clearer in this chapter.

You all can thank Alyx for the part about Millicent and McGonagall, thats part of her storylines.



*Bobmin*  
*FanficAuthors.net*

# Sunrise Over Britain

## Chapter 13 - Aftermath and a Reckoning

### Standard Disclaimer:

"Are you sure Muggles wear clothing like this?" asked Albus Dumbledore.

"Oh yes Sir, absolutely!" replied Hermione. Harry sat a little further back offstage trying hard not to laugh hysterically.

"My word! Muggles certainly are imaginative!" Dumbledore said, sucking on a lemon drop.

"Do you remember your lines sir?" asked Hermione.

Dumbledore nodded and eyed the stage with relish.

"Your on!" shouted Harry. Dumbledore nodded, a glint in his eye and he stepped out onto the stage wearing a studded leather bustier, fishnet stockings and thigh high leather boots ending in six inch stiletto heels. He wore a dainty crown and around his waist a tutu.

"Good Evening Ladies and Gentlemen. Before we can begin these evening's show, the sponsors would like me to tell you that the authors of this story make no claim to any rights or ownership of Harry Potter, here, or in any parallel dimension. All rights to Harry Potter and the Potterverse belong to JK Rowling."

There was a pause and a frame was slowly lowered from the ceiling. Tied to the frame and covered by a sheet was Severus Snape. Dumbledore walked over to the frame and tilted it to the studio audience could see him better. He was gagged and his eyes were bulging out of his head.

"Now moving right along," Dumbledore said with a grin. "Today's lesson concerns alien abductions and how to tell if you've been anally probed. Our volunteer, Severus Snape has been probed for tonight's demonstration. Unfortunately the Wizarding world knows little about aliens, so we asked Amy to serve as our probe for the evening..."

"STOP!" yelled Alyx.

"What?" asked Bob

"You're not going to do this! I refuse to let you get away with this! How could you?" Alyx raged at him.

"Well I wanted to use a penguin but I didn't have any handy!" protested Bob. Meanwhile the sheet slid enough off Snape to see a pair of feet sticking out of an impossible place. Alyx quickly closed the curtain and turned to the audience.

"I most humbly apologize for Bob. He made the mistake of sending me this file early and as a result I've not been able to make sure he gets his meds on time."

Meanwhile Bob ignored Alyx. He hovered over the stage a few feet in the air and chanted "I am Bobholio!"

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### Sunrise over Britain

#### Chapter 13

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#### Padfoot Manor, Harry and Hermione's room (evening of August 25th)...

Harry stepped out of the bath and toweled himself dry before dressing. He knew he had been extraordinary lucky not to have been injured. It was something Caleb spent nearly an hour shouting at him about.

He leaned over the sink and cast a shaving charm. It wasn't as precise as using a razor, and there was the slight chance that you might miss and lop off an ear, but he was too tired to bother with his razor tonight.

Stepping out of the bathroom, he grinned. Hermione sat at their breakfast table sipping tea, while in front of his seat sat Dobby's idea of a light dinner. Harry sat and surveyed the rack of lamb, potatoes and gravy and shook his head. He started pulling items onto his plate when he noticed Hermione didn't have one.

*"Not hungry?"*

*"No, I had something light earlier."*

*"Light? If Dobby made it, it was probably elephant sandwich!"*

Hermione laughed and started to choke on her tea. After a moment she was able to breath again and she shot Harry a reproachful glare.

*"I'm going to tell Dobby what you said."*

*"My Heart, in case you haven't noticed, I haven't said a word. In fact, I'm talking with you and eating, and not speaking with food in my mouth."*

*"Oh, fine. Rub it it."*

Harry waggled his eyebrows at Hermione and she flushed.

*"Stop thinking dirty thoughts at me and eat your dinner,"* she sent him.

Harry chuckled and went back to eating. When they weren't directly talking he could still feel her through the channel, surface emotions and the like. It was a sensation he found comforting.

The couple sat quietly after he finished dinner. When Harry looked over at Hermione, who was staring out the window, he noticed her shiver slightly.

*"What's bothering you?"*

*"I'm not..."*

*"Yes, you are. Something is bothering you, Hermione, and I want to know what it is."*

She grimaced, then sighed before lowering her head. A single tear rolled down her cheek and Harry jumped from his chair in alarm.

*"I guess this is one of the drawbacks of the bonding. I can't hide things from you."*

He knelt by her side and wiped the tear away. *"Not easily, you can't. But isn't sharing one of the reasons why you wanted this bond in the first place?"*

*"Yes, but..."*

Hermione's lower lip trembled and she looked at him with a haunted expression. He reeled under the onslaught of emotions pouring across the bond, mostly grief and loathing for what she had done during the battle. It was ironic to Harry. He found himself having to console her for the very same things she'd had consoled him for.

*"My Heart, it's never easy to take a life, and yes your actions today did result in the death of Death Eaters. But they chose their path, as we've chosen ours. I don't want to make this more difficult for you, but you've made the choice to fight. If you continue to stand by that choice, then you must realize that people will die at your hand. This is war, and death will come with every battle from this point on. If that is unpalatable to you, remember this. Had it not been for your actions, there's a good chance that we would be comforting Ginny as she mourned the loss of her husband."*

Her head snapped up and her wide eyes met his. "Are you sure about that?" she asked verbally, her voice indicating both hope and disbelief.

Harry nodded. "I've reviewed the Pensieve memories and helped with the debriefs. Able company came very close to being overrun. It was only a combination of the Angels arriving and the first salvo of rockets that turned the tide. Neville stopped his squad from running in panic, then cast the first Patronus. But when the Dementors swarmed, it was dreadfully close."

Hermione slumped down a little in her chair. "It's not much, but it helps," she whispered.

*"I know your actions have caused you pain but, in truth, you were doing what a warrior does. I may be Maglios, but you are my mate, my warrior queen,"* he sent to her, then he flooded the connection with his feelings for her.

Hermione's eyes popped open in surprise at the depth of some of the emotions she felt. She felt his overwhelming pride at her strength and her courage, compassion and sadness for her pain.

She leaned over his kneeling form and embraced him, pulling his face into her breasts. *How did I ever get so lucky?* she thought.

*"I ask myself that same question every day,"* he replied in a cheeky tone.

She pulled away and looked at him suspiciously.

He grinned and said, "Sorry, love, but you were thinking very loudly."

Hermione laughed and as she started to pull him closer to embrace him again, a knock sounded at their door. The two exchanged a look, then Harry shrugged and walked over to the door to see who it was. He opened it to find Dan and Emma standing outside, looking very anxious.

"Dan? Emma? Come in. What's wrong?" Harry asked worriedly as Hermione stood up, looking concerned.

Emma smiled reassuringly. "Nothing is wrong, Harry. We just wanted to stop by and see how you two were doing."

*"Do you ever think we'll be this perceptive when we're parents, Hermione?"*

When Hermione blinked in surprise, then giggled, Dan raised an eyebrow at her. "What did Harry say through that bond thing that has you laughing."

Hermione laughed again. "He asked if we'd be that perceptive when we're parents. I don't think my husband has ever heard about mother's ears."

Harry's lips twitched and he tried to put out. "If you're done making fun of me? I think we're all right. Hermione had a bit of a rough spot, but we'll see it through together."

Emma walked over and hugged her daughter hard. "You can always talk to us," she whispered.

Hermione's eyes misted up and she nodded at her mother who also grew misty eyed. Dan and Harry exchanged a look that was known the world over to husbands.

Harry was about to invite the Grangers to sit when Luna and Draco showed up at their door. Harry waved them in, and was about to close the door when he stopped in puzzlement. He couldn't help noticing the sad expression Luna wore. Finally, making a decision, he reached under his shirt and pulled out his medallion.

Everyone in the room stopped talking as they realized their medallions were vibrating gently.

*"Harry, what are you doing?"*

*"Calling in the clan, my Heart. I finally realized what's happening. You'll understand in a moment."*

*"I hate it when you keep secrets!" Her voice even sounded huffy in his mind.*

*"Patience, wife," he send her.*

Slowly the room filled with people and Harry conjured more chairs. Once everyone was seated and looking at him expectantly, he smiled. The only pair missing was Susan and Terry who were off visiting and staying with Amelia for a while.

"I know you're all tired from today. But as Hermione and I sat talking, and then Dan and Emma arrived, followed shortly by Draco and Luna, I realized we all needed to talk.

"I want you all to know, no matter what role you played in today's operation, I, for one, am exceedingly proud of your efforts. Each and every one of you contributed to the success of the mission. But the mission was not without cost. Of all of us in the Brotherhood, only Remus and myself have actually taken a life, until today..."

As Harry spoke Eocho ghosted in through a wall and came to rest standing next to Harry. The ancient druid smiled gently at those in the room.

"I can tell you exactly what the coming days will be like for you. So can Remus. But more to the point, you have a partner who you can turn to. Expect nightmares, anger, guilt, even remorse. Turn to your partner, or to one of your brothers or sisters for help and understanding."

Harry nailed Draco with a piercing gaze. "There is no shame in admitting that you are hurt beyond your visible wounds. Nor is there any shame in turning to your friends and loved ones for help."

Draco looked indignant for a moment and Luna looked sad. While she and his mother had helped heal his arm, he had refused to talk about what he had seen. He had even gone as far as to use his Occlumency to block most of their bond.

"I'm fine Potter," he growled.

"Really? Then why do you look like shit, Malfoy?" Harry snapped angrily.

Draco looked as if he'd been slapped and he glared hatefully at Harry. When he began to stand up, thinking he didn't have to put up with the crap Harry was shoveling, he found himself pinned to his chair by Harry's direct gaze. When the green eyes glaring at him began to glow eerily and he felt the raw power brushing against him, he flinched back inadvertently.

"Grow up, Draco. Look at Luna, for Merlin's sake! I know exactly what you're doing to her and it's killing her! And you have the stones to call me dumb?" Harry paused, then lowered his voice. "Draco, barely a year ago I was a basket case, certifiable and eligible for a one way ticket to the St. Mungos psyche ward. Hermione helped me through all that. I screamed at her, I laughed, I cried. I remember hours where she just held me and let me weep all over her, and I hated myself for doing it, thinking I was too weak to stand alone. But we also talked and I came to realize that, without her help, I wouldn't be here today.

"Other than Neville, you had the roughest go of it by far, but you need to talk to her. You can't push her away and it's only with her help that you'll come out the other side with a full deck."

While Harry spoke, Hermione's eyes glistened with unshed tears and Draco hung his head. Harry could feel a gentle caress from Hermione via their bond and it warmed his heart.

Luna turned to Draco. When she slowly reached out a hand, Harry watched the two carefully. Then Luna's expression changed and her smile was like a sun coming up as Draco dropped his Occlumency shields.

"I'm sorry," he whispered, afraid to look at her.

Luna pulled Draco into a tight embrace and everyone saw his shoulders hitching as he wept silently against her. Luna looked up at Harry, her vibrant blue eyes joyful. "I knew you could help."

Ginny, Hermione, Tonks and Emma all went to the couple, whispering words of comfort to Draco. After a few minutes Draco regained his composure and he sat back in his seat, but he refused to release Luna's hand.

Harry looked over to Neville, "Alright there, Nev?" he asked.

"I'm good, Harry. The Dementors were a touch worrisome, but I think I'll be alright," Neville replied, then he snagged Ginny who was walking back to her seat and pulled her into his lap. Ginny giggled and ruffled his hair lovely.

The room grew quiet, as and everyone seemed lost in their own thoughts.

Hermione walked over to Harry and he wrapped an arm around her, pulling her in close, then he kissed her forehead. "I want everyone to relax tomorrow," Harry told the group gently. "We've done enough for now and I think all of us need to heal from today."

Echo led the now silent group from the room. Remus, being the last to exit, paused for a moment in the doorway and looked back at the raven haired young man as the couple held hands and walked towards the bed. A gentle smile crossed his lips as he closed the door quietly behind him and leaned against it for a moment. His eyes become unfocused as he sent his thoughts out into the ether. *How proud you would be of your son*, he thought, thinking of James and Lily. Then, pushing away from the door, he smothered a yawn and trotted down the hallway to catch up with his wife.

Hermione released Harry's hand and began to undress. "*What you did for Luna and Draco tonight was important*," she told him, the tone of her thoughts gently and loving.

Harry ran a hand through his hair. "I know," he replied. "I just hope he doesn't hold that Malfoy crack against me. I needed to shock him before he would listen to me."

He sighed heavily and began to shrug out of his clothes. "I had plans for us tonight, but now I feel totally drained. Would you mind if we just held each other?"

She felt regret, and even a little fear that his admission might hurt her, coming through the bond. She turned, half undressed herself, and smiled at him. "I'd like that very much."

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## Haven Operations Center...

When the door to his office opened, admitting Caleb Newman, Miles looked up. He waved the other man to the fresh pot of coffee he had on a table in the corner of his office.

Caleb fixed himself a cup, then he collapsed heavily in a chair. "Merlin! I'm about done in," he muttered.

"Oh? Ready to go home to Carolyne and the girls then?"

"No. She knows I'm sleeping here tonight. I called her earlier on the floo and told her I'd be there for breakfast," Caleb replied, then he looked hard at Miles. "You look like shit warmed over, as our Yank friends would say. Why don't you go on home yourself?"

"I'm fine. Just a bit tired."

Caleb snorted in disbelief and Miles immediately changed the subject.

"So tell me about Potter," Miles commanded.

"Potter... He's a brilliant tactician, Miles, first rate. He's also the type of leader that the men would follow even if he led them against the gates of hell itself."

"Why do I hear a 'but' in there somewhere?" growled Miles.

Caleb shook his head. "No, not really. The kid's good and he's learning to lead. He held that line as long as he could, then he pulled his people out, made sure the wounded got out and took the steps to contain the problem. I've just never seen anyone with the power he has. He blew up a third of the island! Everything north of our line to the boat docks was gone. I admit his method was a bit unusual, but it got the job done."

"Did he explain why he blew up the northern part of the island?"

Caleb nodded grimly. "His tactical situation wasn't good. I had given him two squads, but he was up against a numerically superior force. Granted, it wasn't overwhelmingly superior, but it was enough to make a difference. He lost ten men in quick succession and suddenly found that the odds were increasingly against him. So he pulled back the line, bringing his wounded and dead with him, then he decided to take action himself. Up until that point he hadn't been fighting much, just leading as he should. He used a standard explosive spell, 'The Hammer of God'. But when cast at his power level?" Caleb shook his head. "To be truthful, I'm not sure even he was aware it would cause the kind of damage it did."

"It was incredible, Miles," Caleb continued, his eyes becoming unfocused, as if viewing the scene all over again. "He hit the ground with his staff and there was a brief moment of shocked silence. Then everything started to explode. I had enough time to shout for everyone to get undercover and get shielded and then it started." He focused once more on Miles. "I'll never forget it, nor doubt Harry's strength."

Miles relaxed a bit in his chair and nodded. The same spell had been used earlier in the month against Terry Boot and his wife in that Paris hotel. It was a powerful spell and the stronger the caster, the more damage it caused. In Paris, the spell had blown a three foot hole in the floor and ceiling.

Miles had been worried that Caleb might have had some complaint about Harry. "What about strategy? You say he's right on with tactics, but what about strategy?"

Caleb grimaced and looked down for a moment. "I don't think it's fair to ask that right now. Sure, Harry came up with the operational idea and you roughed it out into a usable operation. But there were twenty other people planning on this, and you know we made some big blunders out there. We got lucky."

Miles frowned thoughtfully, "Yes, we did make some mistakes. It never occurred to me that they may do large guard swap outs like that. And, of course, we underestimated the number of Dementors, but the house elves could only report on what they saw at any given time. I don't think a man on the ground would have been able to do any better." He tilted his chair back then and sighed. "I'm glad to hear about Potter..."

Miles stopped talking when his door opened again and an aide to Minister Bones stepped in to hand him a parchment.

"Thank you," he muttered, absently taking the parchment and scanning it quickly. He waited until the aide had left before looking at Caleb.

"I just got the numbers, if you're interested."

Caleb straightened in his chair and nodded, watching his boss.

"Of prisoners, four hundred and forty two saved. Sixty three were killed during the breakout attempt. Mind you, that's just a guess since we didn't bring those bodies home with us... The Death Eaters didn't seem to care if they killed prisoners or not. Of the assault forces, we have a total of twenty four dead, including five who were killed from Able company, and fifty four injured. Six are listed as being in grave condition. Of the prisoners, one hundred have been sent to other hospitals, most notably St. Patrick's in Dublin and Our Lady of Mercy in Cork.

"According to this, the Haven house elves have been working like crazy to erect buildings behind the hospital to house the wounded prisoners. All of our field healers and medics have been pressed into service..."

There was a moment of silence, which Caleb broke. "Well, it looks like we're out of business, at least for the short term. I'll pass the word along to the boys that we're going to stand down on the training for a couple days. I wouldn't risk any missions without a healer or medic along."

Miles grunted. "Might not be a bad idea. Let them relax and blow off some steam."

Silence descended on the office again as each man contemplated the numbers and winced over the cost. It had been a victory, of that there was no doubt. But like so many victories, this one had had a price and they'd paid that price in blood.

As the sky grew dark, house elves worked tirelessly to set up housing for the influx of three hundred and forty two new people, while unit chaplains made their rounds, consoling those who had suffered losses. Even those who had come through unharmed discovered that no one came through unscathed, and Haven fell into an uneasy sleep that night.

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### **Padfoot Manor (August 26th)...**

Harry awoke to find the sun high in the sky. In a rare moment of peace he had slept late. And from the arm draped around him, he hadn't been the only one to sleep in this morning. Hermione was spooned up behind him, her hand covering his heart. He stretched and winced from the pain in his leg. They never did get around to doing anything about it last night.

"*Good morning,*" came a very sleepy sounding thought.

"*I'm sorry, did I wake you?*"

"*No, I've been dozing, waiting for you to wake up. I wanted to ask you something.*"

"*Hmmm?*" Harry had trouble concentrating, Hermione was kissing her way across his shoulders, making it difficult for him to think properly.

"*Howdid you do it?*"

"*Do what?*"

"*You changed my dream last night. I was having a nightmare and suddenly it stopped and I was in your dream.*"

"*Oh, that...*"

Harry chuckled as Hermione growled, then bit him lightly on his shoulder.

"*Yes that! I want to knowhowyou did it.*"

Harry shrugged and started to sit up. "*Honestly, I'm not sure. At one point I could feel your nightmare, so I reached for you...*"

Hermione shook her head in annoyance because he couldn't explain it, and because he was pulling away from her. All she remembered of the dream was a vague image of a picnic, with Harry and herself surrounded by several small children, all of which resembled them both. It had been wonderful.

"*Why are you pulling away?*"

"*I'd love to stay, my Heart. You knowthat. But I'm late already. I should have been up hours ago. By nowI'll have to break everyone's routine to*

*have the morning briefing.”*

She frowned. *“But you told everyone to take it easy today, to take the day off!”*

He winced at the shout that echoed in his head. “Alright, you twisted my arm,” he said aloud, his lips twitching with humor and he climbed back into the bed.

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### **The Weasley Cottage, Haven...**

Fred and George barreled down the stairs and got stuck in the doorway to the kitchen. Arthur sat at the table sipping his tea and wondering if his sons would ever grow up. Finally, George wrenched himself free and slid into a chair at the table, Fred only a second behind him. Immediately, the two started to fill up their plates while Arthur watched in amusement.

“I’m surprised you two aren’t helping the healers with the brewing,” Arthur murmured.

Fred looked up from his plate. “Oh, no, Dad. Helga and Inga are helping brew the potions, but I think they were afraid to ask us.”

“Quite,” offered George.

“You mean to say your muggle girlfriends are making potions?” asked Arthur incredulously.

“They are turning into right good potion makers, Dad,” offered George

“Doesn’t take magic to make a potion. The magic is in the ingredients,” quipped Fred.

Arthur folded the newspaper that Bertrand Lovegood was putting out for the Ministry and he looked at his two sons. “Boys, I know times have changed and things have become... ah... looser. But I’ve been meaning to speak to you about those two young women.”

Fred and George exchanged a glance between them.

“George, me bucko, I do believe we’re about to get ‘the talk’ again.”

“Are you sure? It could be the ‘Don’t get caught with your girlfriend naked in my house’ lecture,” George replied.

“Or perhaps the ‘don’t mess with little sister’ lecture...”

“Although, in truth, we haven’t since her honeymoon.”

“Her revenge, however, was classic.”

“Who would have believed our little Gin-Gin could be so ruthless?”

“Enough!” bellowed Arthur. Both twins blinked and realized that their father had reached his limit.

Arthur took a few deep breaths to get himself under control. “Boys, I’ve put off talking about this with you for too long. You two have grown up into smart men who are taking an active role in our war. Miles informs me that despite his initial resistance to the idea of having you two help, your inventions have saved lives and made it safer for our fighters. I wanted to tell you both how proud of you I am. But...

Arthur paused and his expression grew very serious. “Your mother and I did not raise you two to be sleeping with your girlfriends under our own roof. I’m not going to make too much of a fuss about it because we are in a war. Normality, wherever it can be found, should be grasped with both hands and held tight. Merlin! Do you honestly think I would have let your sister marry at sixteen if these were normal times?”

He ran a hand through his thinning hair. “Reach for your normality boys, but don’t toy with the feelings of others while you’re at it. If you feel anything for these girls, then do something about it.”

Fred and George exchanged a look. “Dad, if it’s any consolation to you, both George and myself are serious about Helga and Inga. Life would be so much easier if we weren’t at war, but then if there was no war, we never would have met the Johansens...” Fred said, trailing off and shrugging a bit helplessly.

“Kinda weird that way,” added George. “But Fred’s right, Dad. We’ll do something about the girls soon, I think. You can’t really ask a girl to marry you when you’ve only known her since April.”

“Oh, no. We need at least another month,” Fred said with a grin.

Arthur nodded, grateful that the conversation hadn’t been as much of a problem as it might have been. He also realized that the twins had only known the girls for a few months. He didn’t want to push them, but finding that his sons were sleeping with them had made him bring it up. The conversation turned to lighter topics after that. The boys, like so many others, were planning on taking it easy today and mentioned that they were thinking about taking the girls on a picnic after they made a stop at their lab to check on some ongoing experiments.

Arthur bid his sons a good day and watched with suppressed laughter as his boys walked out of the house, never noticing that the seats of their pants had been banished while they ate breakfast. *Now, if only I can figure out a way to blame it on Bill, Charlie or Ginny*, Arthur thought with a chuckle. *And they call themselves pranksters.*

## Melinda McKinney's Cottage (Noon)...

Melinda stood at her kitchen window, listening the children play next door. The sound of their laughter was a soothing balm to her spirit, helping to ease away the memory of the painful pleas and screaming from last night.

After tending to Terry at the Minister's residence and helping with his therapy, she'd been called to the hospital to help with the incoming patients from Azkaban. Hospital personnel had been overwhelmed for awhile, but relief healers had finally arrived from several Irish hospitals, allowing the exhausted staff of Haven Hospital to go home and rest.

She'd slept for twelve hours straight, and woke up groggy and muzzled headed. Thinking tea would help, she had wandered into the kitchen with the vague idea of brewing herself a cup, but had become distracted by the kids next door.

Shaking her head, she looked around the kitchen for a moment, thinking. Tea required hot water, and it wasn't going to heat itself, now was it? With a sigh, she reached for the teapot, and nearly screamed the house down when a small house elf popped into view beside her stove.

The rather small, young looking elf pulled her ears down to try to block out the noise and stamped her foot in vexation. "Miss shouldn't be screaming like that! Dilly is here to help, she is. Miss is tired and should be resting."

Melinda could only gape at the creature before her. She'd never had a house elf in her service, and wasn't sure what to do with one. When the elf only stared at her, she smiled tentatively. "I was going to make a pot of tea. I thought it might help wake me up," she explained rather lamely.

"Dilly will make you tea, Miss. And breakfast, Dilly thinks. I do be knowing that Miss has been working very hard at the hospital and that Miss is tired. Sit, and Dilly will take care of you."

"Thank you... Dilly, isn't it?" When the elf nodded, Melinda smiled a little easier and sat down at the kitchen table. "You'll have to forgive me, Dilly. I've never had a house elf, and I don't know much about your duties or..." She shrugged a bit helplessly.

"Not to be worrying, Miss," Dilly told her as she bustled about the kitchen. "Since Dobby told us that the great Harry Potter would welcome our service in Haven, we be meeting many like you. I did not be knowing that so many witches and wizards had never bonded a house elf."

"So you are bound to Lord Potter's service?" Melinda asked as the elf placed a full teacup before her.

"Oh, no, Miss. Dilly is bound to Haven, she is," Dilly said as she pulled out a frying pan, eyed Melinda carefully, then went to the refrigerator. "Dilly has only ever been bonded to one family, but they be killed by the evil ones and Dilly had no where to go. Then word did come of Dobby and of Haven, and here I be."

Watching Dilly crack eggs into a bowl, Melinda leaned back in her chair and sipped tea, her mind racing. "Is the bond you now have to Haven different than the one you had with your family?"

"Yes, Miss. It is more... There be less structure to the bond now. It is not so.. Tight? Yes, that does work. In Haven, Dilly can serve where she is needed and where she wishes. With a family, Dilly would serve as she is commanded to by her Master or Mistress."

"Which do you prefer?" Melinda asked, curious.

"Dilly does not prefer one or the other, Miss. The bond just is. At times, Dilly does like that she can pick what she can do or who she will serve. But Dilly does also miss having a family."

"The bond you have now didn't compel you to my home to serve me, did it, Dilly?" Melinda asked suddenly, feeling a bit sick.

Dilly laughed, the sound almost musical. "Oh, no, Miss. Dilly be working in the hospital when the hurt people were brought in and she did watch Miss. Dilly knows, as all house elves learn to be knowing, when someone be having a good and kind heart. When Miss left the hospital, Dilly did be seeing that Miss was very tired and told other elves that she would care for Miss," she said, placing a plate of scrambled eggs and toast on the table in front of Melinda.

Melinda felt her eyes grow moist, and placed a hand on Dilly's shoulder. "I don't know how to thank you, Dilly."

"Oh, no, don't cry, Miss! If Miss cries, Dilly do be crying, too," came the rather wet reply as Dilly's large, green eyes welled with tears. "Eat now, Miss. You be feeling better, after."

Melinda shook head and laughed. Turning to her plate, she realized how hungry she was. "We make an interesting pair, Dilly," she said, wiping away her tears and shrugging them off as result of exhaustion. When she picked up her fork and began to eat, she missed the light that danced in Dilly's eyes.

A half hour later, she sat back and sipped her tea as Dilly finished cleaning the kitchen and putting away the dishes from breakfast. When a knock came at the door, Dilly spun around and smiled.

"No, Miss," she said as Melinda started to stand. "You be sitting while Dilly does answer the door."

With a smile, Melinda watched the small elf all but run from the kitchen. She liked Dilly, but still felt a bit uncomfortable being served in her own home. She didn't understand enough about house elves or their bonds to know if Dilly was helping her out of duty, or because she wanted to.



"Miss does she have a visitor," Dilly announced as she trotted into the kitchen, a tall man behind her. "Mr. Minister does say that he wishes to speak to Miss."

Melinda smiled. "Good morning, Arthur."

"Hello. I do hope I'm not interrupting anything," he said, watching the elf as she filled another cup with tea and placed it on the table for him.

"No, of course not," Melinda told him, waving him into the chair across from hers. "I was still tired when I woke up, and Dilly came to help me this morning." She smiled at the elf.

"Dilly will be leaving Miss and Mr. Minister to their talking," she said as she placed the pot of tea on the table and beamed at them. "If Miss does be needing Dilly again, Miss has only to call and Dilly will come."

The elf vanished before Melinda could thank her.

"Well, that was interesting," she told Arthur. At his curious look, she shrugged. "I've never had a house elf before, so I don't know a lot about them."

"She seemed rather young," he mused.

"I don't understand."

He shook his head. "Most don't, but before we arrived in Ireland, Remus spoke with Dobby on several occasions about his species and the bond they have with human, magical families. Oh, you did meet Dobby at the manor, didn't you?"

Melinda smiled, remembering the little creature. "I did, yes."

"Dobby is different than most elves, in that he chooses to remain free. The only bond he shares with Harry is one of friendship and loyalty. Harry pays him a wage for the work he does. The other elves were appalled by such behavior on the part of house elf, but they learned to accept it. They later learned to trust him when he passed on Harry's offer of safety.

"But as I was saying, Remus spoke to Dobby, in the hopes of better understanding the creatures, and learned that elves are born seeking the bond. They need it, you see, to survive. Most elves who remain unbound for too long go insane and die.

"Due to the drive to bond, older elves are set to teach and guide young ones, to keep them from bonding with just anyone. No elf wants to bond to a cruel or heartless family, but the need to bond sometimes overshadows caution. A young elf is brought into a household and taught what they need to know to serve a family. In time, that young elf will bond with humans, usually the family of the household they've been learning in."

"Dilly said she had been bound to a family, but that they were killed before she came to Haven," Melinda told him.

"It must have been a recent bounding." When she looked at him questioningly, he sighed. "As I said, she seems young."

"I like her, though I do find it a bit discomfoting to be served in my own home," she said with a laugh.

"If Dilly's taken a liking to you, you may have to get used to it," Arthur said wryly. "Unless you don't want her help, of course. Then you need only tell her, and she won't bother you."

"Would that hurt her?" Melinda asked, a bit alarmed.

"Emotionally, yes, probably. But she is bound to Haven, so there is no risk of death in her case."

"Oh, I don't want to hurt her. She's very helpful and I enjoyed talking with her."

"Talking with her?" Arthur laughed. "I think Dobby has had a wider range of influence than we thought."

"Meaning?"

"As I said, Dobby is different. A house elf rarely speaks to humans, even to the members of the family they're bound to. Dobby, while still being cautious, tends to speak his mind to anyone."

"Well, Dilly's good at giving orders, politely, of course. She just sort of took over at breakfast, telling me to sit, to eat, that she would answer the door," Melinda told him, smiling at the memory.

"Hermione will be pleased to hear it. She's been hoping the elves would find their place and take a more aggressive roll in their bonding."

"Oh, Dilly isn't bound to me," Melinda said, surprised. "She said she was just here to help me this morning."

"Mmm," Arthur replied, noncommittally.

Melinda refilled her cup with tea, then raised the pot and looked at him questioningly. At his nod, she refilled his cup and set the pot down.

"So, what brings you by this morning?" she asked.

"Ginny, actually," he told her. "She said you'd had some questions about Eocho and she wasn't sure if she'd been able to answer them all."

Her face hardened. "Ginny explained what he is and why he's at the manor," she said flatly.

Arthur arched an eyebrow. "From your tone, she must not have done a very good job of it."

"I think I got the highlights. He's some sort of guardian spirit from an ancient Druid culture, brought back to help with the fight against evil. And why does that sound like a muggle comic book?" she asked, her brow furrowed.

When he only stared at her in confusion, she shook her head. "Never mind. The point is, I know as much as I need to know. I'm not part of this Brotherhood they've resurrected, nor do I want to be. My problem is simple. When I'm treating a patient, or trying to, I don't usually have to deal with some ancient dead guy telling me that I can't do my job!"

"Can't do your job?" he asked, puzzled for a moment. "Oh, you mean what happened with Harry and Hermione?"

"Yes! She was in pain, Arthur. A lot of pain. I'm a healer, yet I was expected to turn my back and pretend that young woman wasn't suffering. And don't think I didn't see the anger on the face of that, that..." She paused, drew a breath, and continued more calmly. "I saw Eocho's face. He was angry and seemed to want her to suffer."

"Maybe he did." When he saw the loathing in her eyes, he held up a hand. "Wait a moment and let me explain. When the Brotherhood was resurrected, they agreed to certain rules, Melinda. In exchange for ancient knowledge and power, they agreed to use their new gifts only in certain ways. What Hermione did that night crossed a line. She used something Eocho taught her for her own gain. Had Harry not been who he is, they both would have died. For you to have interfered with what was happening between them could have killed all three of you. Even with Harry's skill, a third person blundering around in the link might have been too much.

"Eocho comes from an ancient society where the breaking of what we consider minor rules came with deadly consequences. He understands that our rules are different than his and has learned to adjust in most things. But he is the guardian of the Brotherhood and their knowledge. He has a lot of respect for Hermione. Not just because she is Harry's mate...his wife, but for her intelligence as well. He has worked with her extensively and thought of her as his brightest student. Then to find her doing something so risky, something so potentially deadly? What she did would have warranted a death sentence in his time.

"And it wasn't just the risk to herself, Melinda. She could have killed Harry, the Maglios of the Brotherhood." Seeing the question in her eyes, he explained. "My ancient Celtic is rusty, but translated, the Maglios means the warrior king or warrior priest. Eocho made Harry the leader of the resurrected Brotherhood because of his power and his destiny. To put it simply, without Harry, Voldemort wins it all. If Harry dies, our world falls to the flames. Is it any wonder that Eocho was so angry?"

When Melinda scowled and said nothing, he sighed. "Maybe I didn't explain it right," he muttered, running a hand through his hair.

"You explained it fine and you know it," she said, crossly.

"Then why are you scowling at me?"

"Because now I feel like I should be apologizing to some spirit for thinking ill of the dead. I mean, this is too much, Arthur. I brought the children here so they could be safe and found a place for myself at the hospital. Don't get me wrong. I'm thankful for everything I've been given. But then I find that a group of people have resurrected a long dead Druid culture in order to defeat Voldemort, that the person responsible for all of this is a young man with some sort of cosmic destiny and that he married a young woman who could have killed him with the knowledge that some old, dead guy taught her. What do you expect me to do? Serve you more tea and comment on the weather?"

"Obviously you're having problems accepting all this," he said placatingly.

"Honestly, Arthur, who wouldn't?" she asked in frustration. "You've had a lot more time to come to grips with all this. I've had minutes!"

"Melinda, calm down. Why is this such a problem for you?" When her left eye began to twitch, he pushed on quickly. "All right, I understand that this came at you rather suddenly. But let me ask you this. You've seen the Angels around Haven. What do you think of them?"

"The Angels? They're lovely creatures, but what do they have to do with this?"

"You have trouble accepting everything I've told you, but you have no problem with Luna creating the Angels to help fight off the Dementors?" he asked, bewildered.

Melinda gapped at him. "Created! What? But how... Why would... No, don't tell me." She leaned back on her chair and massaged her temples. "And this day started out so well, too. A lovely breakfast, a pleasant chat with a house elf. Where did it go wrong?" she muttered.

"I could answer you, but I'm afraid you'd dump tea over my head," Arthur said gently. "Look, I know this is all confusing for you, but it doesn't have to be. All you have to remember is that everything that's been done is for the good of us all. With the Brotherhood now active, we have a real chance of seeing Voldemort's defeat, and you can't tell me you don't want that."

"No," she said, sighing, "I can't tell you that. I'm sorry for my outburst. I shouldn't have spoken to you like that."

"You were surprised and your reaction's understandable. It's a lot of information to take in all at once. You don't know Harry very well, but please believe me when I tell you he would never have resurrected the Brotherhood if he'd thought it would pose a danger to those he's trying to protect."

"It's true, I don't know Lord Potter very well. I've only spoken to him on a few occasions. But a young man who can conceive of, and then build, someplace like this," she said, waving a hand towards the window and all that lay beyond, "is someone who engenders trust in others. It's just a bit overwhelming to take in all at once."

Arthur's smile was understanding. "Do you have any other questions?" he asked as he refilled their cups with tea.

"No, I think that answers about everything, thank Merlin. I'm not sure if I can handle any more shocks today," she told him with a laugh.

"Well then, I have a question of my own," he said, his eyes bright.

"Oh?"

"Yes. Would you have dinner with me tonight? A new Greek restaurant opened near Gringotts and I thought we could try it."

She blinked in surprise, then smiled warmly. "That would be lovely, thank you."

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### **Azkaban Island...**

The small boat motored closer to the island and Archibald Ives frowned. He had served several tours of guard duty and was now in charge of the processing center for the prison. Prisoners arrived at his center on the coast of Wales and were processed before being sent over to the island.

When the duty shift boats hadn't returned yesterday, he hadn't thought much of it. Archibald didn't get out much and thought that perhaps they had been delayed by weather, a common occurrence. But now the boats were more than twenty-four hours overdue. Worriedly, he'd sent word up the line to his supervisor. It hadn't taken long for him to get word back that he was to visit the island and see what was keeping the boats.

Ives' eyes narrowed seeing the island up close. The boat docks were missing and roughly one third of the island was now under water. The Holding Center to the north of the fortress seemed deserted and parts of the center were still smoking. Barely three-hundred feet to the north of the holding center, the island ended abruptly with what looked like a ten foot drop into the Irish Sea.

With no place to dock the boat, they drifted in closer, knowing full well that the rocky shoals surrounding the island would rip the boat to pieces if they weren't careful. After a nerve wracking twenty minutes, they were able to make landing along the western shore near the Holding Center. Ives quickly ordered the eight men he had with him to split up and investigate the island, while he headed for the fortress.

Three hours later, a nondescript owl flew from one of the fortress towers, heading for Scotland. Down in the central courtyard, Ives was still interrogating the surviving members of the guard force. Their screams could be heard all over the island.

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### **Ministry building, Haven...**

Despite it being early afternoon, the building was practically deserted. A large number of Ministry personnel had turned out last night to help at the hospital or at the community kitchen. Amelia had sent word that the Ministry would consider today a holiday, therefore only a skeleton staff of people were left in the building.

One department in particular, the mail department, had only one person staffing the room. Letting most of the staff take the day off had been a mistake, the lone clerk had thought when the announcement was made. But he thought it better to keep that to himself. A simple clerk did not tell the Minister for Magic what to do, after all.

He quickly came to regret that decision, however. The department handled all official owl mail for Haven and the clerk quickly found himself nearly overwhelmed with the sheer bulk of incoming mail. He barely had enough time to remove letters from incoming owls and toss them into a pile before turning to the next owl. As it was, he never noticed that one letter slipped off the pile and fell behind the table. That letter wouldn't be found for several days.

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### **Padfoot Manor...**

Harry and Hermione walked into the dining room holding hands. Both were surprised to see that so many of their friend had also gotten off to a late start.

"Everyone alright?" Harry asked.

Draco scowled and stared down at his cup, then Luna nudged him in the side. He glanced up at her and blushed. "Harry, about last night..."

Harry waved him silent. "Draco, it's a new experience for you. I said a few things to you last night that I'm not proud of, and I regret saying them. But I needed to get through to you before you made a bigger mistake than you were making."

Draco looked thoughtful, then he nodded, grinning slightly.

Remus tapped on a glass catching everyone's attention. "Ladies and Gentlemen... and you too Harry..."

Harry scowled at Remus and tossed his roll at him.

Remus ducked, then continued. "Since we're taking the day off, I've asked the elves to serve us a dinner outside tonight around the pool."

"That's a wonderful idea, Remus. I think I can transfigure us a BBQ grill," Dan exclaimed.

Both Hermione and Emma winced. Dan's transfigurations were not very good. The last time he tried a transfiguration, he created a set of hostile lawn chairs that bit people. It took thirty elves two days to track down and kill the pernicious lawn furniture.

Harry was laughing with everyone else at Dan's attempt to explain his last transfiguration when an elf appeared next to him with a small parchment. He accepted the parchment and scanned it briefly, then he nodded to the elf, who snapped off a perfect salute before vanishing again.

Sensing his change in mood, Hermione turned her attention to him. "Harry, what's wrong?"

He rolled up the parchment and smiled weakly at her. "It's nothing. Just the casualty figures from yesterday. Miles wants to talk about them, but figures it can wait a few days."

Around them, everyone fell silent. Harry shook himself and tried to brighten the mood. "So, a BBQ, Dan? Sounds like it could be interesting, if you can convince the elves not to cook, that is."

Dan's eyebrows knitted as he pondered the problem. He'd figure out a way, even if someone else would have to transfigure the grill for him.

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### **Irish Ministry, Office of the Minister...**

Brogan Mallory sat back in his chair and smiled. He had been aware of the British Ministry's intent to attack the island prison, but he hadn't been informed of all the details. When he'd received his copy of the paper, he had been pleasantly surprised to see the Dublin Daily's headline.

*Over Four Hundred Rescued!  
Daring Early Morning Raid on You-Know-Who's prison!*

*According to a communique released by the British Ministry of Magic in Exile, allied forces, consisting of British, American, Canadian and Irish Aurors, assaulted the island prison of Azkaban and effectively rescued over four hundred prisoners. British Ministry officials released photos taken both during the assault and during the rescue, which occurred after the assault succeeded.*

*The attack began at dawn when nearly four hundred and fifty trained fighters arrived via portkey and by sea. The attack centered upon the northern holding facility, rather than island's fortress. One British Ministry official, who insisted to remain anonymous, said, "The northern holding pens held more prisoners than the fortress itself. We opted to attack them because they were more vulnerable."*

*Rumors have the attackers using a mix of muggle military technology and magic to attack the prison. There is also an unconfirmed rumor that the newly discovered species of Irish Angels were somehow used in the fight. Some experts suggest the Irish Angels might have provided a diversion, while others think the Angels might have some sort of banshee quality about them.*

*According to our own sources, over one hundred of the rescued, some of the worst cases, have been moved to Irish hospitals. A spokesman for St. Patrick's said that a lot of the cases they received are currently in guarded condition, suffering from malnutrition, exposure to the elements as well as to painful curses like the Cruciatus curse. Long term prognosis is good for many of these patients, but they aren't out of the woods just yet.*

*Another source revealed that Harry Potter was personally involved in this attack, leading an elite group of trained wizards and witches called 'The Brotherhood'. Little is known about this group, other than they did participate in the assault and they have been training with the fighters belonging to the alliance against You-Know-Who.*

*The attack against You-Know-Who's prison came as a major shock to the magical world. Magical Governments all over the globe are waking up to the news and, for the first time, people are wondering if You-Know-Who is as invincible as he claims to be. Statements from the Alliance Ministries have all expressed pride in what their people accomplished and sorrow over those who were lost in the attack. The British Ministry acknowledges losses and injuries among its forces, but refused to release any detailed information pending notification of relatives.*

*Harry Potter, The New Leader of the Light? Page 2.  
Where is Albus Dumbledore? Page 7.  
Did Potter Marry? Honeymoon Rumors, Society Column. Page 8a.*

Mallory leaned back and grinned to himself. The successful operation couldn't have come at a better time, and he could use it to his advantage. Mallory knew his position and popularity with the public was at an all time high, but a public relations coup like this only happened once in a great while.

He pressed a button on his desk and waited for his secretary. The door opened and a middle aged woman entered.

"Marge! Sit down, please. I want to dictate a letter to Minister Bones, as well as a few press releases," he said, relishing the feeling. To a politician, this was meat and potatoes. Perhaps he could even arrange a joint press conference that included Harry Potter!

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### **Padfoot Manor, (Evening of August 26th)...**

Harry sat on a lounge watching some of his friends, while Dan tried to explain to Remus the fine art of Barbecuing. Surprisingly, Remus seemed to be enjoying Dan's mini-lecture and was avidly sampling the different foods Dan was cooking. Harry shook his head, amused at the two, but even he had to admit that the food had been excellent.

Hermione sat at one of the tables with her mother, Narcissa, Susan and Terry, while Ginny, Neville and Draco enjoyed the pool. Luna walked around the area, just outside the tree line, hanging objects from the tree branches.

Fred, George and their girlfriends took up another table and Harry eyed them with worry when the noise level suddenly dropped at their table. What had started as a simple, relaxing BBQ among friends, was turning into a major party in the making. The twins had arrived at the manor house with their girlfriends and their father and they'd brought a good supply of fire whiskey. The girls, Helga and Inga, brought along a pan of fresh strudel from Olga Johansen.

At seeing such a large supply of the strudel, Hermione had sighed and turned back to talk to her mother and Narcissa. She didn't want to think about her most recent cooking disaster. The last time she'd made an attempt at cooking, several house elves had laughed at her.

Harry's eyes slowly drifted closed and he felt himself starting to doze when a hand gently shook him awake. He opened one eye to see Luna looking down at him.

"Can I get your help?" she asked him, smiling.

Harry nodded and stood up. He was surprised when she handed him his tin whistle. Taking the instrument, he looked at her inquisitively.

"I'm not quite ready yet, but I'll let you know when I am," she replied to his unspoken question. Then she patted him on the cheek and walked off.

Shrugging, Harry walked over to Hermione's table and sat down. She looked at the instrument in his hand and arched an eyebrow at him.

*"Are you going to play something for us?"*

*"I don't know. Maybe."*

*"What do you mean, you don't know?"*

*"Luna,"* he replied silently.

Hermione blinked and started to giggle. "Does anyone know what Luna is up to?" she asked out loud. "She just handed Harry his tin whistle and walked away."

Narcissa looked over at her daughter-in-law, who was walking the tree line, occasionally adjusting something hanging from the branches.

"I don't know. I'm not sure even Draco knows what she's doing. She said something about unique entertainment tonight," Narcissa replied thoughtfully. Although she dearly loved her daughter-in-law, the girl's unusual way of seeing the world confused even her at times.

"Well, it's starting to get dark out. I hope she finishes so, otherwise we'll need to light some torches," Emma said.

Harry placed his tin whistle on the table in front of him and helped himself to some food off Hermione's plate.

She gave him a mock growl, then nodded towards his instrument. "You don't play that often enough."

Harry looked at the instrument and sighed. "I know. The only real free time I get is on my early morning walks, or an hour or two before bed when I'm usually doing my Tai Chi. Sometimes on my morning walks I bring it along and play for the squirrels. They like it."

"You should make the time if you can, Harry," offered Emma. "I haven't heard you play since last summer, but I've heard that music box you had made for Hermione and that song is wonderful."

Narcissa eyed Harry with interest. This was a skill she never heard about before. "I'm surprised, Harry. I didn't know you had that kind of talent. Perhaps you can play something for us tonight?"

Harry glanced over at Narcissa, then he spotted Luna approaching. "I think that's exactly what Luna has in mind," he said nervously.

Luna stopped near the edge of the pool and waved to Harry.

"Harry," she said breathlessly as he approached her, "I want to try an experiment. Will you help me?"

"You're not planning on draining me dry again, are you," he asked suspiciously.

Luna laughed. "Oh, no, nothing like that. Besides, that's Hermione's job, not mine." Her smile was wicked.

Harry blinked in shock and blushed at her attempt at humor. Luna conjured a stool, then she looked at the nearly dark sky. Around them, everyone fell silent, watching and wondering what Luna was up to.

Luna steered him over to the stool and pushed him onto it, making sure he was facing the others. "I want you to play something, Harry. Play something on your flute."

Harry lifted his tin whistle to his mouth, then he looked at Luna. "It's called a Tin Whistle."

"You can call it that if you want," she told him, waving her hand to dismiss something she felt unimportant. "Just play."

"What do you want me to play?" he asked.

"Anything," she said dreamily then she tapped his tin whistle with her wand and muttered something under her breath.

Harry looked at her for a moment, at a loss as to what he should play. Luna walked back to the tables to join the others, who sat watching him. He was decidedly uncomfortable. Feeling a bit foolish, he glanced down at himself to make sure he was wearing clothing. With a shake of his head, he realized he wasn't in some sort of strange dream, and wasn't sure if he was thankful for that or not.

"Go on, Harry. Play something," Luna called out after taking a seat between Narcissa and Draco.

Hermione could feel his discomfort and nervousness through their link, so she sent him a quick mental caress. His gaze locked with hers for a moment, and then he began to play 'Harry's Life' for her.

Behind him in the tree line, brightly colored glowing bubbles appeared and floated out over the pool, drifting in the wind. As Harry played, the bubbles changed color in time with his music. Each bubble lasted only a short while before it finally faded, but another was always ready to replace it.

Harry's audience sat entranced by the music driven light show. Hermione recognized the melody and she found her eyes filled with tears, remembering the day not so long ago when he gave her the music box in the Room of Requirement. She considered it to be one of the most romantic moments of her life.

When Harry finished that song, he played another, this one more lively. Ginny grabbed Neville's hand and dragged him out near where Harry was sitting to dance under Luna's strangely glowing bubbles. A moment later, Draco and Luna joined them.

Harry, who had lost himself in the music, opened his eyes and looked on, astonished that anyone would want to dance to his music.

He completed his song and switched over to a slow Scottish ballad and more couples left their tables to dance. Hermione left her table and came to sit on the ground next to him. He looked down at her and tried to shrug an apology that he couldn't dance with her. She reached up and rubbed his leg in understanding. He played song after song for his friends and family. He felt the music come alive around him as it wrapped around his friends. The light bubbles floated above them and illuminated the dancers below in a magical glow.

When Harry finished the song he was playing, he looked up to find Luna signaling him to stop. When she pulled out a small Wizarding Wireless and started it up, he smiled at her gratefully. He had played for Hermione before and occasionally in front of others but never had he played for so long and he found that it was a relief to stop. He hopped off the stool and helped Hermione to her feet, then led her back to the table where her parents sat. The others remained behind, content to dance to the music now playing under the star filled sky.

"You're much better than you think, Harry," Narcissa told him.

He ducked his head and mumbled something in reply. Overhead, Luna's light bubbles continued to sparkle and change colors to the music.

Hermione squeezed Harry's arm and he wrapped his arm around her shoulders. "It's just something I learned that helps relax me. I probably would have never learned it at all except that Hermione found a book about it. Hagrid gave me the tin whistle, it used to belong to Sirius," he replied. Then he looked a bit shocked. He had been able to mention Sirius without the normal, painful lump forming in his chest.

"We all miss him in our own way, Harry," Narcissa said in a gentle tone. "For myself, I regret never being able to make my peace with him. That will have to wait until we meet again."

Harry looked down at his tin whistle for a moment, then he looked up and smiled softly. "I know what you mean. I wish I could have told him what I felt for him. But he's never truly gone," Harry said, then he rubbed his arm where the Padfoot tattoo was.

Hermione leaned in close to him and used their bond to send him comforting feelings. He smiled at her, then looked at Luna's light bubbles.

His eyebrows knitted together for a moment, then he released Hermione and stood up. He walked over to the tree line and looked at one of the devices Luna had hung on a branch. He watched, entranced, as the multiple sheets of metal banged together, producing another light bubble. Reaching up, he carefully pulled the hanging device from the tree and brought it back to the table where the others sat.

Laying the device on the table in front of Hermione, he cast a light orb and told her to look at it. Luna and Draco joined them and took seats next to Narcissa. Both watched Hermione carefully, although Luna seemed a little upset that Harry had taken down one of her devices.

"What do you see, Hermione?" asked Harry after she had a moment to study the device.

"It's a wind chime, I think, made up of the same runes we used for the rune stones. But I don't recognize the runes along the top of the piece," she replied hesitantly.

"No, you wouldn't. In school we learned English, Scottish and Welsh runes. The Brotherhood uses Celtic runes. Those are Nordic runes," Harry said, then he looked over at Luna. "Somehow Luna has combined runes from different cultures," he concluded.

Luna glance over at the pair. "Of course I combined them. Nordic runes specialize in triggering conditions, while Celtic runes deal more with effects and powers. Nordic runes are so limiting in what capabilities they have, but they seemed to take triggering of the spell to an art form."

Harry held up a hand and Luna stopped speaking. She watched him carefully as he stared down at her wind chime, his brow furrowed in concentration.

Harry?" asked Hermione. Something was bubbling over from their bond that she had never experienced before and it confused and alarmed her.

"Hush, Hermione, give him a moment," Luna said.

Harry looked up from the wind chime with a look of wonder. "What if we pre-made the Brotherhood rune stones so they were in the correct configuration already, but we used a Nordic rune to trigger them? Wouldn't that result in a rune set someone could pull from a pouch and use right away? Without even needing a wand? Something triggered by a word or phrase?"

Hermione's eyes narrowed and she stared at Harry in surprise. "How do you know about Nordic Runes?" she demanded.

Harry rolled his eyes at her. "Hermione, one of the books you had me read was called Runes of the World. It listed runes from twenty-three different cultures."

"You'd need to craft totally new spells, Harry, spells that combine the effect you want with the triggers. But we could develop a set of new spells for standard things like shields, camouflage charms and the like," Luna said thoughtfully.

"Do you think we can combine other runes besides Nordic and Celtic, Luna?" Harry asked.

Hermione glanced at him, a little put out that he hadn't asked her. She calmed when she felt his reassurance over the bond.

*"I'm only asking her because she's already done it with two cultures, Hermione."* The tone of his thoughts were colored with impatience.

*"I know,"* she sent back to him, unable to hide her insecurity from him. He reached under the table with his hand and laid it on her thigh.

*"I'll always need you, my Heart. I'm just asking questions here. Feel free to jump into the conversation."*

"I don't see why not, Harry," Luna replied, then her eyes glazed slightly while she thought about it. "You'd have to make sure you break things down into compartments. For example, all the triggering conditions would have to come from one rune set, while the power or effects come from another. I don't think it would be safe to combine them in the same compartment."

Harry leaned back and nodded pensively while Hermione and Luna got into a debate about mixing Rune sets and compartments. He tuned the two of them out, as something he had read was tugging on his consciousness. He was sure it was important.

The part broke up soon afterwards and Harry and Hermione walked back to their room. Both were considering the implications of the conversation around the table.

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### **Haven School of Witchcraft and Wizardry (August 27th)...**

"Ah, Miss Bulstrode. Thank you for coming so quickly," Minerva said as the young woman entered her office. Standing behind her desk, she pulled out her wand and sealed the door against intrusion and eavesdropping. "Please, be seated."

"Thank you, Professor," Millicent said as she sat down in one of the two chairs in front of Minerva's desk. "What did you wish to see me about?"

"An idea, my dear," she said, her eyes dancing. "I've been thinking since you brought me the letter Miss Joyner...lost. As she and Mr. Palmer think so little of us, it should be easy to use their prejudice against them."

Millicent frowned. "In what way, Headmistress?"

"As her letter stated, we are trusting fools who would never suspect either of them of duplicity," McGonagall told her, waving a hand about rather airily. "So any information they receive from us they will surely pass on to their parents. Most of the information they receive will have to be correct, of course, but if a small portion of it was incorrect..."

"It could aid our cause," Millicent finished, a wicked smile on her lips. "How very Slytherin of you, Professor. There is at least one problem with the idea though. I can't just walk up and give them information. My parents know who's side I'm on, and it would be too easy to verify it. And we can't rely on them to eavesdrop on the right conversations, either, so how do we pass them the information we want them to have?"

"You pass it through me," a voice said as a figure stepped out of a darkened corner and into the light.

"You!" Millicent exclaimed as she stood quickly and drew her wand. "What is he doing here, Professor?" she asked as she glared at the young, black haired man now standing in front of her.

Minerva stood, reached over her desk and plucked the wand from Millicent's hand. "Calm yourself, Miss Bulstrode. Mr. Thorntree came to me this afternoon with information about Miss Joyner. Apparently he is rather adept with eavesdropping charms. He told me that he overheard Miss Joyner and Mr. Palmer speaking together in the library. He says they are still in contact with their parents and are passing on everything they learn here in Haven. Who would have imagined such a thing?" she asked, her lips twitching.

"So you filled him in on what we're doing?" Millicent asked as she made a grab for her wand and missed. "Are you insane?"

"Don't be impertinent," the Headmistress snapped. "You may be a student in this school, Miss Bulstrode, but that does not mean I won't turn you into a toad for the remainder of the summer!"

"Deneb Thorntree is Mindy Joyner's boyfriend," Millicent growled through clenched teeth. "What makes you think she didn't send him here?"

"Veritaserum," Deneb replied succinctly. "And that's ex-boyfriend, thank you."

When Millicent looked at Minerva, she nodded. "I tested Mr. Thorntree with Veritaserum before trusting him with anything. I am not some addlepated old woman, Miss Bulstrode. I will remind you that I have fought this war before and I mean to see an end to it this time round. I refuse to fight that snakish monstrosity every thirteen years! Now, sit down, both of you," she commanded, pointing to the chairs in front of her desk.

"Ex-boyfriend my ass," Millicent muttered as she sat down.

"And a nice ass it is," Deneb replied, earning a glare from both women as he took the chair next to Millicent's. "Sorry," he quipped, "the Veritaserum must still be working."

Minerva eyed them both carefully for a moment. "Actually, your dislike of each other could work to our advantage."

"I don't dislike Miss Bulstrode," Deneb replied, a bit surprised. "I hated her house, but I never disliked her. I hardly know her."

"You're such a Hufflepuff," Millicent sniffed.

"Not anymore. There are no houses at the Haven school," he reminded her, his dark eyes wide and innocent.

"If you children are finished?" Minerva asked icily. "We have a lot to discuss."

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### **Hogwarts Castle (August 27th)...**

Horatio Mulciber sat at a narrow desk and scowled. He was finally getting reports in from his agents in the field and the news wasn't good. Two days ago there had been a massive flare up of magic all over Britain. The flare up had been so intense that it had completely swamped his Master's magic detectors. Then yesterday word came from a patrol that something seemed wrong at Azkaban. He immediately sent an order to investigate and now he was reading the results of that investigation. Angrily he stared down at the report on the desk and wondered what he could do to appease the Master's anger.

*Sir,*

*Azkaban Prison attacked at dawn on the twenty-fifth. All prisoners in the new facility have been released and removed from the island. We found sixteen uninjured guards and another six wounded. The northern end containing the boat docks has been obliterated. The sixteen uninjured guards have been disarmed and are en route to Hogwarts, the other six have been dispatched. Expect arrival by thirteen hundred today.*

*The new facility is badly damaged and may be a complete wash. The fortress is intact, but the Dementors have either been driven off or killed. We did find a number of their cloaks on the ground, although I can't guess how they were killed. I didn't think it was possible.*

*Of the fifty prisoners still in the fortress, all are alive. Why the fortress wasn't attacked is anyone's guess. The area due north of the fortress has been heavily damaged and most of the guard force from the fortress has been found in this area.*

*Awaiting further instructions.*

*Archibald Ives, Leader of Team Eight.*

Mulciber stood and began to pace. *Yes, there was a way to do this,* he thought, *but it will have to wait until the guards arrive this afternoon.*

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### **Padfoot Manor, Harry's study...**

Harry glanced up from the letter he was reading when the door opened and he watched as Amelia, Arthur, Caleb, O'Dalley and Draco entered. It was the usual size crowd for his morning meetings, but he wondered about Caleb's presence and the absence of Miles. Hermione took her seat next to Harry's desk, while Dobby rushed around serving tea, coffee and biscuits.

Harry raised an eyebrow at Caleb, but the man just shrugged apologetically at him.

"Well, let's start from the top then. Amelia?" asked Harry.

Amelia consulted her notes for a moment. "We've reviewed the list of prisoners we recovered from Azkaban, Harry. Mind you, most of these people are very ill and will need care for some time to come, but from a cursory look we've saved a number of former Ministry workers, including department heads, magistrates and even twenty-eight Wizengamot members. Among the rescued we have healers, teachers, solicitors, shopkeepers, artisans, and over fifty ex-Aurors.

"At some point, preferably after Draco's people are done questioning them, it would be to your advantage to visit the hospital personally."

Harry frowned and looked hard at Amelia.

Amelia winced slightly under his gaze, but refused to back down. "Like it or not you are a leader," she explained. "Your exploits are becoming legend. The people need to see you. To them, you are their hope."



Harry dropped his gaze and looked down at his desktop for a long moment, sighing heavily.

“Hermione?”

“Amelia is right. I know you don't want the fame, or the legend, but it's going to happen whether you want it or not. At least if you embrace the role, you can help keep the truth in the story.”

Harry nodded to himself then looked up at Amelia again. “Very well. When the healers tell you it would be alright, I... No, we, that is, the Brotherhood will visit them. We all had a hand in their rescue.”

Amelia nodded happily. It was much more than she had hoped for. She moved on to the next issue. “With the rescue of so many Wizengamot members, there may come an attempt to reconstitute the Wizengamot...”

“How can that be possible? Under current rules they lack the numbers for a formal quorum,” Hermione blurted.

Amelia looked at her in surprise. She hadn't known that Hermione was so knowledgeable about the Wizengamot rules.

“Technically, you are correct, Hermione. However, under war time provisions a lot of the old rules can be suspended. That's why I was going to suggest that if such a move is made, Harry assume his familial seat as Lord Potter. As he is from one of the old families, his vote would hold considerable weight within the body,” Amelia replied, looking at Hermione.

“If that comes to pass, he'll assume the seats for both the Black and Potter families. In fact, considering the losses and upheavals at home, it is quite possible that he would be allowed to assume the seats for several other families. Considering the intermixing among the pure blood families, I don't believe it's unreasonable to assume that he could claim lordship over several other now extinct lines,” Hermione said firmly.

Harry simply stared at her in shock.

Hermione leaned back in her chair thinking for a moment. “Yes, that would work. By rights, the Weasley family should have had a seat on the Wizengamot, but they were unable to pay the seating fees at the turn of the century. I'm sure Harry would be happy to pay those dues for Arthur and reinstate the family to their proper place. Then there is your position, Amelia. As you're allied to Harry, we don't have to worry about that. The Longbottoms are also firmly on our side. Minerva might be the last living heir of Clan McGonagall, which means she could also take her seat...”

Arthur had paled at Hermione's suggestion. The others sat in shocked silence while she listed off the beginning of a power block that would firmly support Amelia and Harry in the Wizengamot. When she finally wound down, she looked over at everyone and wondered why they looked so stunned.

“What?”

“I'm sorry, Hermione. I didn't realize you had such a firm grasp on the politics of the situation,” Amelia said, looking pleased.

“Narcissa has been tutoring me on the subject. She seemed to feel it was part of my duties as Lady Potter-Black, and that I would use the information to guide my husband in a subject he loathes,” she said with smile as she reached out and took Harry's hand. He looked at her for a moment, his expression dignified, then he stuck his tongue out at her.

Arthur started to sputter, but Harry stopped him. “Arthur, nothing is decided today. We're talking about things that might happen, so let's worry about it when we need to, hmm?” At Arthur's nod, he turned to Draco and asked for his report.

“I have people talking to the prisoners now, Harry, but we're hampered by their illnesses. Nothing can really be done until they're well enough to talk. Also, I need to know what you want done with the Quislings?”

Harry blinked at the unfamiliar term. “Quislings?”

“It's a muggle term, Harry,” offered Hermione. “During the muggle Second World War, there was a government official who cooperated with the enemy, a traitor. His last name was Quisling. As it turns out, the muggle war was actually the wizard war against Grindelwald and Quisling was really a traitor wizard. Both muggles and Wizards use the term.”

Harry nodded his thanks, then turned back to Draco. “Do you really expect to find any?”

“We already have testimony from several individuals concerning two Quislings. One is supposedly guilty of causing the deaths of several prisoners.”

Harry frowned and looked down at his desk for a moment. “Very well. When you obtain testimony concerning one of these people, turn it over to Michael O'Dalley so it can be treated as a criminal case.”

He shook his head then and looked up. “I'm reluctant to build a prison here in Haven. Besides, I don't think we have the authority to do so. Amelia, we're going to have to talk to the Irish about housing our prisoners until we can get them in our own prisons back home. Legally, only small parts of Haven are considered British soil - the Ministry building and the Ops Center to be specific. We can't hold these people, at least, not legally.

“Draco, have the healers given you any time frame for interviewing all the prisoners?”

Draco consulted his notes for a moment. “Some are capable of talking to us now, but others will take several weeks. To be honest, I was surprised when Amelia brought up the Wizengamot, only because so many of it's members that we did rescue are seriously ill. I wouldn't expect any attempt to rebuild a Wizengamot for at least a month or more.”

Harry nodded in understanding, then turned to O'Dalley. "Michael, I know Draco's people will point out what you should be looking at, but make sure you double check everything. I don't want someone to be accused of something they didn't do."

"We would have done that anyway, my Lord," Michael said with quiet dignity.

Harry grimaced. "I'm sorry. I know you'll do a fine job, Michael. You always do. I did not mean to cast any doubt on your performance," he said apologetically.

"I understand, my Lord," Michael told him, smiling.

Harry turned back to Draco. "Do you have anything more to add?"

"No, that about covers it. I'll keep you updated on the rescued prisoners, but I don't expect to have much until they're better."

Harry turned to Caleb next and watched the man pull out a large envelope and removed several files from it.

"We've scheduled a service for the twenty-four we lost," Caleb said quietly. "The service will be held at Memorial Lake at dusk in three days time. We lucked out on the six who were critically injured. It looks like they'll survive. Most of the other injured have been released from the hospital."

He paused as several people in the room breathed a sigh of relief. Several whispered prayers for those lost.

Once the moment had passed, Caleb continued. "We'll be holding a post mission debriefing and analysis starting at thirteen-hundred today. There were several critical flaws in our plan that could have turned against us..."

"Yes, the guard shift turn over and the number of Dementors for a start," Harry murmured.

Caleb shot Harry a grateful glance. His comments were neutral, assigning blame to no one. "Finally, Miles asked me to hold down the fort for him for a day or two. He's feeling a little under the weather."

Arthur snorted and everyone turned to look at him. "Under the weather? That's a fine way of saying he nearly collapsed after the end of the mission."

Harry frowned. "Are you suggesting he's too ill to continue with his duties, Arthur?"

Arthur looked confused for a moment, then started to squirm under Harry's intense gaze. "I don't honestly know, Harry. It could have been extreme fatigue."

Harry looked around at the faces surrounding him and pondered his options, which, to be honest, were quite few. He couldn't ask Miles to step aside, and he owed the man a huge debt.

He stood then and walked to the window. He glanced outside for a moment before turning back to the group. "I don't like this. I owe Miles. Many of us here do. Caleb, I'll ask you to keep an eye on him and help him if he needs it. However, I won't ask him to step aside unless I know for sure his health is in jeopardy."

Caleb looked relieved.

"Is there anything else then?" Harry asked of everyone.

Caleb looked down at his notes. "Yes, concerning that issue we discussed? If you still want to go through with it, we're ready to start this Monday."

Harry's danced wickedly and he wore a feral smile. "Excellent. I'll alert the participating parties to be there at the appropriate time. Now, if that's all? I still have a morning training session to attend and a few things to look up before the afternoon mission debrief."

Hermione looked at Harry sharply. She could tell he was hiding something from her. By mutual agreement they decided not to explore each others minds without express permission. He didn't mind her poking around, but he had set aside one area she was not allowed to enter and she knew it was the place he kept things he didn't want her to know. She had used a similar technique herself.

"*What are you up to, Harry?*" Hermione sent him silently as the others filed from the room.

"*Oh, nothing much love. I'm just avoiding a repeat of something,*" he replied with too much smugness for her comfort.

Hermione scowled and knew she wouldn't get it out of him until he was ready. That was one big difference between Harry and her father. According to her mother, her father couldn't keep a secret to save his life. She could always wheedle it out of him, or bribe it out of him. When Harry decided to keep something secret, it stayed that way. She watched as he packed up a few books and walked from the room, whistling off-key.

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## Hogwarts Castle...

While Harry was entering the Haven Operations Briefing Theater for a analysis of what went right, and what went wrong on Operation Breakout, another meeting was about to begin. This meeting had a more sinister purpose.

Voldemort glanced up from his throne when the doors opened and Mulciber walked into the hall. He bowed low, then clapped his hands together.

The Dark Lord raised an astonished eyebrow at his audacity, but said nothing. Through the doors walked several masked Death Eaters who were

leading a group of sixteen badly bruised and broken looking men. A rope was tied around their necks. The men were lead to stand directly behind Mulciber.

"What is the meaning of this, Mulciber?" demanded Voldemort. One of the tethered men moaned in fear and nearly fainted. A guard hit him with a club, causing the man to cry out.

Mulciber bowed lower. "My Lord, these things have failed you... They are all that is left of the guard force that protected your island prison at Azkaban. Two days ago the island was attacked and most of the prisoners were freed by forces led by Harry Potter."

Voldemort bolted to his feet. "My Prison? Potter! *Avada Kedavra!*" he shouted, pointing his wand at one of the tethered men. The green bolt struck the man and he collapsed to the ground, his eyes unseeing, dead.

Mulciber cowered on the floor and hoped these men would be enough to deflect his Master's wrath.

"Explain, Mulciber!" snarled Voldemort as he glared at the fifteen remaining men.

"We are still trying to find out details, my Lord, but as near as we can determine a group of British Ministry Aurors, lead by Harry Potter, attacked the prison at dawn two days ago. We first learned that something was wrong when the duty shift boats didn't return yesterday. A team was sent out to investigate. The island is heavily damaged. The northern one-third of the island from the Holding Center to the boat docks has been totally destroyed. The Holding Center was the scene of a large battle and all the prisoners were freed from the island. The fortress was untouched although, as you can see from the men behind me, these are all that remain of the guard force. We are unable to account for any of the Dementors that were stationed on the island. We've found nearly a hundred cloaks, but there's no sign of the Dementors."

The Dark Lord stood quietly, absorbing all that Mulciber had said. Then he walked towards the remains of his guard force and examined them.

"Send these... failures down to Severus. He will know what to do with them. In the meantime, this must not be allowed to happen again! See that all the prisoners in the fortress are brought to Hogwarts and put extra guards on the other wizard camps," Voldemort said finally, then he turned and stalked back to his throne.

Relieved, Mulciber motioned for the former guards to be taken away. Then he turned and bowed again to the Dark Lord. When he stood up straight once more, Voldemort launched a bone pulverizing hex at his legs. The Death Eater howled in pain and collapsed to the floor as his legs bones turned to a powder.

"I do not tolerate failure, Mulciber. Learn from this experience!" Voldemort snapped, his eyes glowing red in the dimly lit hall. "Now leave!"

Mulciber whimpered and started the long crawl from the Great Hall.

"Summon Lucius!" Voldemort snapped to another Death Eater. The man, in his haste to leave his Lord's presence, never noticed when he stepped on Mulciber's hand, breaking several more bones.

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### **Haven Operations Center (August 29th)...**

Harry stood on the platform and looked at his friends. Next to him stood Neville and Draco, both of whom were smiling smugly at the rest.

Looking up at him were Hermione, Ginny, Luna, Tonks, Remus, Dan and Emma.

Harry took a step forward. "Last week we had a bit of a problem because some of you didn't like the fact that you weren't on the island with the three of us. Well, today's your chance to change that. Before I continue, however, I'm going to offer you one chance at a way out. If you don't want to undergo the training that Neville, Draco and I have undergone, now is the time to say it. Just remember, don't complain to me if you're left watching the grass grow."

Dan and Emma exchanged a glance, and then Dan raised his hand. Harry smiled and nodded at the pair. "I didn't really expect you two to want to undergo this kind of training. Eocho and I will be beefing up your DADA training a little to compensate, but you're both excused."

Remus watched the elder Grangers leave enviously and he looked like he desperately wanted to follow them. Then he straightened his shoulders, sighed and turned back to look at Harry.

Harry grinned, a bit smug. "Ladies and Gentlemen, I want to introduce you to Gunnery Sergeant Oscar Stonefist. He was a drill instructor before being attached to the 806th Animagi Division. He'll oversee your initial training until you're able to join the rest of us in the regular ranks. Now Gunny Stonefist is a bit of a perfectionist, but I think you'll get along just fine."

His expression changed then and he grimaced at his friends. "And before any of you make the same mistake I did," Harry told them, thinking back to the hundreds of push-ups he'd had to do, "Gunny Stonefist is a Native American, not an Italian."

Harry stepped back and watched the Gunny walk out onto platform. He stood at least six and a half feet tall and couldn't have weighed less than two-hundred-fifty pounds, none of which was fat. His black eyed gaze took in each of the new recruits and his expression became more disgusted as he went down the line. Then he turned to Harry and glared at him for a moment before turning back to the group.

"Mr. Potter here has asked me to train you children," he said with a sneer. "But I think I just oughta kill you now and get it over with. I swear by my ancestor's spirits you are the sorriest looking bunch of maggots I have ever seen! Now, here's what we're going to do, boys and girls. You see that door over there? Inside you'll find lockers with your names on them. And inside those lockers you'll find your PT gear. I expect you all to be in that

gear and back out here within five minutes!"

Stonefist placed two mammoth fists on his hips and stared down at the group. All of them stood staring at him in shock

"MOVE IT!" he bellowed and the group turned and bolted for the door.

"You've got them alright, Gunny?" asked Harry.

Stonefist turned to him and grinned. "I'll handle them fine, Mr. Potter, but are you sure you want me to do this? I mean, isn't your wife in that bunch?"

"All our wives are, Gunny," answered Neville. "But they want to be able to fight alongside us."

Stonefist nodded thoughtfully. "I'll whip them into shape."

"Good enough, Gunny. Now, if you'll excuse us, we have our own training to get to," Harry said.

"Training or not, I wouldn't hang around here if you paid me to," Neville muttered just loud enough to be heard. "Ginny's going to kill me when she gets home."

"You're assuming she'll be able to move when she gets home," Draco told him. "I'm betting Luna won't be able to catch me."

Stonefist saluted and waited for his trainees to come out of the locker room. As Harry and the others walked from the room, they could hear Stonefist dressing down someone for being sloppy. The three men couldn't help but laugh. After all, they'd been through it and had lived to tell the tale.

"I'll get you for this, Harry," Hermione sent.

"Train hard, my Heart. After all, this *is* what you wanted," he replied smugly.

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### **Padfoot Manor, Later that same day...**

The manor was surprisingly quiet with so many of the Brotherhood away. Harry was sitting in the dining room eating dinner when the Grangers entered the room.

Emma raised an eyebrow when she saw Harry engrossed in a book. "Careful, Harry, or people might think you're turning into my daughter," she cautioned him.

Harry grinned and waved them to seats. Dan looked around at the empty table and frowned. "I thought they would be back by now."

"Oh, I expect they'll be back soon. They're probably plotting their revenge on Neville, Draco and me," he replied with a grin.

Emma's eyes narrowed in a manner remarkably like Hermione's. "Just what have you three done?"

Harry shrugged. "We gave them what they asked for. We're sending them through the same training that we through so they can join us on the battlefield if they wish. The first couple days will be rough on them, but they'll adjust. If you think they had it bad, imagine what I had to go through. No one allowed me to sit out the exercises when my leg hurt. Because of the way I run, I ended up setting the obstacle course record - for the longest time ever recorded..."

He trailed off when the door to the dining room opened and the rest of the Brotherhood staggered in, looking rather beat. Seeing the look on Hermione's face, he very wisely refrained from commenting out loud.

*"Dobby will be here in a moment with a potion, love. It will help ease the aches in your muscles. Winky is already getting your bath ready. Have a light meal and go relax for a while."*

"You went through this?"

*"I did, and never would have been able to get through it without your help with my leg."*

Hermione winced, remembering all the days he came home with his leg hurting.

*"If it's any consolation, my Heart, within a week you'll find that it hurts less. It's the first couple of days that are really bad."*

Hermione sat heavily on her chair next to Harry and smiled weakly at him. Dobby appeared a minute later with potions for the others.

"Dobby has a potion that will make you feel better. I suggest you drink it, then have a light meal. After dinner, go for a hot soak. I have the elves preparing your baths even now," Harry told them, smiling wryly.

Around the table people groaned and strained against complaining muscles to look at him.

"That's not a bad idea," Tonks said wearily. "I used to do the same when I was at the Auror academy." When Remus groaned, she snickered. "Just remember dear. You *wanted* to do this."

Remus quickly discovered how painful it was to glare at his wife, let alone argue with her. Being the wise man he was, he decided to save his energy for more important tasks, such as eating his meal.

Harry waited until Hermione had eaten before he stood up.

"Are you ready?" he sent to her.

"I suppose, but to be honest, right now one of the couches on the first floor sounds mighty inviting."

Harry chuckled and pulled her into an embrace, then he apparated the both of them upstairs to their bedroom.

Hermione smiled against his chest and nearly purred. "Happiness is a husband who can apparate us both when I'm too tired."

"Don't worry, a week or two of this and you won't be coming home exhausted. Now, get undressed. Your bath is waiting."

"Are you joining me?"

Harry smiled and shook his head ruefully at her. "I'd like to, but I doubt you're up to that sort of entertainment tonight. However, I'll give you a nice massage when you come out if you want."

Once stripped of her clothing, Hermione smiled to herself and walked into the bathroom naked. She knew Harry would watch her and she had nothing against teasing him a little.

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### **British Ministry of Magic, Haven (August 30th)...**

Dobby appeared in the small mail room and looked around, expecting to see the usual clerks on duty. He blinked his large eyes in surprise at finding the room empty. Shrugging, he walked over to the bin set aside for Harry's mail. Reaching in he pulled out the mail and one large package addressed to Hermione. It was then that he spotted the letter on the floor behind the bin. He picked it up as well and put it on the pile.

With mail to deliver, he vanished with a small pop.

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### **Padfoot Manor, Harry's study...**

Harry held the door open for Hermione who was still a little sore from yesterday. She didn't have to return to the Operations Center until noon, something for which she was very thankful. As per her routine every morning, she checked the mail, handing off to Harry what he needed to see. This morning she was surprised to find a small package sitting on top of the mail pile.

She walked over and pulled the package off of the pile. All mail had been screened for harmful hexes, portkeys and the like, but the package could have other spells on it. Placing the package on the floor, she ran a scan of it. Harry watched her with no small amount of amusement from his desk.

Hermione's brows knitted for a moment, then she cast a "finite" on the package, canceling the shrinking spell. The package grew into a huge crate, nearly six feet on a side. Hermione stepped back in surprise, then she reached for the packaging list attached to the side of the crate. Opening it, she found a letter from Sheik Alim Hosary, the Egyptian Minister for Magical Antiquities.

*My Dear Lord and Lady Potter,*

*Even as I write this letter, news of your exploits in rescuing your countrymen are echoing through the halls of Government here and in the other Arab Ministries. You have rocked the world and shaken the belief that Voldemort is unstoppable to its very roots. It is no wonder that the comic book version of 'Harry Potter, the Autobiography' has become one of the best selling books to children in our region.*

*My Lady, as I promised, a survey of the Library uncovered nearly fifteen hundred volumes of lore pertaining to the Celtic and Druid cultures from the pre-Christian era. Inside the crate you will find shrunken copies of these volumes, along with a list of translation charms that can be used. I hope you will accept this humble gift from one who admires what you and your husband are trying to do.*

*It is my sincere hope that this finds you both in good health and that you remain that way for many years to come. May God look favorably on your work.*

*Yours,*

*Alim Hosary*

*Minister of Magical Antiquities.*

Hermione looked at the big crate rapturously. She shuffled over to a chair and sat down.

"Hermione?"

"Hmmm?"

"What's the matter?"

"Books, Harry, wonderful books," she replied in an eerie, Luna-like voice.

Harry scanned the letter from the Sheik and nodded. "Alright, you start unpacking those books. I'll go through the rest of the mail."

Harry leaned across his desk and grabbed the pile of mail and began to leaf through it. He went through nearly twenty letters before finding one that made him stop everything.

*Potter,*

*I know this letter had to take a circuitous route to get to you, but that's alright. It just gives my people more time to play. You will never believe what I've found. It wasn't easy, but we've found your dear cousin, Dudley. Your aunt and uncle, I'm afraid, suffered a more ignominious death. Can you believe it? Someone actually forgot to feed them when her Majesty's prisons were abandoned. What a pity.*

*Now, to the matter at hand. We've managed to obtain the services of a defrocked healer who took more pleasure in inflicting pain than he did in healing it. Our good healer is now teaching Dudley a lesson and I'm told his screams can be heard all over Surrey. We thought it would be ironic if he were tortured in your old home.*

*Here's the deal, Potter. If you want to see your precious muggle cousin again, you will drop the ward around the country and come to Little Whining in person. You can bring a portkey with you to send him out of the country, if you wish. And I'll give you my oath as a wizard that he'll be allowed to leave alive. This offer is only good until the thirty-first of August, then we'll kill him and send you the pieces.*

*Lucius Malfoy*

*Supreme Muggle Authority of Britain*

Harry read the letter a second time as he brought up his full Occlumency shields. He felt a rage building up within that was almost as bad as what he'd felt when he destroyed the Ministry building back in April. Crumpling up the letter in one fist and threw it violently into the trash bin. Swearing sulfurously under his breath, he stormed from the room, leaving a bewildered Hermione behind.

She sat stunned for a moment. She had been caught off guard when Harry closed the link between them so suddenly and completely. He had never closed it before, but now there was nothing, as if he had ceased to exist. Frightened, she scrambled to the trash bin and retrieved the parchment he had thrown away. It had obviously been the cause of his strange reaction.

As she read the letter, she paled. Still holding it in her trembling hands, she called for him again and again over the bond, but she couldn't feel any response. Assuming the worst, she ran from the study, still clutching the deadly letter in her hand.

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### **Haven Operations Center, Miles' Office...**

Miles looked up from the parchment he was reading when the door opened and Hermione rushed in. He was still dreadfully pale, but he was slowly recovering, at least he thought he was.

"Hermione?" asked the aging former Unspeakable.

"Harry got this letter this morning," Hermione said, thrusting the parchment under his nose without any preamble.

Miles took the letter from her hand and started to read as Hermione paced in the room. Finally he looked up from the letter, the worry obvious in his expression.

"Harry tossed that letter into the trash bin, then stormed from the office. I don't know where he is. He's completely shut down the link between us, so I can't even feel him anymore," Hermione said in a tremulous voice, then she collapsed in a chair, trying not to give into the wave of grief she was feeling. The loss of the link confused and hurt her. She knew Harry could hide things from her, but she couldn't understand the total and complete silence he had imposed between them.

"You don't think he's gone to Surrey, do you?" asked Miles incredulously.

Hermione waved a hand weakly in his direction. "I don't know, Miles. He's gone somewhere."

Miles frowned and suppressed a wince as the pain in his stomach flared to life again. He pressed a button on his desk and a moment later an aide opened his door.

"Please ask Caleb Newman to join us as soon as possible," Miles said. The aide nodded and left the room.

Caleb arrived a few minutes later. He was surprised to see Hermione, but he turned to Miles and waited.

"Caleb, I think we're going to need to mount a quick and dirty assault," Miles said, passing the note over to Caleb. "It's possible that Lord Potter has gone off to save his cousin. It's undoubtedly a trap of some sort. I want you to assemble two combat squads and insert them into Little Whining as quickly as you can."

Caleb blinked at Miles in shock. This was an uncharacteristically heavy first response. The first thing they should be doing is sending in elf scouts to determine exactly what the situation was, not rushing in.

Hermione listened to Miles and her eyes grew wider as she came to understand the potential danger Harry was in.

"Miles..." Caleb started.

Miles glared at him. "You have your orders, Caleb. If you can't carry them out, I'll find someone who can."

Caleb stared at Miles in astonished shock for a moment, then he nodded. "We'll be off in less than twenty minutes, Miles, but I want to go on record right here and now and say you're making a huge mistake with this," he said in a hard tone. He tossed the letter down on the desk, spun on his heel and left the office.

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### **Derreenataggart West, Overlooking Castletown...**

Harry sat on the portal stone within the stone circle. This was the source, the fount of the Brotherhood. He had fled the manor to this place, all the while trying to control the rage that had built up within him. As soon as he realized what was happening, he'd cut his connection to Hermione. He did not want to subject her to the madness that threatened to consume him. Or for her to feel the deep shame that accompanied the rage.

Why he came to this place in particular he couldn't say. His first impulse was to go someplace where he could blow something up. He even briefly toyed with the idea of portkeying into Hogwarts and trying to destroy the place, but he knew he wasn't ready to face Voldemort yet. Besides, he still hoped in his heart that they would be able to reclaim the castle someday and return it to its original purpose - a school for Wizarding children.

And so he left the manor, apparating with no clear cut destination in mind, to end up here, at the birthplace of the modern Brotherhood. It was a sobering thought and caused much of his anger to dissipate. Sitting atop the portal stone, he watched the ships out on the ocean for a long time. The sight was soothing.

Harry hopped off the stone and stepped into the middle of the circle where he sat on the cool damp grass and proceeded to use his Occlumency to center himself. He needed to find the source of this anger and burn it away. The fact that such rage still continued to plague him shamed him deeply.

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### **Number Four Privet Drive, Little Whining, Surrey...**

A bleaker landscape could not be found in all of Britain. Little Whining had been razed to the ground, first by loyalist elements of the British Army fighting with Voldemort's controlled forces, then again by the Death Eaters in a gesture of contempt for Harry Potter.

Privet Drive consisted largely of a street bracketed by ruins on both sides. Most of the homes were mere burnt out shells, except for number four. Number four looked like it always did, spotless and untouched by the devastation around it. The home had been destroyed in the battle and resulting firestorm, but Lucius Malfoy had seen to it's repair and reconstruction as part of his overall plan.

Caleb and his men arrived in the park roughly one mile away from Privet Drive and made their way towards the target building. Caleb was extremely tense. The target could be easily seen, even from this distance with so many other buildings having collapsed. There was a lot of low cover, but not a lot of high cover, which made moving up on the target difficult at best.

Caleb and the assault team were just coming off Wisteria walk onto Privet drive when the ambush hit. He was confused at first when several of the Americans on the team started shouting to find cover. The whumping noise in the distance didn't mean much to him. Then the area around them all began to fountain with explosions, rocks and debris.

"COVER!" Caleb shouted as he ducked behind a small piece of brickwork still standing. He motioned to one of his Americans. He didn't understand the explosions, or the noise in the distance.

"Mortars, Sir! They're shooting at us from over a thousand yards away," came the shouted reply.

Caleb looked around and made his decision. Miles might not approve, but to hell with him.

"Portkeys! Return to Haven!" he shouted, then he ducked as a nearby explosion showered him with more rocks. He glanced up in time to see Death Eaters pour from Number Four and start firing curses at his men. Turning, he spotted one of his medics run up to a fallen Auror and slap down an emergency portkey... and nothing happened.

Caleb swore under his breath, then he tried to apparate, but failed. They were trapped under several wards, including anti-portkey and anti-apparation.

"FLOO! FLOO!" he shouted. A man ran up to Caleb carrying the bulky device. He snatched the portable floo out of his hands and pressed the lever to release the floo powder.

"Op Center, this is Charlie One Six. We're trapped under wards and are pinned down, unable to retreat or move forward. We are taking both muggle heavy weapons and wizard fire. Request assistance to enable a breakout."

Caleb ducked again and cursed when he saw the man who'd given him the floo lying in the street, both legs torn off below the knees.

"Medic! Medic!" he shouted.

He glance up to see what was obviously their target. Dudley Dursley stood in front of the house among a large group of wizards. One stood behind Dudley, holding a wand to his head. Dudley lifted a rifle to his shoulder and began looking for targets. His face had the characteristic blank look of someone under the *Imperio* us curse.

Crouched next to Caleb was one of his Americans. The man had taken a bad hit to the shoulder, but was still casting shields and hexes at the

enemy. The man paused and looked at him in fear as another sound slowly rose in volume. Caleb looked confused at the clanking sound.

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### **The War Room, Haven Operations Center...**

Miles looked up at the sound of Caleb's voice and he experienced a profound dizziness. A wave of nausea washed over him as everyone in the room looked to him to make a decision. Miles stood up unsteadily from his chair, then staggered a few feet before vomiting blood all over the floor. Someone screamed for a healer and the room spun crazily for a second, then he collapsed into unconsciousness.

There was a moment of total silence and the clerks and aides all looked at each other, aghast. They had a mission in the field that looked to be in serious trouble and no one available to give orders. One of the map girls bolted from the room, looking for the healer they kept on station in the Op Center. Finally, another aide said he was going to go find either Lord Potter or the Minister.

Meanwhile, the messages from Charlie One became more and more frantic as Op Center remained off the air.

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### **Padfoot Manor...**

When Harry returned to the manor house, he immediately sought out Eocho. With help from Dobby, Harry found him out behind the manor, near the pool. He had been instructing the Grangers outside and had just finished.

"Honored Teacher," Harry said in a quiet voice, stepping up to the spectral Druid.

Eocho looked carefully at Harry, frowning. "I feel your disquiet, Maglios. What bothers you?"

Harry sat and explained to Eocho about the letter he had received, and how, despite the brutality, Dudley was the last living link, other than himself, to his mother's family. He explained the anger he felt, and where he went, spending several hours in quiet contemplating.

Eocho nodded understandingly. "This is a significant step for you, Maglios, You controlled the beast within. You shall never truly escape it, for it is part of you. But controlling it is a great step... I am troubled, however, by you cutting yourself off from your mate. She is one of the sources of your strength, perhaps the greatest source."

Harry hung his head and tried to frame a reply to his teacher. "I realize that, Honored Teacher, but I did not want her to experience my anger, or my shame for having such feelings..."

Harry was interrupted by the arrival of a Haven Elf who snapped off a perfect salute at him. "SIR! His Sneakiness, Commander Draco Black, insists you come to the Operations Center right away, SIR!"

Harry and Eocho exchanged a glance, then Harry stood and bowed slightly to Eocho. "Honored Teacher, perhaps we can continue this conversation later? This evening, perhaps?"

With Eocho's agreement, Harry vanished, apparating to the Ops Center.

A moment after Harry vanished, Hermione came running out of the manor looking for him. Eocho waved for her to slow down.

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### **Haven Operations Center...**

Harry appeared just outside of Miles' office and was about to enter when he heard someone shout out his name. Turning, he could see Draco running towards him.

"Harry! It's a bloody mess! Miles has taken ill and we've got a complete muckup of a mission going down right now. Caleb's the mission commander, which means you're the next in command," Draco said breathlessly as he skidded to a halt next to him.

"Mission? There's no mission scheduled for today! Hell, there's no mission scheduled at all!" protested Harry.

Draco tugged on Harry, trying to drag him to the War room. "I don't know all the details, but we have two squads trapped and taking muggle and wizard fire in Surrey."

Harry skidded to a halt and stared at Draco for a moment. "Surrey? A town called Little Whining?"

Draco nodded, astonished that Harry would know so much about a mission he claimed wasn't happening.

Harry's eyes flared hotly. "The squads are trapped under wards, right?"

Draco nodded dumbly at him.

"Damn that woman!" Harry growled, then he turned and kicked the wall. He closed his eyes for a moment taking a few calming breaths. Then he turned back to Draco.

"Draco, until I get back, or Caleb relieves you, you are in charge. Get some elves out to Surrey – now! I want magic all over the place to cover me. Alert the hospital. We'll probably be coming back with wounded," he said, then he vanished.



Draco shook his head and wondered how the heck he was going to tell anyone that he was in charge. Squaring his shoulders, he took off in the direction of the War Room.

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### Little Whining, Surrey...

Harry arrived in the little park off Wisteria walk and immediately crouched down and cast an invisibility spell. It was something learned from Echo and sufficiently different from modern spells to make him undetectable.

With a deft flip of his wrist, his staff flew into his grasp and expanded to its normal size. He looked around carefully. He could hear the sounds of fighting. Not far from where he stood he watched as a British Centurion tank slowly made its way over the rubble. The tank was clawing in the direction of Privet Drive, and he knew that couldn't be allowed.

With a silent invocation and a wave of his staff, the street in front of the tank turned into a muddy bog. Almost immediately the tank started to dig itself into the mud rather than move forward. It was well and truly trapped.

With the tank out of the way, Harry moved carefully towards Privet drive with his senses fully extended. He had to find the edge of the trapping wards before he could bring them down. Crouching low next to a broken brick wall, he said a silent prayer of thanks when the sky over all of Surrey lit up with magic. Draco's elves were providing enough of a diversion that his magic wouldn't be easily spotted.

Harry was slowly making his way towards the intersection of Privet and Wisteria when he stopped. Some wards, even with his enhanced Aura sight, could be difficult to find. He could detect the faint outline of a powerful ward only a few yards ahead and he crept closer to it.

When he was close enough, he reached out and touched the ward. His magic flared brightly. "Ego to order illa moenia occumbo!" he murmured, his voice laced with power. There was a moment of stillness, then his hand flared briefly. The ward sizzled and snapped as its power shattered into millions of shards of glowing energy before fading out.

Harry wiped his sweaty brow and took a deep breath. *That ward was a lot stronger than I expected it to be*, he thought. *Could the assault squads be up against a rite enhanced wizard?*

He inched up on the second ward and brought it down a few minutes later.

Caleb crouched lower against the wall and cursed. Op-Center had finally gotten back to him, telling him that help was on the way, and the approaching tank or machine or whatever it was had stopped making that awful clanking sound. Then the sky lit up with magic from all four major compass points. But as far as he was concerned, help still hadn't arrived.

When a body suddenly jumped into the shallow hole he was in, Caleb nearly fired a crushing hex. When he realized who was in the hole with him, he stared in astonishment.

"Hi! I heard you ran into a spot of trouble," Harry said cheekily. It took all of Caleb's willpower to suppress his urges at that point. He didn't know whether to strangle Harry, or hug him.

"The wards are down?" Caleb asked carefully.

"Down and gone, so how about getting our wounded home?"

Caleb turned and whistled sharply. A medic ran up to the wounded man sharing Caleb's wall and slapped a portkey on him. A moment later, he was gone. Caleb noted it was the wounded American.

"So, what is the situation?" Harry shouted over the sound of exploding mortars.

"We got pinned down here under anti-apparation and anti-portkey wards. Your cousin is about fifty yards up the road and under an *Imperio* us curse from the looks of it. He's the one shooting at us using a rifle. I had planned to get everyone out of here, but now that you're here, if you want to bring out your cousin, we can try," Caleb replied loudly in Harry's ear.

"What's our strength?" Harry shouted back.

"Less than fifty percent!"

Harry frowned and poked his head over the wall. His eyes narrowed and he shot a cutting hex at the wizard holding Dudley under wand point. The curse arced out over the battlefield, hitting the wizard a little higher than Harry had planned. The man screamed in agony as the cutting hex sliced away the man's arm at the shoulder.

"Nice shot," commented Caleb.

Harry sent Caleb a quick grin, then he turned back to where the other wizards were clustered. Dudley stood out in the open, shaking his head as the curse faded away. He dropped the rifle and looked at it in surprise.

"*Accio Dudley!*" Harry shouted, then he waited until just the last moment before standing. He caught Dudley and spun before dropping below the brick wall again. Harry stared at Dudley and released him almost immediately. He didn't want to rescue his cousin, but he had been forced into taking this action. Dudley blinked in surprise, while Harry turned back to the wall and Caleb.

Lets get the hell outta..."

Caleb's eyes bulged as Dudley, in a single, fluid motion, climbed to his knees, pulled out a nine millimeter handgun from underneath his shirt and fired two round at close range into Harry's back.

"Die, you freak!" Dudley shouted. He pulled the trigger again, then gaped when the gun jammed.

"Avada Kedavra!" shouted four of Caleb's men.

All four curses hit their target, spinning Dudley around. He was dead before he hit the ground.

Harry's eyes widened in shock, the closed slowly as he slumped against the wall.

A medic jumped into the hole to help, but before he could do anything, the medallion Harry wore activated, whisking him away.

The medic stared at the empty space, then at Caleb in anguish. "Where'd he go?" the man shouted.

"Charlie One, Portkey retreat!" Caleb shouted, then watched as his men activated their own portkeys. He took a quick count, then glanced over to the body of Dudley Dursley. Had he the time, he would have gladly set it on fire. Grabbing his own portkey, he vanished from the field.

Charlie One had taken heavy losses, perhaps the heaviest loss of all.

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### **Padfoot Manor...**

Hermione paced in the sitting room set aside for her and Harry. Her parents had joined her a short while ago. After talking to Eocho she discovered that Harry had not gone to Surrey like she'd originally thought. But floo calls to the Operations Center for Harry went unanswered and none of the Haven elves knew where he was. She tried calling Dobby, but remembered that he was helping Neville with an important replanting in one of the greenhouses and couldn't be disturbed.

"Hermione, dear, what is your problem today? It seems like you're unable to sit for more than a minute before you start pacing again," Emma said.

Dan frowned and looked at his daughter, wondering if she was pregnant.

Hermione stopped and stared at her parents, then she wrung her hands together. "I think I made a horrible mistake today... Something terrible is happening, I can feel it..."

Then she paled so quickly her parents stood in alarm. The link to Harry opened and for a brief moment she rejoiced before she realized that he was unconscious. Her knees gave out and Dan leaped forward catching her in his arms. "Harry, no!" she gasped aloud, then clung to her father.

Both Dan and Emma exchanged worried looks, then paled when the alarm, indicating a medical emergency, started ringing throughout the manor. Hermione broke from Dan's arms and rushed for the door, her parents close behind.

Remus and Tonks were standing in the grand foyer when the front door burst open and Danni McNeil rushed in. Part of the house alarm system alerted Danni that she was needed. She made a beeline for the stairs to the basement, and the room where the medallions delivered the wounded. Remus and Tonks followed her with Hermione close behind them.

Danni rushed into the receiving room and spotted Harry lying on the floor, bleeding heavily from a large wound in his chest. Danni reached into her kit and pulled out a portkey. She looked up as the others arrived. Hermione skidded into the Remus' back and, seeing Harry, she cried out in anguish.

"I'm taking him to the hospital. Meet us there," Dan said calmly before she vanished, taking Harry with her.

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### **Haven Hospital...**

The doors to the emergency room entrance opened admitting Hermione, her parents, Remus and Tonks. None of them had any idea of what was really going on, only that Harry appeared to be seriously injured. Hermione skidded to a stop in the waiting room, surprised to see Caleb Newman sitting in one of the chairs.

Caleb looked up at Hermione and frowned at her. Then he stood and walked over to where she stood with her parents.

"It was a trap, like we knew it would be," Caleb said angrily. "I lost more than half my men. Twelve dead and another ten injured. If Harry hadn't shown up to break through the wards, we would have been slaughtered. Then his own fucking cousin shot him."

Remus looked up in surprise. "Shot? Harry's been shot? What in the name of the nine hells is going on here?"

"Ask her," Caleb growled, pointing at Hermione.

"Harry got a letter from Lucius Malfoy. He was holding Dudley Dursley hostage and offered him freedom in exchange for Harry." Hermione said weakly.

Remus frowned. "So? Harry would have just ignored the letter. I know he hates Dudley, not enough to do anything to him personally, but he wouldn't

lift a finger to save him, either.”

“Harry did ignore it. I... I brought the letter to Miles, who mounted a rescue mission,” Hermione told him.

Remus turned to stare at her. “How could you?” he demanded angrily. “You of all people should have understood. You're bonded to him! How could you have been so stupid? Merlin! I thought you were smarter than this, Hermione!”

Seeing Hermione wilt under Remus' verbal assault, Dan placed an arm around her. “Remus, you're not being fair. We don't know the whole story yet. Besides, what Hermione did was the right thing, the Christian thing to do.”

“He's not a Christian!” Remus exclaimed, furious. “He wasn't brought up as a Christian! The Dursleys denied him even that! The only thing Harry understands about Christians is what little he's learned from Hermione, and the years of persecution they've inflicted on us Wizards. They're the reason we rarely mix with muggles, for Merlin's sake!”

Remus stopped and calmed himself with a visible effort. Then, moving closer to Hermione, he looked into her eyes. “Use that vaunted intelligence that you're famous for and ask yourself this question. Would Harry really want to help those people? Especially after all they've done to him?” he asked in a gentler tone.

Hermione shook her head and clung to her father.

“It's time for you to start looking before you leap, Hermione. Harry's learning to control his impulsiveness. You, however, are not and it may cost Harry his life. This is the second time you've nearly killed him. What more will it take for you to become more circumspect?”

Remus straightened and looked at Dan. He had said what needed to be said, and if he had been harsh, he felt he was justified, under the circumstances.

If Harry survived, the rest was up to Hermione. She could either take his words as they were meant and modify her behavior, or continue to jeopardized Harry's life and everything he was trying to do by acting so impetuously.

“What now?” Dan asked.

Remus ran a tired hand through his silvery hair and shrugged, then he sat on a chair heavily. “We wait,” he said with an explosive breath. Tonks sat next to him and grabbed his hand. He glance over at her, then leaned into her. She wrapped both arms around him, giving him the reassurance he craved.

Dan guided Hermione to a seat not far from Remus and made her sit. Emma sat next to her and pulled her into an embrace.

Slowly, other members of the Brotherhood joined them in waiting room. First Neville and Ginny, then Draco arrived with Luna and Narcissa. Each gave and received what comfort they could from each other.

Hours dragged on.

Finally, Danni walked out one of the doors, looking very tired. With her was an older woman with graying hair, also dressed in healer green. Danni looked around, then pointed in Hermione's direction and led the way to weeping young woman.

“Lady Potter?” asked the older healer.

Hermione looked up at her and wiped the tears from her eyes before nodding.

“I'm Sylvia August, chief healer for Haven Hospital.”

“How is he?” asked Hermione. It was a question everyone wanted an answer to, and all were fearful of the reply.

“I won't pull any punches. He's in serious condition, having undergone five hours of magical surgery to rebuild parts of his lung and rib cage. His youth and strength are factors in his favor. He was shot at close range by a muggle handgun, a real nasty piece of work, if you don't mind me saying. But we've managed to piece him back together.”

Hermione closed her eyes and whispered a prayer of thanks. Around her, the others did the same.

“When can I see him?” she asked.

Healer August frowned. “He's in a magical coma right now and we don't intend to lift it until tomorrow noon, at the earliest. You can come back then and sit with him if you like, but I don't really expect him to awaken until the day after tomorrow. Our biggest worry right now is infection and making sure his damaged lung continues to supply him with enough oxygen. But I can assure you, we have someone with him at all times.”

Hermione looked over at her parents, her expression one of bewilderment.

“Dear, we'll come back tomorrow,” Emma suggested.

Hermione nodded mutely, while Dan stood and thanked the two healers. Danni pressed a potion bottle into his hand. “For Hermione. It will help her sleep,” she whispered.

Dan nodded his thanks, helped Hermione to her feet, sighed and shook his head. A lot of angry words had been spoken and he was sure it was

only the beginning. *This is the last thing we need*, he thought. *We need to work together, not fight with each other.*

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## Authors Notes:

Hi Guys! I bet you were expecting this file in a month. SUPRISE!!!

It's time once again for the dreaded Authors notes. Where we inflict upon you, our dear readers, our caustic wit, our raging sarcasm and our bottled water. (BUY BOB'S WATER, IT'S CLEAN, AND IT TASTES LIKE WATER!)

OK We'd like to thank everyone in Wales that kindly pointed out that they have an east coast, not a west coast. It gets a little confusing if you ask me. From Wales, we are west of them, but from us, they are east of us. I think they need to get their act together.

Ummm to the person wanting to know if we'd see Dudley again, the answer is yes. He appears in a brief cameo before shuffling off to his new career as a cruise ship entertainment director. He'll not appear again in this series even if he remains a subject of debate.

A personal note to Sterling who proceeded to explain in great detail how much he disliked our characterization of Ron and Dumbledore in Sunset, and now, despite hating the series is back complaining about Sunrise. Sterling, there are other fan fictions you can read. I hear the Itchy and Scratchy fics are quite amusing and usually to canon.

You'll find a little more information about the Hammer of God spell in this chapter.

Are people really positive Wales has no east coast? What if way back when they goofed and West should be East and East West? For that matter how come so many things taste like chicken?

Harry's leg will continue to be an issue. Part of the reason why we are leaving it this way is because it forces us to be a little more inventive with the final battle. He does have a spell that he can use that will give him the mobility he needs. The downside of that is the longer he uses, the more permanent damage it will do to his leg. I know some of you dislike the fact that he's lame in one leg, but as Eocho put it, when your up against a stronger foe, guile is your best weapon.

Eocho's reaction to Hermione's bonding is explained in this chapter. But remember the time he is from, punishments for rule breaking were brutal in his time. He is a product of those times and while he'll eventually mellow, he can't totally forget where he's from.

I believe there is someone on our Yahoo group that is posting the files in PDF format. Check there.

The reasoning why Harry blew up part of the Island was pushed back to this chapter and is explained here. Had we not pushed it back, the chapter would have been longer than it was. As it is, this is another large chapter.

Why didn't Harry and company retake the Azkaban fortress? I had thought I made it clear at the briefing that they weren't sure what kind of defenses were in place at the fortress. Assaulting a heavily fortified position is a great way of losing your fighting force and that castle is heavily fortified.

Rob: I'd answer your review man, but first you need to send me the cliff notes on the review, or maybe I'll wait til the movie comes out.

*Bobmin*  
*FanficAuthors.net*

# Sunrise Over Britain

## Chapter 14 - Healing Conversations

### Standard Disclaimer:

Alyx grunted and found herself tied over a barrel, her bum flapping in the breeze. Bob walked over and smacked her bum using a large paddle.

“THANK YOU SIR, MAY I HAVE ANOTHER?” Alyx shouted.

Bob smirked at the studio audience and waited for the polling machines to count the votes. Finally a signboard lit up saying “Hit her again – 4057, No more – 12”

Bob smacked her bum again.

“THANK YOU SIR, MAY I HAVE ANOTHER?” Alyx shouted.

“Ya know,” Bob said conversationally, “if only you had written the disclaimer you could have avoided this. I offered it to you and you turned it down!”

“Alright dammit, I'll do the effing disclaimer!” She grumbled.

Bob leaned down and released her from the barrel. Alyx stood up for a moment, then hissed as she realized what it was like to have a flaming butt.

“Now, disclaim!” Bob commanded.

“Fine!” she snapped, then turned to the studio audience. “Excuse me,” she said sweetly.

The scene shifted and hundreds of Snapes dressed in spandex skated out onto the Skating Rink. Alyx, as mistress of ceremony pulled out a Microphone and handed it to one of the Snapes.

“The authors of this story wish to inform all people that read this story and survive the experience, that none of the Potter character belong to them. All things from the Potterverse belong to JK Rowling... And now, without further ado, we give you Snapes on Ice!”

Harry and Hermione sat down in the front row passing popcorn back and forth to each other. “This is boring,” Hermione complained. “No monsters, no cannibals, no guns or rockets!”

“Wait for it,” Harry said, then he groped Hermione who squeaked happily.

“Wait for what? You groping me?” she purred.

“No, that!” Harry said nodding at the now melted skating rink and the drowning Snapes.

Hermione leaned forward and threw a large switch that was labeled 'Do not touch'. A moment later there came a grinding noise and dorsal fins appeared in the water.

“Nice touch,” Harry commented in admiration.

“OOOO I am getting so mad at you!” Alyx growled at Bob.

Bob nodded knowingly. “Yes dear, I know.”

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### Sunrise Over Britain

#### Chapter 14

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#### Haven Hospital (August 30th)...

Amelia stepped into the room quietly. The lights were low and the occupant of the one bed snored gently before turning over on his side.

She turned when someone tapped her on the shoulder and recognized Melinda McKinney, the same healer who had been helping Terry with his injuries. Melinda motioned her out of the room and, frowning, she followed.

“I'm sorry, Minister, but I didn't want you waking my patient. He's still very tired and needs his sleep,” Melinda said.

“I assure you, Healer McKinney, I wasn't about to disturb him. I was, however, hoping to discover more about his condition.”

Melinda scowled for a moment. She didn't like releasing information to non-family members, but her patient had no living relatives, and this *was* the Minister of Magic.

Reaching for the chart that hung just outside the door, she flipped it open with a practiced flick. “Very well. Mr. Pickerton was admitted this afternoon after having collapsed at work. He is suffering from a large peptic ulcer and blood loss, both of which appear to have been brought on by stress. In

addition, he apparently hasn't been eating properly or getting enough sleep, which has only aggravated his condition.

"The ulcer has been treated with potions and has closed already. The blood loss was dealt with using blood replenishing potions. The underlying cause of these problems is beyond our control, however. He must work to reduce the stress in his life," she said, as she closed the chart and looked at the Minister.

"Damn," Amelia swore under her breath. "You're sure of your findings, Healer McKinney?"

Melinda turned frosty. "I assure, Minister, my colleagues and I agree on his course of treatment, including the issue of stress, a major factor in the formation of ulcers."

Amelia took a step backwards and flinched slightly under the healer's icy glare. "I meant no disrespect, Healer McKinney, it's just that Mr. Pickerton holds an important position in the Ministry and his loss to us will be keenly felt."

The sound of footsteps caused both the healer and Minister to turn. Coming up the hallway with a purposeful stride was Minerva McGonagall, looking very anxious.

"Good afternoon, Minister, how is Mi... Mr. Pickerton?" she asked, correcting herself.

Amelia suppressed a smile. "He is recovering, Minerva, but I fear that for his own health, we'll have to release him from his position."

Minerva's expression grew guarded, then pensive. "Really?"

Amelia studied the Headmistress carefully. She suspected that Minerva was up to something. "Of course, we'll keep him on as a consultant to advise us, but the Healers are adamant on this. He has to have a less stressful job."

Minerva smiled slightly. "If you don't mind, Minister, I think I have an idea Mil... Mr. Pickerton will agree with. It appears that the curse of the Hogwarts Defense teacher still holds sway, as I have been unable to secure a full time professor. I have several part time people here in Haven who are willing to handle specific years or topics, but are unwilling or unable to accept the position full time. I may be able to convince Mil... Mr. Pickerton to take over as head of the Defense curriculum. He'd have several teachers under him and be responsible only for sixth and seventh year classes himself."

Amelia smiled. She didn't need to be accomplished in Legilimency to see that the woman was trying to hide her feelings for Miles.

"Very well, Minerva. I'll let you explain to him that I'm putting him on one hundred twenty days leave and that we'll discuss his position with the Ministry in the future, when he's feeling better..." She paused as several healers ran past her and down the corridor.

Minerva nodded and turned to enter Miles' room, while Amelia followed the running healers, trying to find out what the emergency was.

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### **Parliament Building, London (Late evening of August 30th)...**

*Damnation!* Lucius Malfoy thought, as he took another swig from his brandy snifter. His plan was supposed to be perfect, but Potter had shown up late! And from what Hammersmith could tell, the gun had jammed! Lucius didn't even know if the damn muggle had done his job or not. Only two bullets fired? He was supposed to empty the gun into him.

Lucius snarled and spun, hurling the brandy snifter against a wall, where it shattered. A house elf popped in almost before the shards hit the ground and poured him another drink before cleaning up the mess. The little elf barely missed the foot that swung out to kick him.

A moaning sound distracted Lucius and he looked up at the far wall and smiled evilly.

"Ah, Hammersmith. I see we're awake," he said pleasantly. Smiling, he picked up a bloody knife and walked over to the man pinned to the wall.

Hammersmith was a mere shade of his former self. Lucius had been slowly torturing him since he reported the failure of his plan with Dursley. The man hung from the wall, naked and bloody, his head hanging limply. Every so often he moaned piteously. Lucius had been slicing off his fingers, one joint at a time, then cauterizing the wound with a hot iron. Soon, Lucius would start working on more vital areas, but he wanted Hammersmith to know the price of failure.

Casting a specialized hex on his knife, he began to shave the skin, layer by layer, from Hammersmith's chest. The man arched his back and screamed. Blood ran down his chest, but Lucius again cauterized the wounds with a flame spell.

"Lucius!"

Malfoy turned and looked at the fireplace, spotting Mulciber's head in the green flames.

"Ah, Mulciber, how are your legs?" Malfoy asked, sardonically.

Mulciber tried to hide his snarl. "Fine, Lucius, just fine."

Lucius placed his knife on the table and waited for a moment. When Mulciber didn't say anything, he lost his patience. "I know this isn't a social call Mulciber, and I know you're not calling to share your latest boy toy. So kindly get to the point or get your fucking head out of my sight," he said with barely concealed contempt.

Mulciber smiled thinly. "Now, now, Lucius. There's no reason to be insulting. I just thought you'd like to know that the Master was most curious when I reported the huge surge in magic over Surrey. As you are aware, the Master considers the region to be of particular interest. When I reported it was the result of one of your operations, he requested that I contact you and ask you to visit him tomorrow... with details."

Lucius paled for a moment, then nodded. "I will be pleased to meet with the Master tomorrow and explain what happened."

"Very well, Lucius, I will inform the Master," Mulciber said smugly, then he pulled back out of the fireplace and the flames returned to normal.

Lucius ground his teeth for a moment in frustrated fury before turning back Hammersmith. "If I have to report this failure, then I might as well enjoy myself until then."

Outside the Office of the Supreme Muggle Authority, the two guards stood, trying not to flinch as the screams rang out and echoed through the empty halls of Parliament.

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### **Padfoot Manor (August 31st)...**

Emma and Dan walked into the dining room still sleepy. Both had spent a restless night watching over Hermione. She had slept with the help of a potion, but it had been a restless night for her. She followed her parents into the room, still groggy from the brew.

Remus looked up and scowled angrily at her presence.

"Any word?" asked Tonks in a hushed tone.

Dan shook his head. "No, not since midnight, when they sent an elf to report that he was breathing a little easier."

The door opened and more of the Brotherhood shuffled into the room. Several looked at Hermione and she flinched back from their stares. Echo floated into the room a moment later and watched as people took their seats.

"What do we do today?" Neville asked. Ginny held onto his arm and she seemed to be on the verge of tears. Even Susan and Terry seemed to be unable to grasp what had happened.

"You do what the Maglios would want you to do," Echo said firmly. "You continue with your duties and your training."

Remus started from his seat. "You aren't seriously suggesting that we allow her to continue training with us!" he demanded, pointing at Hermione.

Dan jumped to his feet. "Now see here!"

"ENOUGH!" Echo thundered.

Hermione leaned against her mother, tears sliding down her cheeks. She refused to look anyone in the eye.

Echo's yell had silenced everyone and his quick frown had Dan and Remus returning to the seats. He then drifted over to stand behind Hermione, where he glared at everyone.

"Now is not a time for divisiveness! What happened, happened because the Maglios made an error, and then his mate compounded that error." Echo sighed and drifted towards the head of the table.

"When the ransom note arrived, the Maglios became enraged and it shamed him greatly. He instinctively shut off his link with his mate because he didn't want her to feel the madness raging within him. He left the manor and returned to our source, the holy place of Derreenataggart, where he brought the rage within him under control. The Maglios recognized the danger he posed to himself and others around him and took the proper steps to control himself. In doing so, however, he shocked and frightened his mate by shutting off the link.

"After he returned, he was still filled with a deep shame and did not open the link to his mate. And she, not knowing better, assumed he had gone to accept the terms of ransom, thus starting the chain of events that led us to this point.

"Both are partially to blame for this. And both will need to deal with its aftermath. However, this is a private matter between the Maglios and his mate. If you must lay blame, then lay it at the feet of both."

Remus looked down at the table for a long moment. "Hermione... I owe you an apology," he said quietly.

"Remus... stop," Hermione choked out, then she shook her head. "A lot of what's been said is correct. My husband lies in a hospital room not a mile from here and I can't feel him because he's still in a coma... If I could take back yesterday's actions, I'd do so in a flash. But I honestly thought it was the right thing, to try to rescue Harry and his last living relative. I know, now, that it was a mistake. One which I will regret for the rest of my life."

"Do you feel anything from Harry now?" asked Luna.

Hermione shook her head. "No, nothing. And it feels as if a part of me has been cut out. I feel incomplete and lost now," she replied with shudder.

Luna nodded in understanding.

Draco cleared his throat. "Harry and Hermione were not the only ones who made a mistake in this. From what I understand, Miles ordered the mission without any of the standard pre-mission protocols. Caleb tried to put the mission off, but Miles wouldn't hear of it. I'm afraid Miles will have



to deal with that knowledge when he wakes up.”

Remus turned to look at Draco. “Wakes up?”

Draco nodded, then paused and looked a little confused. “Didn't anyone tell you? Miles collapsed in the war room yesterday. The on-duty healer took him to the hospital, muttering something about stress and ulcers.”

“Who will take over for him?” Dan asked quietly.

There was a moment of silence as people thought.

“Caleb, I think,” offered Draco. “I know that Harry was being trained to work as Caleb's second. The problem is both of them are field commanders. Neville and I don't have that level of training.”

Remus sighed and shook his head. “Well, Harry's not going out on any missions for a while. It's something we'll have to discuss when he's better.”

Luna turned to look at Hermione, who had been listening to the conversation half heartedly, then she reached out and touched her hand. “I feel your pain, Hermione, but it will be alright.”

Hermione looked at the younger girl with haunted eyes. “Will it, Luna? Will it really? He's going to be so angry with me, and with Miles.”

“His love for you is greater than his anger,” Luna said softly. “Never doubt that.”

“I hope your right, Luna,” said Remus sadly. “The last time he got really angry he destroyed the Ministry building and nearly everyone inside.”

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### **Haven Hospital...**

Miles opened his eyes and, for the first time in weeks, breathed a sigh of relief that the burning pain in his belly was gone. Then his eyes widened and he tried to sit up, only to feel a wave of dizziness wash over him. He fell back on the bed and someone opened the curtains, letting the morning sunlight filter into the room. He blinked in the bright light and couldn't identify the person.

“Who?” he croaked.

“Relax, Miles,” said a familiar voice.

“Minerva?”

She nodded and handed him a cup of water. “Yes, it's Minerva, you fool of a man. Did you honestly think that pain in your belly was going to go away by itself? Merlin protect me from stubborn, stupid men!”

He winced and watched her carefully as he sipped from the cup.

Minerva sat on the chair next to his bed and composed herself before speaking again. “The Minister was here earlier, Miles, and I'm afraid that things are going to change, things you have no control over. The healers are insistent. You need to reduce the stress you've been experiencing. Amelia has placed you on one-hundred-twenty days leave, starting immediately. It's quite probable that you will never return to your original position. Amelia still wants to use your services, but as... what was that word? Oh, yes, a consultant. In the meantime, I can offer you a position that should reduce your stress levels.”

He was shocked. “I've lost my job?” he asked incredulously.

She smiled slightly. “I'm afraid so, Miles. You need to slow down. You nearly killed yourself.”

He nodded absently, thinking. “Wait a minute. This is Amelia's decision? Who will take over for me? And what happened with the mission yesterday?”

Minerva's expression grew guarded. “Yesterday's mission didn't go well. I don't know the details, but I know they took many casualties. Harry had to rescue them and he...” She broke off and looked away.

“Minerva what is it?” Miles asked in alarm.

When she looked back at him he was shocked to see tears sliding down her cheeks.

“They say Harry was badly injured by some muggle weapon. I was going to go to the manor after I visited with you to see if I could find out more information,” she choked out.

Miles leaned back in his bed and his already pale complexion turned pasty. He had sent forty men into what he and everyone else knew would have to be a trap without even trying to scout it out first. Any blame for the casualties would rest squarely on his shoulders. He sighed heavily and closed his eyes. He knew he had mucked up big time.

When he opened his eyes again, Minerva reached over and took his hand.

“I know how involved you were in the war effort, Miles, and I know you don't really want to leave it, but it's for your own sake. Besides, if you come to

work for me, I'll have you training our next generation of fighters," she said. Her attempt to smile faltered a little. Having Miles at the school appealed to her on several levels, but she didn't like the idea that her students might someday have to fight.

She proceeded to explain what his duties would be as the head of the DADA department at school, including the fact that he'd be personally teaching the sixth and seventh year defense courses, as well as an Occlumency elective, if enough showed interest in it. She had learned that Miles had taught Harry, Hermione and Susan last summer and those three had gone one to teach it to Ginny, Neville, Luna, Draco and Terry.

He watched, amused, as she spoke. There was a connection between the two. Not the same kind of connection that might exist between a pair of hormonal raging teenagers, but a connection nevertheless. With a bit of a smile he finally held up his free hand.

"Alright, alright... You've convinced me. I'll come teach. It's better than sitting in the town square with the rest of the old gaffers," he said with a chuckle. He knew he was being put out to pasture because of his illness, but he felt as if he deserved it because of the mistake he made with the mission.

Minerva released his hand and leaned back, inwardly very pleased with herself. She and Miles were contemporaries with a common history. She felt both attracted to the man and comfortable around him and with his knowledge and background, he'd make a superb teacher.

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### **Padfoot Manor Grounds...**

Tonks left the breakfast meeting and, after talking with Remus for a few minutes, went to find Hermione. Dan had said he'd seen her exiting the manor and heading for the pool. Unable to find her there, she had begun to search.

After a quick look in the garden, she rounded a hedge and moved off towards the trees. Upon entering the small grove, she quickly spotted the young woman sitting on the ground, leaning against a tree and made her way towards her.

"Hermione?" she called.

She looked up when she heard her name and frowned when she spotted Tonks. "What is it? Has something happened?" she asked, worriedly.

"No, it's nothing like that," Tonks told her as she knelt down. "What are you doing out here?"

"Harry comes here sometimes. He said it soothes him. I brought some peanuts and was hoping to find Nutters," she explained.

"Nutters?"

"A squirrel. Harry named him. I've watched Nutters take peanuts right out of Harry's hand, but he won't come near me," she said, pointing at a small squirrel sitting on a branch in the next tree, watching them closely. "Maybe it's the lack of music. He always liked Harry's music."

"Maybe you should try tossing them a little closer to the tree. You might coax him down," Tonks suggested.

With a shrug, Hermione began tossing nuts at the base of the tree. "So, what are you doing out here?"

"Looking for you. I wanted to talk to you, away from the others."

"Come to deliver a harangue? I hope you don't mind if I pass. I think Remus took care of that well enough," she said, her voice trembling.

"A little too well, I think," Tonks said. Sighing, she sat down and crossed her legs. "Believe it or not, I know just what you're feeling."

"How could you?"

"Because I nearly got Remus killed last year. Remember? In that case, it was Harry yelling at me. He said many of the same things Remus said to you. I was his guardian at the time and having my ward dress me down for my carelessness was painful. But what made it worse was knowing that everything he said to me was correct."

Hermione chewed her lower lip for a moment. "I'd forgotten about that," she finally murmured.

"So had Remus. I won't make this any easier on you by telling you that the memories will fade with time. They don't. I remember everything vividly, and still the occasional nightmare about it."

When Hermione hung her head and refused to look at her, Tonks reached over and lifted her chin so their eyes met.

"No one understands what you're going through better than I do. But you're lucky. You're the most important person in Harry's life and he loves you. As Echo said, mistakes were made all around, but you'll forgive each other, as that's what we do for the people we love. We forgive," she said, turning her hand to cup the young woman's cheek in her palm. "But there's something else, something much harder that you'll have to do, Hermione. You have to forgive yourself."

"I don't know if I can," Hermione whispered as tears began to slide down her cheeks. "He means everything to me and I nearly got him killed!" She collapsed against her friend and sobbed.

Tonks wrapped her arms around her and let her cry, knowing it would help. When Hermione quieted, she leaned back, placed both hands on her cheeks and raised her head to look into her eyes once more. "Sweet girl," she murmured, wiping away the tears. "The time will come when you and Harry will talk about this. And I think you'll find that he understands what happened better than you think. He'll know this wasn't solely your fault."

Mistakes happen, you know that. But now you've learned that those mistakes can also have deadly consequences, haven't you?"

Hermione's lips trembled and she nodded her head.

"And I'll bet you've learned to be more circumspect about your actions."

"Yes," Hermione said, her voice a little firmer. "Everyone tells me how smart I am, but I've sure done my best to prove them wrong in the last month." She wiped her eyes and sat up straight.

"No one knows how they'll react in an emergency," Tonks told her. "Hindsight is twenty-twenty and we can look back with perfect clarity and see what we should have done. But you can't continue to beat yourself up over it. You learn from the mistake, take the lesson to heart, and do your best to move on. As I said earlier, it won't be easy. But I think you'll find things are a bit better once you've spoken to Harry. And I'm always here if you need someone else to talk to."

Hermione smiled slightly. "Thanks, Tonks. For everything."

"That's what friends are for. Now, lets go back inside and get you cleaned up. We can't have Harry waking up and seeing his wife a wet, blubbering mess, now can we?"

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### **Haven Operations Center...**

Caleb Newman sat on the small cot he kept in his office and tried to clear the cobwebs from his head. Ruefully, he admitted to himself that he was no longer capable of living on three hours of sleep a night.

He had been shocked and positively appalled when he discovered that the reason Ops Center had gone off the air was due entirely to Miles' illness. This highlighted, in his opinion, a glaring flaw in the overall command structure for the British Alliance. The lack of Miles being at Ops Center had ultimately forced Caleb to leave the hospital and return to the center. He had been waiting to receive word on his wounded, as well as on Lord Potter.

A knock at his door startled him out of his reverie.

"Come!" he called, then stood and walked over to small sink in the corner to wash away some of his fatigue.

He glanced over to see Johnson, one of the Ministry people who Miles had been using for grunt work.

"Good morning, Sir," said Johnson.

"I suppose," he growled as he eyed Johnson warily. Like so many soldiers and law enforcement officers, he was wary of paper pushers.

Johnson started the coffee pot, then straightened up his desk. "The Minister will be meeting with you later, sir, to discuss your new duties. Word has come from the hospital that Mr. Pickerton is recovering nicely. I've placed a file folder containing the causality count for yesterday's mission, as well as the necessary personnel information on the WIAs and KIAs on your desk. I've also rescheduled the morning briefing to mid morning," he said, then looked up expectantly at Caleb.

Caleb blinked in shock at the young man. "Excuse me? New duties?"

Johnson looked up from the pile of folders he was neatly putting into alphabetical order. "Yes, sir. As of this morning, you are assuming Mr. Pickerton's duties as Deputy Minister for Defense."

Caleb sat in the chair behind his desk and shook his head in denial.

Johnson continued to sort the folders as he spoke. "We'll have you moved into the Deputy's office probably by tomorrow, sir. And rather than keeping a cot in the office, I'll see one of the adjoining offices is cleared out and turned into a more comfortable place for you to sleep."

Caleb could only stare at the man and wonder if he'd really woken up after all, as the situation had all the elements of a nightmare.

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### **Haven Hospital...**

Hermione arrived with her parents at the hospital just before noon. Danni had informed them the night before that they would not lift the magically induced coma until noon today, at the earliest. Remus and Tonks had elected to remain behind, in the hopes they would be able to visit with Harry later.

Dan had them stop at the reception desk to find out which room Harry was currently in, then they followed the markings on the walls to the appropriate room. Just outside the door they met up with Danni McNeil.

Danni turned to face Hermione, her expression one of weariness. "I thought you might show up at this time. I'm about to go off duty myself, but I wanted to stay to talk with you," she said gently.

"How is he?" asked Hermione.

"We lifted the coma about a half hour ago. Right now he's in a very deep sleep. Fortunately, while he was under, we were able to regrow the three

ribs we had to remove. The induced coma prevented him from feeling the pain of the Skele-grow, thank Merlin. As you know, he was shot twice at close range. Muggle weapons can do extraordinary damage but, in this particular case, the close range worked in our favor. The bullets tore through his right lung and shattered his ribs on their way out.”

Seeing Hermione blanch, she reached out and squeezed the young woman's hand. “It could have been a lot worse, from what I understand. One of our Yank Healers explained that, with different ammunition, the bullets would have entered and shattered apart once they hit bone, sending metal fragments bounced around inside, causing massive damage. Mind you, his injuries are severe, but we think he'll pull through.”

She squeezed Hermione's hand once more before letting go and continuing a bit more briskly. “We've repaired the damage to his lung, as well as his ribs. The problem right now is that the new lung tissue will take time to adjust to his body, so his right lung is not capable of providing him with as much oxygen as he is used to at the moment. This is strictly a temporary condition that will ease off over the course of the next week or so. However, for at least the next two weeks, he is not allowed any strenuous exercises and you should be aware that there is a real threat of infection. His left lung is currently providing him with the bulk of his oxygen, so he'll be short of breath for a while. We're monitoring the output of his right lung and when it reaches seventy-five percent, we'll probably release him.”

When Hermione and her parents continued to stare at her with a mixture of relief and horror, she shook her head. “Well? Aren't you planning on going in?” she asked.

Shaking off the shock, Dan opened the door, allowing Emma, Hermione and Danni to enter before him.

Inside the room a series of magical devices monitored Harry's condition. He lay on the bed, pale and nearly motionless, seeming to struggle for each breath. Around his head was a blue translucent bubble. Rather than the normal hospital gown, his chest was covered in a large, self sealing bandage. The blinds were closed, giving the room an eerie appearance due to the glow from the monitoring equipment.

Hermione leaned against her mother and stared at him. He looked so helpless. This couldn't be her Harry! She had seen him sick and wounded before, but never like this. His fingers and lips were blue tinged, and he was nearly white.

“The bubble concentrates and gives him a higher percentage of oxygen than we get under normal breathing. We've had to increase his oxygen intake to compensate for his lack of a balanced set of lungs,” Danni said in a hushed tone, then she turned to Hermione. “I know he looks bad right now, Hermione, but he's getting better, trust me.”

When Hermione only nodded dumbly and continued to stare at Harry, she stepped forward. “Here, look at this,” she said, pointing at two crystals on the table next to the bed. A pair of numbers floated over each. “The crystal on the right tells us how much oxygen his right lung is giving him. The one on the left is for the other lung. Look at the two numbers.”

The right crystal displayed fifty-nine, the left one-hundred.

“This morning, Hermione, the number was down at thirty-two. He is getting better,” Danni said gently.

Hermione sat on the chair next to Harry's bed. She watched him, while Dan and Emma conversed with Danni in hushed tones.

Then she felt something in her mind, almost like a tickle, but very faint. Her eyes widened and she leaned forward suddenly, watching him intently. “I think he's starting to wake up,” she said.

Her link opened up a little more and she gasped in relief. She wasn't getting any coherent thoughts, but the link was there and she was getting a jumbled mass of confusing images and emotions. It took her a moment to realize that what she was feeling wasn't usually the ordered mind of her husband, but rather the confused reactions of his subconscious. Harry's shields were completely and totally down!

“Oh, Merlin! His Occlumency shields are completely down,” she muttered.

Dan and Emma turned to her, alarmed.

“I thought they weren't supposed to go down, even when he was asleep or was unconscious?” Emma asked, worriedly.

“They aren't. I don't know why he's dropped them,” Hermione replied, distractedly. She was trying to think of something they could do to protect Harry's mind.

Danni swore and her expression turned angry. “Of course! The induced coma would have done that. The coma reduces all brain function down to the barest minimum needed for survival. Why didn't I think of that before?”

Dan placed a placating hand on the angry healer's arm. “Probably because you were too busy saving his life to worry about it. The question is, can we speed up his awakening so that he can put up his shields?”

Danni shook her head. “No. As it stands, he's probably going to awaken confused and disoriented. He probably won't be able to raise them.”

Hearing a sound at the door, Danni turned away from the Grangers and stepped out of the room.

Hermione reached out and grabbed Harry's hand. She wasn't sure exactly why, but something told her it was what she needed to do. As soon as she touched him, her vision grayed out for a moment and she could feel Harry very close by, though his mind was still a confusing array of random thoughts and emotions.

Her mind seemed to flow around his, encasing it, cocooning it. She immediately understood and brought her own Occlumency shields up to their full strength. Once in place, she began to work on building a secondary wall around her own, as an extra layer of defense. If Harry couldn't protect his

mind at the moment, she would do it for him.

A soft light began to pulsate around them both.

Dan and Emma watched, startled, as Hermione's hair began to rise, as if charged by static electricity. When her eyes began to glow dimly, they both stepped back in alarm.

The door to the room opened and Danni, the Lupins entered. Remus took one look and he growled in the back of his throat.

"Hermione, what do you..."

"Shut up, Remus," Hermione muttered quietly. "Harry's shields are completely down and he's just barely begun to wake up. I'm using the bond between us to shield his mind for him. I've got to borrow some of his power to do this. It's not easy and I need to concentrate.

"Sweet Merlin, how does he manage this? I'm only borrowing a small amount of magic and it's the most intoxicating feeling I've ever experienced!"

The four adults exchanged a long look, then Emma stepped forward. "Dear, I know you're busy but is there anything we can do to help?"

Hermione started to shake her head when she suddenly found herself being levitated. She would have complained, but she couldn't break her concentration. Tonks lifted her up to Harry's level, while Remus expanded the bed enough for both to lay comfortably.

"I don't know if this is considered approved therapy," murmured Danni in amusement.

Dan shot her a grin.

"If he's waking, he's going to need something for the pain," Danni said, then turned to get a potion from a cabinet. Removing a bottle from the shelf, she walked back to stand next to Remus. "Is there really a danger of him being attacked by V-V-Voldemort?" she asked him.

Remus nodded. "Yes. Harry told me that Voldemort routinely tests his shields since that time he managed to get through. With no shields he'd be wide open for Voldemort to strike. Harry will be able to put up his own shields once he's awake enough. He was alright in the coma, since it suppressed his mind too much, but in his current state it can be dangerous for him."

Hermione settled in next to Harry, still maintaining the shield

"What do you think is causing the glow around them?" Emma asked the others.

Dan shrugged, Danni and Remus looked thoughtful, and Tonks just shook her head.

"If I had to hazard a guess," Remus said quietly a few moments later, "I'd say it was Hermione's Occlumency shield being extended to include Harry. Frankly, I have no clue how she's doing it. It's not even theoretically possible. It must be a result of their bond. She's borrowing some of his magic to increase her own shield to include him. I wish Eocho could see this. He might have an explanation."

Danni nodded. "There are some case histories of people who shared a consciousness via a soul bond, and it allowed them utilize the talents of their partner. I remember reading about one pair who shared animagus abilities because one of the pair was an animagus prior to the bonding." She had been informed of what occurred between Harry and Hermione and knew about their bonding.

Remus looked thoughtful, considering Danni's comments. It would be something to think about later.

While her parents conversed quietly with the others, Hermione tuned them out, turning all her attention inwards and the slowly awakening mind of her husband. She was initially confused by the total randomness of what she was experiencing. Fragments of memories popped into focus and played for a moment, then vanished just as quickly as they had begun. In between the memories, she experienced waves of emotions. The first real indication that she had of Harry's consciousness awakening was when she began to feel an uncomfortable weight on her chest. The feeling increased until she was in pain.

"Harry?"

Nothing.

"Harry?"

"...W-W-Who?..."

A wave of confused images hit her, seeing Dudley flying towards her, explosions, loud noises, Caleb staring at her in horror. She shuddered back from the images. He was waking alright, and his mind threatened to overwhelm what she was doing. She had to bring him out gently, with as little disorientation as possible so he could bring his own shields back up.

"Harry, can you hear me?" she sent.

"...Wha... ..wha... ..what is this pl... place?..."

Hermione was about to answer when another wave of images washed through her. She blinked mentally at the one image that stood out in her mind, involving her with no clothes on, a roaring fireplace and a plush carpet in front of it, along with a bowl of strawberries and lots of whip cream. She thought it was a wonderfully romantic idea for another time, although she was puzzled by the excessive amount of whip cream. Driving the

Image away, she fixed her attention on Harry again. It was hard enough to concentrate when she was feeling his pain. His erotic images didn't help any.

*"Harry? Can you hear me?"*

*"...hhurtss... ..'ermione?..."*

*"Yes, love, I know. Danni is preparing a pain relief potion even now."*

*"...wwhere...are...we?..."*

*"Harry, you were hurt yesterday. You're in Haven Hospital right now. You're waking up, but your Occlumency shields have fallen. I'm shielding you at the moment. Do you understand me?"*

There was a moment of silence, then she felt his confusion lessen a little. She was about to say something when the pain suddenly receded to a dull ache and a sense of heaviness in his chest. Both of them breathed a sigh of relief.

*"...much... ..better..."* he sent to her.

Much to her relief, she could feel his consciousness slowly ordering and bringing his mind back under control. She continued to borrow his power to maintain the shields, as her own power had been exhausted within the first few minutes. She trembled slightly and wondered at the depth of the connection she had managed to forge across the bond.

*"Harry, did you understand me?"* she asked again.

*"...too tired, Hermione..."*, he replied. Even though they were talking mind to mind, she could feel his exhaustion in his words.

*"No! Harry, you need to raise your shields, then you can sleep, I promise,"* she sent him, a bit desperate.

*"...Shields?..."*

*"Yes, my heart, raise your shields,"* she sent to him.

She was beginning to get frustrated. She never quite realized how muddled a person could be before they woke up. There was another long pause and then she felt Harry struggling to bring his shields up. The power she was borrowing reduced to a trickle for a moment before flowing freely again.

This was the first time she had ever been in Harry's mind when he brought up his mental shields and she had to suppress a chuckle. His method for building them included a visualization of a muggle construction company as the walls were put into place. She could actually see Harry envisioning cement mixers pouring concrete.

It was a process so uniquely Harry, and so unlike her own shields, which she always thought of as granite walls like one might find along a river valley.

*"Hermione?"* His voice sounded stronger in her head and she assumed he was drawing on his magic to deal with his fatigue.

*"Are you awake now?"* she asked. Even though she didn't say a single word out loud, she couldn't hide the humor now that he was awake.

*"I'm awake for now, but why are you in my mind? You didn't try another bonding thing again, did you?"* he asked plaintively.

*"No, I've been shielding your mind, love. You were in a coma, which brought down your shields. But it didn't matter as long as you remained in the coma. When you started to wake up, I used some of your power to extend my shields to include you."*

*"Is that even possible?"* he asked, puzzled.

Hermione sent him the equivalent of a mental shrug, then she shuddered when Harry assumed control of their bond.

*"Harry? What are you doing?"*

*"You've exhausted yourself, Hermione. I'm replenishing your core. Lower your shields and start to pull out."*

She did as he told her, lowering her shields and moving her consciousness away from his. The bond slowly contracted and she felt a moment of extreme fatigue, followed by a rush of power that enervated her. For a brief moment she felt a sensation of stabbing pressure. She opened her eyes to find herself nearly nose to nose with Harry, who was looking at her.

*"We have much to discuss. But right now I think you should talk to your parents and Danni."*

Hermione frowned at him. *"Can't you talk to them?"*

He shook his head. *"I don't think so, not the way my chest feels. It's almost like I can't quite catch my breath. Besides, I really want to go back to sleep now,"* he told her tiredly.

*Alright, I'll talk to them, hang on a moment."*

Hermione turned to her parents, who stood at the end of the bed watching both of them with obvious worry and concern. When Harry opened his eyes and turned to look at Hermione, Emma moved up to the head of the bed.

"He's awake and his shields are up," Hermione told everyone.

Danni pushed her way past Dan and started running diagnostic spells. "Harry, do you feel any discomfort?"

Hermione glanced at Harry for a moment. "He says his chest feels heavy, like he has a weight on it. He also feels like he can't catch his breath, but the pain is mostly under control."

Danni's eyebrows rose up to her hairline, then she grinned. "That's helpful. You can speak for him using your bond, this way he won't run out of breath trying to speak. The feeling of weight and the shortness of breath will go away in a day or so, Harry. Now that you're awake, we can proceed with the rest of your treatment."

Harry nodded, then smiled at Emma when she reached through the bubble to smooth his hair back. He closed his eyes for a moment, relaxing into her touch.

Hermione blushed and looked at her mother. "He says 'Hi Mum, now I know where Hermione gets her wonderful touch from.'"

Emma blushed as brightly as her daughter and Harry closed his eyes again.

Hermione watched him for a moment, but when she tried to sit up, he rolled slightly and reached for her. She looked at the others, then shrugged her shoulders.

"Most boys want a teddy bear or something to hold at night. Not our Harry. He wanted his Hermione," Tonks quipped, grinning wickedly.

Hermione tried to glare, but her grin ruined the attempt. "He's sleeping normally now and his shields are in place. I'm not sure I could have held out for long against Voldemort if he had tried testing Harry's defenses now."

*"Hmmm, you did, 'ermione,"* Harry sent sleepily.

Hermione turned to stare at him.

He opened his eyes slightly and looked at her. *"That stabbing feeling... was him..."* he told her as his eyes slipped closed once more.

Hermione shook her head and turned to look at the others. She didn't share what Harry said with them, thinking to wait until after she'd spoken with him about it in more detail.

"You did what you had to do, Hermione," Remus replied, his smile gentle. Then he turned to watch Danni, who was holding a board with a series of multi-colored crystals over Harry. Every so often she'd examine one closely, make an adjustment to it with her wand, then whisper something to a auto-quill, which jotted down the information.

"Well, Danni?" asked Remus.

She straightened and placed the board on the bedside table. "His lung is continuing to improve, but his temperature is slightly elevated. That could be a result of the wound and his subsequent healing, part of what Hermione did to him, or it could be the start of an infection. I don't know and we'll have to monitor him closely for a while."

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## **Hogwarts Castle...**

The sun hung low in the sky, casting the long shadows of late afternoon. From a distance, Hogwarts appeared as it always had, serene, calm, a place of welcome. It was only up close that the rows of piked heads and the cages used to house the women who serviced the resident Death Eaters became visible.

Lucius Malfoy entered the Great Hall with no small degree of fear in his heart. He now had to explain to the Master what had happened to his magic detectors and why. If Mulciber was any indication, the Master was not pleased.

He paused at the entrance for a moment, then cringed inwardly when his Master called out.

"Lucius!" Voldemort roared. "Get your sorry carcass in here."

He walked quickly to the large throne Voldemort sat upon. At the base, Nagini, Voldemort's pet and familiar, lay curled up, staring at the approaching human with dead looking eyes. Lucius stopped a few feet from the throne and prostrated himself before his master.

"You summoned me, my Master," he murmured.

The Dark Lord sat on his throne idly playing with a vicious looking, brown stained dagger. The handle of the blade pulsated with a sickly green light.

"A Blade of Mordoc," Voldemort said in a sibilant voice. "The only artifact known to be imbued with the essence of a Dementor."

Lucius bowed and fought the urge to soil himself. The dagger was one of the most feared and dangerous dark artifacts in Wizarding history. The Dark Lord Mordoc was said to have created the blades for his cadre of assassins to use. One of its less savory features was that the blade only sucked out the soul of its victim upon removal. The magically renewing poison on the blade did not cause death, but pain worse than an Cruciatius curse, making the victims long to remove it from their flesh.

Mordoc's assassins were renowned for their cruelty.

"I have been quite lucky, Lucius. One of our overseas suppliers managed to find a stash of these blades. They will come in handy, I suspect."

Lucius cowered deeper, terrified of what was to come.

"Tell me, my friend," Voldemort said in a deceptively beguiling voice. "How is it my magic detectors were swamped both yesterday and on the day that Potter and his allies attacked my island prison?"

"M-m-my Lord," Lucius stammered. "T-t-this isn't my area. I can only guess as to what they are doing to swamp your detectors. I know the why of yesterday's incident, not the how."

Voldemort's eyes flared slightly. "Very well, tell me why it happened. And Lucius? It had better be good or I shall test my new toy on you myself."

"It was a trap for Potter, my Lord." Lucius replied uneasily, his voice almost whining. "We set a trap using his last living muggle relative."

"And did your trap work, Lucius? Did you bring Potter's body with you?" Voldemort asked dangerously, leaning forward on his throne and looking hungrily at Lucius.

Lucius shook his head, his hands trembled with fear. "Not entirely, my Lord. We know for a fact that Potter was injured, badly we think, but his allies managed to portkey him away before we could capture him. We've reviewed the entire event in a pensieve and there is reason to believe his wounds are mortal. If he has managed to survive, his injuries are serious enough that he will need much time to recover."

Voldemort nodded knowingly and raised a hand to stop Lucius from further explanation. Then he reached out with his mind to test Potter's shield as he did every morning. The connection blossomed like it usually did, then something strange happened, and so quickly, he wasn't sure it had happened at all.

For just a moment, a very brief moment, he felt not one, but two sets of shields guarding Potter's mind before the brat expelled him rather forcefully.

Two sets of shields? It was unheard of!

Voldemort scowled and turned to a nearby Death Eater. "Summon Mulciber!" he snapped, then he turned back to Lucius.

"Continue with your story," he ordered darkly.

Lucius bowed again and continued to describe how he had set up his trap and how they had managed to kill many of Potter's allies. He rushed through the description of how the trap was a mix of muggle and magical once he saw Voldemort's frown. He knew that the Dark Lord did not approve of anything muggle.

"And so there you have it, my Lord. Your detectors were overloaded when our trap was triggered," he concluded.

Voldemort nodded and looked up towards Mulciber, who had entered the Hall during Lucius' explanation.

Mulciber looked on, rather smug at having deflected his Master's anger away from himself.

"Mulciber, it was your recommendation that you oversee all magical happenings, while Lucius oversaw all muggle. Why, then, are you saying Lucius should be aware of how our magic detectors are being overwhelmed? Lucius set a trap for Potter, which triggered *your* detectors. I want to know how that is happening."

Mulciber shivered under his lord's gaze. He realized that he hadn't succeeded in deflecting anything.

"Well?" asked Voldemort again.

"I-I don't know, my Lord. I have people looking into it, but we're not sure how Potter's doing it," he stammered.

Voldemort scowled. He did not suffer failure well. He surveyed both men carefully. Lucius had yet to undergo the ritual of Anthrokrak, but Mulciber had undergone it twice now, the maximum limit he'd allow any of his inner circle to under the Rite. By rights, Lucius should have undergone the ritual by now, but his duties had not allowed for it. Lucius rarely failed him, but then he was a crafty bastard who made sure failure could not be pinned on him.

Voldemort's scowl deepened. He knew he couldn't kill either man, he needed them too much. But some sort of object lesson was necessary.

With a fluid movement of his wand and a whispered incantation, Mulciber fell to his knees, wailing in terror. He held his left hand in his right and stared at the three missing fingers. Voldemort had sliced them away, then healed his hand, making it impossible for those fingers to be regrown.

Next to him, Lucius collapsed, clutching at his face as blood seeped through his fingers. The two horizontal cuts, one across each cheek, would leave ugly scars the vain man would be unable to cover, at least in his Master's presence.



I do not tolerate failure. I thought you both had learned that lesson by now, but apparently you have not. Let this be a reminder," Voldemort said angrily.

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### **Haven Hospital that evening (Miles' Room)...**

Caleb slowly opened the door, not really knowing what to expect. He had known Miles professionally for more than twenty years, having not only trained under him, but fighting side by side with him. Now, having taken over Miles' job, he felt uneasy.

What made him even more uncomfortable was what he was about to do.

"Caleb?" asked Miles from his bed.

Caleb nodded and walked into the room, taking a seat next to the bed. "How are you feeling?"

Miles noted the man's neutral tone. "I suppose you heard what they are doing to me?"

Caleb nodded. "Yes. In fact, they're moving my stuff into your office and boxing up your belongings as I speak." He paused for a moment, then raked a hand through his hair. "What the hell did you think you were doing, ordering us on that mission? Do you know what it cost us? Do you?"

He stood and stepped back from the bed, trying to calm his fragmented nerves. "Sweet Merlin, Miles! You cost me nearly half my team. Twelve dead and another ten injured! And to top it off, Lord Potter nearly got himself killed rescuing us from a place he was no where near in the first place!"

Caleb looked down at Miles and noted how old and frail his friend seemed to be. Seeing the man's wide eyes and trembling hands, he felt a sense of shame. What the hell was he doing, yelling at a sick man?

He nervously wiped his hands against his pants.

"Look, Miles, I know you've been sick. But I don't think you need me to tell you how badly you missed the boat on this one."

Miles sighed heavily. "You don't have to tell me, Caleb, I know. I broke from procedure. I should have sent in elf scouts first," he said haltingly. "How is Lord Potter?" Despite his repeated requests all day, no one had given him any information about Harry.

"He was shot twice in the back with a muggle handgun by his own cousin. For the first three hours they worked on him they were convinced they were going to lose him. He's improving and I understand they've upgraded his condition to fair, but he's got a long road ahead of him."

Miles frowned. "Put up a privacy charm, Caleb," he said in a commanding tone.

Caleb blinked and set up several privacy and anti-listening charms.

Miles seemed to collapse into himself for a moment. "Caleb, a lot of people think that it's up to Lord Potter to take care of Voldemort. What they don't know is just how right they really are. What I am about to tell you is a state secret. Only the Minister and her deputies, Lord Potter, his Brotherhood and his inner circle know about it. Harry Potter is, according to prophecy, the *only* person who can kill Voldemort."

Caleb sat in the chair and stared at Miles for a moment. "I thought that was just rhetoric? Something for the public," he said.

"Yes," Miles explained, "that's what we wanted people to think. Putting the idea out there in the public's mind but never officially acknowledging it was a good way to protect the secret, or so we thought at the time."

Caleb shook his head in wonder. He knew Harry carried a heavy burden, but never suspected something like this! Shaking his head to clear his thoughts, he turned back to Miles. "Alright then, I assume Headmistress McGonagall spoke to you today?"

Miles' expression grew guarded. "Yes, she offered me a job."

"Take the job, Miles. If you don't, you'll spend your days doing nothing but blaming yourself for this mess. Teaching offers a distraction. And if nothing else, you'll be able to spend your time training kids to survive if they get into a similar situation."

Miles peered at his old friend before nodding in agreement. Then he scrubbed his face with one hand. "Damn, I feel old and worn out," he muttered.

"All the more reason for you to get out, my friend," Caleb told him, the first trace of a smile crossing his lips since he entered the room.

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### **Haven Hospital that evening (Harry's Room)...**

Harry opened his eyes. As much as he tried to fight it, he felt a great weariness and taking naps didn't seem to help him much. He'd had two naps already today since he woke up with Hermione.

He looked around and spotted Hermione and Emma dozing in chairs, while Dan stared out the window, a cup in his hand.

"Hey," Harry said, his voice weak and trembling.

Dan turned around and, seeing Harry looking at him, he smiled. "Hey, yourself," he said, moving closer to the bed. "How are you feeling?"

"Tired and my chest hurts," he replied, panting slightly.

Dan patted his shoulder. "Rest and don't try to talk. I'll find the healer and see if we can get you something for the pain."

He walked out of the room before Harry had a chance to form a reply.

He looked around groggily. He had vague memories of yesterday, and none from last night or this morning.

Hermione sat in the chair next to the bed. She had leaned forward so that she could lay her head on the bed while she dozed. He looked down at her, confused. He could have sworn that the bed had once been larger than it was currently. He reached out and used his hand to gently comb her hair, something they both enjoyed.

"Harry?"

"Hi."

"How are you feeling?"

"I'll be fine once your dad comes back with the healer and a pain relieving potion."

She lifted her head and examined him. He looked better, but his lips and fingertips were still tinged blue. The crystal monitoring his right lung function was reading sixty-seven, up from earlier today.

Both of them turned when the door opened and watched as Dan led a healer into the room. The healer held a small vial in his hand and Harry looked relieved to see it. The noise woke Emma and soon both women were helping Harry sit up enough to drink the potion.

"This one shouldn't make you as drowsy as the ones you took earlier, my Lord," the healer told him.

Harry grimaced and glanced at Hermione. She turned to the healer. "He asks that you either call him Harry, or Mr. Potter, if you want to be formal about it. The lordship role is something he only does when he absolutely has to."

The healer's eyes widened, but he nodded. "I had been told about your bond and how you could speak for him. It's interesting to see it in operation. In any event, I'm the on-duty healer for this floor tonight. Healer McNeil was escorted home a few hours ago and given a strong dose of sleeping draught. She's exhausted herself taking care of Mr. Potter. If anyone needs me, I'll be at the duty station. You can either ring the bell or come to the station." With that, he turned and walked out of the room.

Hermione watched the healer depart for a moment, then she turned to her parents. "Why don't you two go find some dinner? I have to talk to Harry, and watching two people stare at each other can't be all that interesting," she said, almost brusquely.

Dan and Emma exchanged a glance, then nodded and left the room quietly.

Hermione looked at the bed for a moment, then expanded it and climbed in next to Harry.

"How much of yesterday do you remember?"

Harry thought for a moment, remembering the sequence of events. "Almost all of it. The only thing I don't remember is how I got hurt." Then his eyes narrowed and he looked at her accusingly. "You went digging through my trash for that letter."

Hermione's eyes flashed defiantly. "Yes, I did. And I'll do it again if you ever pull that sort of stupid stunt on me again. You want to know why I did it?"

Before Harry could answer, their bond broadened and a flood of emotions came pouring through. He reeled under the onslaught of fear and an overwhelming sense of loss. When he had cut his bond with Hermione, his supremely smart wife had been reduced down to a few instinctual imperatives. She had acted as best she could under the circumstances *he* had forced her into.

She watched as Harry's eyes grew anguished. When tears began to rolling down his cheeks, she stopped sending him her memories of those emotions. She didn't want him crying and knew it wouldn't be good for him.

"I'm not blaming you, but you have to understand exactly what drove me to take the steps I did. I'll do anything to protect you, my heart."

Harry closed his eyes and nodded, then he tried to pull her into an embrace but was too weak to accomplish it. Recognizing what he was trying to do, she rolled over until she was nestled in the crook of his arm.

After a few minutes, the couple had relaxed somewhat. *Now it's time for the next phase*, Hermione thought to herself.

"Harry?"

"Hmmm?"

"Why did you cut me out like that?"

She could feel him flinch under her. It was something he didn't want to talk about. He didn't reply for another minute.

*"You're going to insist, I take it? You won't take my word for it that I'm not proud of why I did it?"*

She propped herself up on one elbow and stared at him. *"Would you just take someone's word? Wouldn't you want to understand if you could?"* she asked him archly.

He sighed and seemed to deflate a bit. Then she saw an image in her mind of the ransom letter. Harry was bypassing their bond entirely and using Legilimency to send her a faint echo of what he was feeling after reading the letter. She felt his anger explode into a towering rage and she shuddered back from it. It was like some primordial beast demanding blood and she could feel Harry's need... no, desire to reach out and cause pain and destruction. She could feel his magic swelling to greater heights and it was egging him on to destroy everything. She also saw the overwhelming shame he felt that such anger could be a part of him, and a desire to never let her know that he could feel that way. As the images receded and he canceled his spell, she could feel the bond again, and through it, a wave of fear. He was afraid of her reaction to what he had shown her.

She rolled away from him for a moment to think. Harry had shown her his beast, the same beast that had devastated the Ministry building in April, killing so many. She also saw his never ending fight to control it and his refusal to let it rule him. His abilities and the anger within him would enable him to be the most powerful Dark Lord the wizarding world had even know, if he so chose. But he rejected it utterly and wanted only to be Harry, Hermione's husband, father to their future children. She quickly caught his hand in her own and brought it up to her cheek, holding it there, bathing it in her tears.

She understood. His biggest fear was that she'd recognize the beast and reject him because of it. Harry tried to turn away from her, but couldn't break free from her grasp. She could feel his shame burning through the link.

*"Harry... Look at me, please?"* she sent. It was more of a plea than a request.

He turned to look at her and she leaned over him until her nose was almost touching his. *"My heart, I could never turn from you or reject you. Not for any reason."*

*"You saw what I'm like, Hermione. Did you know that in the first war Voldemort only killed about a thousand wizards? I'm quickly closing in on his numbers."*

*"You're not him, love,"* she said, simply. *"You feel and regret every death. Voldemort relishes them. But we're getting away from the point. Harry, your anger is a part of who you are. That you controlled it this time is wonderful. But why won't you let me help you? When I married you, I promised to help you in all ways and I want to do just that."*

When Harry nodded, she sighed. She knew that while his head might understand what she was saying, in his heart there would always be some doubt due to his upbringing.

Thoughts of the Dursleys caused a sharp, hot anger to rise up, some of which leaked through the bond, causing Harry to look at her quizzically.

*"Sorry, love. I was thinking about the Dursleys and my anger got away from me for a moment."*

*"Dudley didn't make it out of that trap, didn't he?"*

Hermione blinked and wondered how to tell him.

*"Hermione?"*

*"Harry... my heart... your cousin was killed by our own forces after he shot you twice in the back with a gun."*

He closed his eyes and was silent for a long time. She knew he was using his Occlumency meditation to center his emotions, but the link remained open, unlike yesterday. When she began to wonder if he had drifted off to sleep, he opened his eyes.

*"And so it ends..."*

*"Harry?"*

*"According to the ransom letter, my Aunt and Uncle are dead. And with Dudley now gone, I'm the last with Evans blood, the last with Potter blood."*

*"You are not the last Potter, Harry! Or did you forget that I willingly became part of your family not too long ago? You may be the last of the Potter blood, but that will last only until we decide to have children. And if it bothers you so much, I'll get you the antidote to your contraceptive potion and I'll cancel my charm."*

Hermione's stern expression changed quickly to one of laughter as a image floated inadvertently over the bond. Apparently the idea of children appealed to Harry, although it seemed he felt they needed to practice more before having any.

As much as she wanted to maintain the current light tone, she couldn't.

*"Harry... about yesterday... I found out that they lost a lot of men on that mission,"* she sent. Now her mental voice became very hesitant, almost afraid to say the words.

*I know... Caleb told me about it while we were in Surrey,"* he sent back to her, sounding very tired emotionally.

*"How can you stand it?"* she demanded of him.

*"Stand what?"*

*"I know it was partially my fault our people died in Surrey. I know I am responsible for some of the deaths at Azkaban. What I don't know is how to deal with the knowledge!"*

She could feel his mental sigh and his grip on her tightened slightly.

*"You just do, Hermione. Each of us has to come to understand that as this fight goes on we're going to be involved in the deaths of friends... I started this war losing my parents, then Cedric and Sirius. The war cost me my childhood because of Dumbledore. Not too long ago I approved of a mission which could have resulted in Remus losing his wife. The mission to rescue the Patils? That man was the first man we lost on a mission. You learn to live with it, and to deal with it.*

*"In this case, there's only one thing you can do. Learn from your mistakes and push forward. A lot of people made mistakes yesterday... I should have never cut you off from me... You succumbed to panic over that fact... Miles ordered a mission with no prior planning... Oh, bloody hell, there is blame enough for all of us to share! The real question now is, what can you learn from it? What lesson do you walk away with?"*

Hermione snuggled a little closer to him and pondered his words. He was right. For all her pride in her intellect, she had panicked.

*"And how do you deal with it?"* she asked.

Harry shrugged mentally. *"I will let my wife help me more than I have been, of late. And I try to remember that, eventually, justice will win out,"* he sent.

*"Justice?"*

*"Yes. Each and every one of those people deserved to live and would have lived had it not been for Voldemort. He will pay for his crimes."*

She shuddered back from the images he sent. *"Aren't you really asking for revenge?"*

*"I don't think so. In the beginning, I wanted revenge. For my parents, for Cedric and Sirius. But this war has grown beyond what I want. It's no longer me against Voldemort. We're merely representations of two opposing ideas. I want a world where a child born of muggles can grow up to be the Minister of Magic, and blood lineages mean little. And maybe someday Muggle and Wizard societies can merge... I don't think I need to tell you what Voldemort wants. So no, I don't think it's revenge. It's justice, justice brought on by a society that cannot survive Voldemort's racism."*

Hermione considered his words silently for a while. He knew she was thinking hard about what he had said. Yes, there had been mistakes made all around that had resulted in people dying. She owed it to those who had been lost to see that a mistake like this never happened again.

Harry held her as best as he could and watched as understanding lit her eyes. He knew from personal experience that this wasn't the end of it. She'd suffer nightmares and a loss of confidence, but together they'd be able to work through it.

Hermione smiled at him, then moved off the bed and back to her chair just before the healer returned.

The healer looked at the enlarged bed and shook his head. *"They told me this bed was acting up, but I didn't believe it. If it happens again, I'll call maintenance."*

The healer pulled out the board with the crystals on it and examined Harry. After fifteen minutes he looked up and smiled in satisfaction. The man made a few notations on the chart, then walked out of the room. A few minutes later a house elf appeared, delivered a meal for Harry and disappeared with a small pop.

They conversed silently while he ate. He grimaced and wished Dobby had made the meal, as the hospital's food was awful. When he finished, another elf appeared and removed the tray. He looked over at Hermione and frowned at the bad taste in his mouth.

She laughed at his reaction.

They both looked up as someone knocked on the door, then pushed it open. The Johansen twins smiled as they walked in, one holding the door for the other, who was struggling with several items. A moment later, the Weasley twins arrived, one sitting in a plush office chair the other was wheeling in.

*"Harry, old chap!"* said George, pushing Fred.

*"Heard you ran into a spot of trouble, Harry!"* added Fred.

George began to take things out of Inga's hands and expand them to normal size.

*"We figure you're going to be here for a few days..."* said Fred.

*"...And we thought you might want to get some work done,"* George added as he expanded a fancy wooden desk with inlaid panels.

Helga place a tiffany lamp on the desk and pushed the chair into place.

Hermione watched in confusion as the twins seemed to unload an entire office worth of material. A filing cabinet blocked the entrance to the bathroom.

Harry watched, trying to hold in his laughter as the twins continued to set up the office. Then he noticed Helga peeking out the door to the room.

Fred levitated a toilet seat and stuck it to a wall, while George was trying to figure out what to do with the still dripping tank.

Harry decided he really didn't want to know where the toilet came from.

Hermione finally broke out of her bemused state and stood up. "What are you doing?" she practically screeched at the red heads.

"We're just doing our part to help Harry!" protested Fred.

"Right! If he must be in this prison, and it seems he must, we thought we'd make him more comfortable!" added George.

Fred turned to his brother. "Did you bring any nymphs for him?"

George began to pat his pockets. "I have some shrunk around here somewhere. A happy patient is a healing patient!"

Helga suddenly pulled her head inside the room. "He's coming!" she whispered hurriedly.

"Oh, well Harry, no nymphs for you, I'm afraid," said George.

"It's just as well, Hermione would probably object to them anyway. Well Harrykins, it was fun, but we must run. Get well soon, mate!" Fred said.

Helga ran over to Harry and kissed his forehead, her sister repeated the kiss a moment later. "Get well," they murmured in unison. They then ran back to Fred and George, who disillusioned them, and themselves, before slipping out the door again.

"What in the name of Morgana was that all about?" asked Hermione, still looking at the office furniture now cluttering the hospital room.

"*You know as much as I do, and that isn't much,*" Harry replied with a mental shrug.

A moment later the door opened, allowing Draco and Luna to enter the room. Draco stopped just inside the door and stared at all of the office furniture in puzzlement.

Luna walked over to Harry's bed and kissed him on the forehead before walking over to hug Hermione. Then she turned back to Harry. "You had us all very worried, Harry. I only just earned the right to call you brother and have no wish to lose you," she said in an uncharacteristically serious tone.

Harry smiled at her. She had an interesting way of looking at things... most of the time.

"He says he's not going anywhere so you don't have to worry about losing him," Hermione said, echoing Harry's comments.

Luna glanced over at Hermione and smiled. "In a way, you're more blessed than Draco and myself. We can talk like you do, but only with great concentration and effort."

"Have you tried looking into ways to increase that ability, Luna?" Hermione asked curiously.

Luna's brow crinkled a bit. "No, not yet. It may develop all by itself as the bond continues to mature. Right now we've discovered we can make our partner orgasm with just a touch."

Harry's eyes lit up and he looked at Hermione, who blushed and glared at him.

"No, Harry," she said firmly.

*"But..."*

"No," she repeated with less conviction.

Harry gave her a smoldering look.

*"Fine, we'll talk about it. But not now. You're sick and shouldn't be thinking about things like that!"*

Amused, Luna watched the two talk silently for a moment before Hermione turned back to her and gave her a look which clearly said "Men!"

Luna and Hermione talked for a bit, with Harry throwing an occasional comment in via the bond. Then he noticed Draco still standing by the door.

Harry leaned around Luna and cast a water hex at him to catch his attention.

"HEY! What did you do that for, you prat!" grumbled a now dripping Draco.

Harry chuckled softly and glanced at Hermione for a moment. Then she turned to Draco. "Harry wants to know why you're staring at the office furniture the Weasley twins brought here."

Draco frowned. "Well... If you must know, I'm trying to figure out how to move all my furniture back to my office," he said huffily.

The Potters blinked in unison before both began to laugh. Harry's laughter degenerated into a painful cough, causing Hermione to turn her attention back to him. By the time he had calmed, he was seeing spots, having difficulty breathing and his chest felt heavy again.

He lay back weakly on the bed and watched as Hermione helped Draco shrink down his furniture.

Luna watched Harry for a moment, then she leaned over and placed a hand gently on his bandaged chest. Her eyes grew unfocused and she whispered something quietly under her breath.

Harry blinked at her in surprise as the heavy feeling receded and he felt he could breathe easier.

*"Hermione! Did you see that?"* Harry practically shouted at her mentally.

Hermione jumped in surprise and her shrinking charm missed the target, landing between Draco's feet.

"Hey! Watch it!" Draco yelled, leaping to one side. Hermione smiled apologetically at him and turned to look at Harry.

"Harry? See what?" Hermione asked aloud.

*"What Luna did!"*

"I think he's just excited because I eased his discomfort," Luna said in a soft voice.

Harry nodded vigorously, his eyes wide.

Hermione walked over to the bed looking at Luna. "Eased his discomfort?"

"I felt his discomfort. I just made it easier for him," she replied nonchalantly.

*"Hermione, I don't think she healed me, but she definitely made the heaviness go away. We should see if she would be interested in healer, or at least medic training. We don't have a healer in the Brotherhood."*

Hermione watched him closely, noting how much easier he breathed. A quick glance to the crystals monitoring his lungs showed the damaged lung was now approaching seventy percent.

Harry listened for awhile as Hermione and Luna discussed what she had done and how it could apply to the healing arts. The weariness caught him by surprise and, rather than fight it, he let himself slip into sleep.

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## **Haven School of Witchcraft and Wizardry (Sept 1st)...**

Minerva McGonagall looked out with both satisfaction and pride. All of the tables in the dining hall were filled to capacity. The first year students were an eclectic mix of children from the Haven refugees, foreign Auror families and the local Irish. Harry and Arthur Weasley had pushed hard at the Irish Ministry to get their accreditation. They had pushed even harder to ensure that they would be accepting Irish nationals this year.

There was one very popular Irish school that, like so many other old schools, only accepted the very best of pure blood or half blood society. Millsworth Academy received the cream of the Irish Wizarding youth, but that didn't bother Minerva in the least. The Irish Ministry scrambled every year hoping to place muggle born wizards, sometimes even resorting to sending them to other countries. The Haven School, with its open door policy, solved that problem neatly.

Amelia and Arthur had joined Minerva at the head table for the opening feast. It was another victory, in her book, and in some ways one more important than the raid on Azkaban.

All of the children had gathered in the Haven town square, where the Hogwarts carriages picked them up for their trip to the school. There had even been a short speech in the town square by Sven Johansen, the mayor of Haven, welcoming the students and urging them to study hard.

Minerva stood and cast sparks with her wand to capture everyone's attention. Slowly the hall silenced as all eyes turned to the Headmistress.

"Thank you for your attention and welcome to the first ever welcoming feast for the Haven School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. Despite being new, we are a proud school with a rich history of culture and traditions that we brought with us from Hogwarts.

"Someday, many of us will return to Hogwarts, but Haven will remain to become our sister school, rich in its own traditions. Until such time, however, we will uphold the many traditions of Hogwarts and blend them with the new.

"This year we have students from nearly a dozen countries. There are differences between you. Learn from your classmates about those differences, but celebrate your commonality! All here are magical beings, none better than the other.

"Now, as you are aware, we've had some major faculty changes this year. Professors Sinistra and Vector, as well as Madam Pince, are no longer on the staff. Professor Flitwick will assume the role of Deputy Headmaster, as well as the Charms professor.

"Also returning this year are Professor Sprout, teaching Herbology, and Professor Hagrid, who will continue to teach Care of Magical Creatures.

Professor Hagrid also tells me that the seventh year students in his class may sign up for an extra credit project, overseen by the Irish Ministry of Magic. Its purpose is to study the newly discovered species of Irish Angels here in Haven. Interested students should see the Professor before the week is out. Participation in this project may earn you as much as a full grade on your NEWT exam.

"Madam Hooch will continue to teach flying, and she is also in charge of organizing four new Quidditch teams this year. We have Professor Flitwick and Professor Hagrid to thank for the fine new Quidditch pitch built behind the school.

"Now, to introduce some of our new faculty members. Professor Conal McDermitt will be teaching Transfiguration this year," Minerva said, then paused for a polite smattering of applause as a tall, blond haired man stood and smiled at the students. He looked to be fairly young and a good number of the girls, and some boys, sighed at his smile.

The man sat back down and immediately a dark haired woman with a creamy complexion stood up. Minerva frowned for a moment, then shrugged. "Professor Eithne O'Keefe will be our Divination teacher."

"Arithmancy will be taught by Professor Carolyne Newman and, yes, she is the wife of Auror Commander Newman, so mind your manners with her," Minerva said with a slight smile.

Carolyne stood as her name was called and tried to smile. She was a slim woman in her mid-thirties and looked more than a little flustered to be in front of so many people.

"Ancient Runes will be taught by Professor Olivia Ollivander," McGonagall said to another round of applause. An austere woman stood and smiled slightly at the students before taking her seat again.

"Potions will be taught by Professor Constance Longbottom."

Constance stood and stared out at those in the hall. She was older than McGonagall and her sour expression cowed many of the students.

"Muggle Studies will be taught by Professor Alicia Spinnet," McGonagall said with a smile.

When Alicia stood, many of her former house-mates cheered loudly, causing the young woman to blush.

"The library will be maintained by Mrs. Shaila Patil, and her daughter, Tripuri Patil, will assume the role of school healer." Minerva's voice held an echo of pain. She missed Poppy, especially now, at the start of the new school year.

Both women stood up and a lot of heads turned towards Lavender and the Patil twins. It was common knowledge that, following the end of the school term last year, Lavender Brown had been adopted into the Patil family. She had even assumed the name of Lavender Brown-Patil. Many students smiled at the three girls and then cheered for the new faculty members.

Lavender blushed under the scrutiny. She was used to having boys admire her, but not so many at one time.

Minerva paused, waiting for the students to settle down. "I'm sure you've noticed that I haven't mentioned the Defense Against the Dark Arts class as yet. There is a reason for it."

Her expression grew very serious. "Most of us have lost our homes and our countrymen now live under the cruel law of Lord Voldemort," she paused as several students yelled in fear. "We are at war! Our homes and our families have been threatened, friends have died or been lost. Because of that we are beginning a new program for our Defense classes.

"There will be a total of three defense instructors. Professor Miles Pickerton will head the Defense Department here at Haven. Under him will be Professor Stonefist, who has agreed to work part time with us, teaching the first and second years. Professor Stonefist is an Auror trainer. When he is not at the school he will be helping in our war effort, training real Aurors to fight this war.

"Professor Angela Mathewson will teach third, fourth and fifth year defense classes. Professor Mathewson is another person on loan from the Ministry and an expert in hexes, enchantments and disarming cursed objects.

"Professor Pickerton will be teaching sixth and seventh years only. With the approval of the Ministry, we have revamped the curriculum so that the sixth and seventh years will be taught the same spells and tactics as beginning Auror trainees. Professor Pickerton will also offer an elective course in beginning Occlumency for anyone interested."

While Minerva spoke, all three Professors stood and looked out over a silent student body. Minerva nearly choked on her laughter. Professor Stonefist was an imposing individual and his causal look around the hall had many students cringing.

"Finally, I have one additional announcement. Many sixth and seventh year students have volunteered to help out at the hospital or the Ministry during this time. Personally, I applaud their interest in public service and hope others will join in to help the war effort. In order to make life a little easier for those people who are volunteering, there will be no restriction to school grounds in the afternoons and on weekends. However, the ten o'clock curfew will be enforced. Students must be back at school by ten P.M. every night."

Minerva looked around at the many bright, smiling faces lighting up the hall and she smiled to herself. "Prefects, escort the first years to the student dormitories and help them get settled. Now, run along everyone. Tomorrow will come soon enough," she said, then she sat back down and sighed heavily.

"Now I know why Dumbledore always dreaded the welcoming feast," she mumbled, much to the amusement of everyone else at the table.

## Padfoot Manor (September 3rd)...

The main door opened and Harry slowly entered the grand foyer of the manor house. Danni walked behind him, watching and ready to help if the need arose.

Harry's lung functions were nearly normal and, despite his maintaining a low grade fever, the healers had decided to release him, though they ordered several days of monitored bed rest at home. The potions he was taking for his lungs interfered with the potions for his ribs, so it was decided to let the bruising around his ribs heal naturally.

He was glad to get out of the hospital. He hated it there, but the dull ache in his rib cage reminded him he wasn't fully healed.

He smiled when he saw Hermione and most of his friends waiting for him. Danni had told them to take it easy with him, so it was a happy but subdued crowd that met him by the door, welcoming him home.

Hermione joined him, lifting his left arm over her shoulders and, Harry noted, trying to support some of his weight. He'd had little to do the last few days but lay in bed and think. He'd come to the realization that he needed to let Hermione in further than he had. It wasn't a comforting realization and he wasn't sure just how he was going to accomplish it, but he had to try.

He smiled at her and leaned his head against hers for a moment. He nodded his thanks to Remus when the older man mirrored Hermione's position on his right and they helped him climb the stairs to his bedroom. In short order he found himself on the couch near the window in the master bedroom.

Dobby appeared soon afterward and left him with a tray of sandwiches and a bottle of butterbeer.

Danni put several potions by his bedside, along with dosage cups, and gave Hermione the list of his dosage schedule. When she was finished, she moved closer to Harry and ran a few diagnostic charms on him.

"I still don't like releasing you with that fever, Harry, but Sylvia insisted. The simple fact is, we're still dealing with those people rescued from Azkaban and Healer August wants to free up the bed space. She was nice enough to put me on the day shift, so I'll be here every morning to check on you, then again in the late afternoon, at least until we get this fever knocked down. Now, Hermione, I want you to check his temperature at lunch time. You're to call me if it goes up, even by a degree."

Hermione nodded seriously while Harry grimaced to himself. She could be quite the nag when she wanted to be!

*"I heard that,"* she sent, her tone icy.

*"I'm sorry, love. I just hate being sick. You know that. Besides, it's true."*

Hermione didn't reply, but he could clearly feel her huffing at him through the link.

Harry sunk down lower on the couch, his feet propped up on a foot stool and he thought the next few days were going to be difficult.

Hermione turned to glare at him, but stopped when she saw him nodding off.

Danni spotted him sleeping and she nodded approvingly. "It's best if he sleeps while his body fights this fever. That's why I had Dobby slip a little sleeping potion into his butterbeer," she said softly.

Dobby appeared then and lovingly laid a blanket over the sleeping young man.

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## Order of the Phoenix Safe-house, Cairngorn Mountains, Scotland (September 6th)...

"No, Albus, now shut up!" Moody said with a low growl. Dumbledore had been bugging him for days, trying to persuade him to join his crusade and so far all he had accomplished was to give him a headache.

"Look at you, Albus! You're nearly blind in one eye, thanks to the burn damage, your arm and shoulder are still a mess. And while you lay here healing, Potter is fighting back."

Dumbledore glared up at Moody. "Alastor," he said, his voice raspy, "what have you heard?"

Moody glared back at him for a moment. "The wireless reported that Potter and his forces attacked Azkaban island a while back. They rescued nearly a thousand prisoners and then Potter sank the entire bleeding island. Imagine that! He rescued all those prisoners, then he sank the island so the Dark Lord would never have use of it again."

Moody leaned back in his chair and lit his pipe, his one good eye bright with admiration over what Potter had done.

"And what of the Death Eaters guarding the island?" asked Dumbledore.

"Killed!" snapped Moody. This was an old argument between the two of them.

"See? This is exactly what I am talking about, Alastor! The boy is running amok and if he isn't reined in he is sure to become the next Dark Lord after he defeats Voldemort. One cannot defeat the Dark Lord by resorting to his own brutal tactics," Dumbledore said pompously.



Moody glared at the old man for a moment. "Albus, I don't know what's gotten into your head, but you personally killed Grindelwald and his entire inner circle. You also got the Ministry to agree to allow their Aurors to use the killing curse in the first war. And now, just because it's someone else leading the war, it's not right to use the same spells and tactics as your enemy?"

"That was different," Dumbledore snapped. "Times were harder then and we had to make hard decisions."

Moody shook his head in amazement and stood up. "There is no talking sense to you. 'Times were harder then'," he mimicked. "Excuse me for saying so, but Grindelwald never conquered Britain! Your countrymen are being killed every damn day and you claim times were harder back then? I don't know what happened to you, but you're not the same man I knew, Albus. You've grown hard and become twisted. And stop testing my Occlumency shields, dammit!" he snarled.

Dumbledore blinked in surprise as Moody effortlessly threw him out of his mind.

Moody walked over to corner and picked up a bag, which he proceeded to stuff with clothing, some potions and food.

"I'm sorry, Albus, but this has just gone too far. I want you out of the house by noon. Walk at least a mile before you apparate, this way I may still be able to avoid Voldemort's goons," he said, handing the bag to the shocked old man.

He started to reach for his wand, but the burn damage forced him to use his left hand. He froze when Alastor spoke.

"I wouldn't, if I were you. Not only do I have my wand out, but Nippers would also take steps. For old times sake, I won't kill you, Albus. Just leave," Moody said, nodding in the direction of the door. Nearby, a scowling Nippers watched Dumbledore.

Dumbledore nodded grimly. What else could he do? Moody had warned him on several occasions and he had ignored those warning. Moody was too well trained to cast an *Imperio* us curse on, and he was an accomplished Occlumencer.

Albus stood and picked up the bag. He glanced one last time at Moody, then sighed and walked to the door of the small cottage and opened it.

Moody watched his every move until he was out of sight. Only then did he breath a sigh of relief.

Turning, he walked to a small desk. He really didn't want to get drawn back into the war, but his conscience was insistent. Reluctantly, he pulled parchment and quill from a bin and began to write a letter, warning Potter of what Dumbledore was saying.

"Looks like it's just you and me again, Nippers. But maybe Harry will have use of an old beat up warhorse like me, eh?" he said to the timidly smiling elf.

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### **Padfoot Manor and Various locations (September 9th)...**

Harry accepted the letters from Dobby and absently stuck them in his pocket. He would read them after this morning's dog and pony show. He adjusted his formal robes for what seemed like the fifth time while he waited for Hermione to come out of the bathroom. He tugged again at his collar, then walked over to the window and sat down, staring out at the grounds.

The last few days had been quite uncomfortable for him. Not because Hermione was fussing over him, but because his fever had proved to be tenacious and tough to get rid of. He still had some soreness in his ribs and he tired easily. Danni assured him that he was healing very well and the minor complaints would soon disappear. In the meantime, Hermione fussed over him and worried about his fever. And as much as he might vocally complain about it, deep down he found he rather liked it.

The issue of the mission that lead to his injury was also a cause for many deep conversations with Hermione. They had discovered the time honored wedded problem of how to explain something to your spouse without offending them. And they also discovered a way around it. Hermione thought of it, based on what Harry had done in the hospital to show her an echo of the rage he had felt. She called it 'sharing the gestalt', a fancy term for each of them showing the other a snapshot of their emotional state, using Legilimency.

For Harry, sharing his emotions in this manner was easier than trying to find the words to explain how he felt. Trying to put feelings into words made him feel woefully inadequate. Sharing emotions still made him uneasy, and there were things he believed about himself that Hermione couldn't shake. On more than a few occasions these sessions had produced tears from both of them.

For him, it was a purging experience. He didn't like doing it, but the more he shared with her, the better he felt. An unexpected result of these conversations had been an expansion and improvement in their bond. The link between the two had grown to the point where both had to learn to control their thoughts so they didn't overwhelm the other.

Hermione found the experience to be a bit overwhelming, as well. Harry appeared to be a very cool and collected individual, except when he was angry. That was one emotion he had little trouble showing. He also didn't mind showing her love and affection when they were alone, and little forms of affection when they were in public. What surprised her was his wall. He walled off a lot of his reactions that he felt might be construed as a weakness. He had started to build that wall with the Dursleys and then on through his Hogwarts years. As much as he tried, he couldn't bring the wall down now. It was part of him. He was able to help her peer over it, but only reluctantly. Behind it were all his fears and insecurities.

He sighed. They had talked last night and she had helped him work on that wall. It was a slow, painstaking process, where successes were measured in baby steps. Afterwards, she had taken him by the hand and led him to their bed, where she had made love to him for the first time since his injury.

He smiled, remembering it. Her beauty never failed to captivate him and steal his breath away.

*"I heard that... It's interesting how your mind works, my love. First depressing thoughts, then downright randy."*

"Are you almost done in there?" he asked.

*"Almost. But seriously, don't let it depress you, my heart. We have a whole lifetime to work on this."*

*"Hmmm, that reminds me... You know, the whole year and a day, handfasting business?"*

"Yes?" she asked, her tone a bit fearful.

Harry shook his head. *"My heart, you are jumping to the wrong conclusions again. I don't want to terminate the handfasting. Well, I do, in a way, but not the way you are thinking of."*

Now he had her curiosity. *"What are you talking about?"*

*"If I remember right, if we stay together for more than a year and a day, then it's permanent. Right?"*

*"That's right."*

*"Is there anyway to make it permanent earlier?"*

There was a long pause. *"I don't think so. But why don't we talk about that later tonight? I'm coming out."*

When the door to the bathroom opened Harry's breath caught. She was beautiful.

She was wearing the formal Potter family robes for the first time and the sight took his breath away.

The royal blue robe clung to her like a glove and a small version of the Potter Family crest rested just above her left breast. Around her neck she wore an elegant string of pearls with a sapphire pendant hanging down to accentuate the gentle swell of cleavage, just visible over the top of her robe. With her hair swept up in a sophisticated style, the sparkle of the matching sapphire earrings she wore could be easily seen.

She smiled at his thunderstruck expression. "You approve, my lord?" she said with a slight curtsy.

Harry bowed in return and smiled. "I do indeed, my lady. Thou art a gem among a field of dull stones and thy brilliance doth dazzle the eye and taketh away the breath!"

Hermione laughed, her eyes dancing mischievously. "Have you been reading Shakespeare again?"

He shrugged and placed her cloak around her shoulders. "It's something to... Well, it's not really reading, is it? I think it's more like spending time trying to decipher what he's saying. Now, shall we go?"

She nodded and he took her hand, kissed her palm, then led her from the room.

They met up with the other Brotherhood members, all dressed in their family robes and wearing their Brotherhood cloaks, in the Grand Foyer of the manor.

Harry looked them over with an approving eye before calling for their attention.

"In a little while we will be going to the Haven Hospital to visit with those people rescued from Azkaban. Meeting us there will be Minister Bones, the Irish Minister, Mallory, and a contingent of the Irish and International Press Corps. I didn't want this to become a media circus, but I'm afraid it has. I will remind everyone that, with the exception of myself and Hermione, no one is under any obligation to talk to the press. If you don't want to, then don't. If you do, be careful of what you say. No one wants a repeat of our fourth year and Rita Skeeter."

When he saw several acknowledging nods from the group, he removed his staff from its holster, expanded it to full size and apparated to the front of the hospital. The others followed a moment later.

Looking around, he noticed a nearby cluster of people and recognized Amelia, Minister Mallory and Healer August, the head healer for Haven. Not far from them was a larger group of reporters.

At the noise of so many people apparating, both groups looked up, noticing the new arrivals.

Amelia and Minister Mallory joined Harry and his party.

"Harry, you remember Minister Mallory," Amelia said with a smile. She knew how much Harry hated doing anything in the public eye and this entire event was going to be covered by the press.

"Minister," Harry said, reaching for Mallory's outstretched hand while flashbulbs popped.

"Lord Potter! A pleasure to see you again. And under such special circumstances," Mallory said, then he glanced at Hermione, noting her robes proclaiming her familial affiliation. "And I see more congratulations are in order."

Mallory took Hermione's hand in his own and kissed it. "I understand it was a private ceremony, Lady Potter, but I would offer you and your husband the very best wishes from myself and my country."

"Thank you, Minister," Hermione said demurely. She looked up at the tall man through her dark eyelashes and he smiled broadly.

"*What are you doing?*" Harry sent her, startled by her uncharacteristic behavior. Demure? Hermione was never demure! At least, not with him.

"*Hush, love. I'm just charming the old goat's socks off. Besides, you're my husband, I don't have to act demure with you,*" she replied.

Harry coughed for a moment trying to cover his laughter. That turned out to be a big mistake. Coughing in front of Healer August earned him an appraising glance and he was sure she was itching to start casting diagnostic spells on him.

"Harry, we've already given a statement to the press about what we're doing here today and why. We've promised that, afterwards, we would let the press have some time for questions. In return, they will follow behind us quietly, and they promised not to disturb any of the patients," Amelia told him.

Harry nodded thoughtfully as Healer August led them into the building.

"I understand you dislike the publicity, my lord," Mallory said in a low voice while walking next to him. "Far be it for me to instruct you in the roles of leadership, but you are the leader of your people, and they need to see you. It gives them hope, you see."

"I know, Minister. I am uncomfortable in the role I find myself thrust into. But my wife has been pounding these lessons home for me," Harry replied.

Mallory smiled at Hermione. "A beautiful wife is a comfort, a smart wife is an asset. You, my lord, have been blessed with both."

When Hermione returned the Minister's smile, Harry chuckled mentally, but nodded to the politician.

Sylvia August led the party to the back of the hospital where a covered walkway extended to a series of long buildings. There, she waited for everyone to catch up.

"Can I have everyone's attention please?" she called. "These buildings house patients rescued from Azkaban prison. As part of the original planning for the operation, we mistakenly assumed the prisoners would be in reasonably good health. We felt we'd be able to release the prisoners into Haven, where cots had been set up for them in the Town Hall and other locations.

"Unfortunately, the reality of the situation was far more dire. Most of the prisoners required immediate and extensive care. As soon as we realized the magnitude of our mistake, we had more than five hundred Haven house elves start putting up these buildings. Each building houses a hundred people. Time and space became a pressing problem, and we ended up placing people into buildings while the elves were still building them.

"As for the patients themselves, we're seeing a large variety of ailments, both physical and mental, though malnutrition is the most common ailment. All of the patients are suffering from it to one degree or another. Unfortunately, malnutrition opens the body up to a whole host of secondary illnesses.

"To those gentlemen and ladies of the press accompanying us today, I give you this warning. You are forbidden to ask any of the patients about their experiences unless they begin to speak of them first. For many, this has been a traumatic experience and these people will need the help of Empaths to clear away the traumas caused by their captivity," August said sternly.

Many in the press corps looked rebellious for a moment before being cowed by her stern gaze.

With that lecture in mind, Healer August opened the door to the covered walkway and led the party into the first building.

With the exception of bathrooms, storerooms and a staff station, the building consisted of little more than two rows of beds, separated by curtains. There was little noise, but plenty of activity, as house elves scurried about on their errands and staff and volunteers moved from bed to bed, comforting people.

"Oh, sweet Merlin," Mallory mumbled under his breath as he visibly paled.

Harry grabbed his arm. "Minister, are you alright?" he asked quietly.

Mallory nodded and shook himself. "Yes. I'm fine, my lord. I suppose I was just unprepared for the reality of it."

Harry looked out over the sea of patients. "Yes, I can understand that. You, Minister, move in the rarefied circles of politics. This is more my reality, sir," he said with calm dignity.

Mallory eyed the young man, once again re-evaluating what he saw. He had heard about Potter's injuries. They had resulted in the delay of the tour for several days. He quickly found himself coming to realize that Harry Potter was someone truly unique, a hero who cared little for the title or the rewards that came with it.

Mallory glanced at Hermione and she smiled knowingly. She knew exactly what her husband was.

As Healer August pushed on, with the group following, Harry noted that at the end of each bed was a chart with the name of each patient written in big, bold letters. Some names he recognized, most he did not. And a few, sadly, were listed as 'unknown' with the patient comatose and unable to supply the information.

"Healer August? Were there any children among the rescued?" He asked suddenly.

August frowned, then sighed, shaking her head. "No, my lord, there were not. Children would have found that environment far too harsh to survive for more than a week or two. The youngest prisoner we've found so far is a twenty-one year old named Oliver Wood."

Many of the younger Brotherhood members gasped, recognizing the name.

"Wood? How is he?" Harry demanded, his face pale.

August was surprised at the demand, but waved her wand, summoning a chart. She read it carefully for a moment before turning to the group. "He's still suffering from malnutrition and it's effects and is grossly underweight for his age. He's also suffering from several opportunistic infections."

"Can we see him?" Harry asked.

"Yes, of course. He's right up the hallway. If you'll follow me?"

"I take it this Wood fellow is someone you know?" asked Mallory in a undertone.

"Oliver was my house Quidditch captain. He graduated in my fourth year at Hogwarts," Harry replied tensely.

"I'm sure your friend will be fine. Quidditch is a wonderful sport. I was very pleased when we took the world cup a few years back," Mallory said proudly.

August stopped at one bed and turned. "Oliver Wood, my lord."

Harry stepped forward, followed by all of the former Gryffindors. Oliver lay on the bed, dreadfully thin. He was bandaged in several places where the healers were dealing with infections.

"Oliver?" Harry said softly.

The man opened his eyes and looked up. His eyes clouded with confusion for a moment before clearing. "Harry? Fancy seeing you here, mate."

He tried to sit up, but Harry pressed him back down. "Rest, Oliver. You're safe now, and you have friends nearby who will be here soon," he said before turning to the redhead behind him. "Ginny, get word to the twins about this. Also, send word to Minerva and Alicia."

Ginny nodded and stepped away from the group before apparating.

Hermione moved to stand with Harry. "You'll be fine, Oliver. The healers are fixing you up and you'll be out and about in no time."

Oliver looked up at Hermione, somewhat confused. He recognized her, but couldn't put a name to her.

Harry grinned. "Now, Hermione, don't confuse Oliver. He could tell you the name of every Quidditch player in the last century, but couldn't name his house mates unless they play on the team."

"I remember her..." Oliver said, blushing at being teased.

"Oliver, this is Hermione. You knew her as Hermione Granger, but she's Hermione Potter now," Harry told him proudly.

Oliver's eyes widened and he grinned. "Good going, mate."

"I wish we could stay longer, Oliver, but we have many others to see. Fred and George Weasley are on their way and we've sent word to Alicia Spinnet, as well as Professor McGonagall. You're going to get better, mate, and you have friends nearby to help you," Harry said, his voice catching slightly at the end.

Oliver nodded. Just knowing he had friends nearby was comforting.

"We'll come back and see you soon, Oliver," Hermione said, patting his hand.

Harry walked back out to the aisle and smiled gratefully at Healer August.

"Mr. Wood is expected to recover fully, my lord. He'll be even better now that he'll have friends visiting and helping. That's something we haven't had the time or manpower to do. We simply lack the people to compile a list of our patients or check for family and friends in Haven. It's a shame too. Knowing family or friends are nearby and having them visit helps in a patient's recovery."

Harry frowned, thinking quickly. "There are a great many students at the school who are looking for public service work they can volunteer for. I'm sure if you contact Headmistress McGonagall, she'd be more than happy to help."

Sylvia looked thoughtful. "An excellent idea, my lord. Thank you," she said with a smile. "Finding friends and family to help with patient care always works wonders on recovery time."

Harry motioned for Sylvia to lead them forward, smiling when he heard two loud cracks and cries of, "OLLIE!"

Healer August led them through the building and into one of the others. Harry stopped on several occasions to speak with patients, many of whom seemed to feel they had been personally rescued by him. It was a distinctly uncomfortable feeling for him, so when Healer August suggested that visiting only two of the four buildings was enough, he gratefully agreed.

Hermione walked next to him, holding his hand. She could feel how uncomfortable he was. *"Don't worry, my heart. This will be all over soon."* she sent to him, while caressing the inside of his palm.

*"I know, but can you believe this? We had nearly four hundred and fifty Aurors on that mission and these people seem to think I personally pulled them from their cages."*

August ushered them into a room with a row of chairs and a podium. In front of the podium were a number of chairs for the press.

The Brotherhood and both Ministers sat behind the podium, while the press filed into seats in front. It was a subdued group of reporters filling those seats. Seeing so many ill people had a sobering effect on everyone.

Healer August was the first to step up and speak. "Ladies and Gentlemen of the press, as promised, we'll take some of your questions now," she said. Several hands were raised immediately and Healer August pointed to one man in the back.

"Michael Rourke, Dublin Daily. My question is for Mr. Potter. By the British Ministry's estimates, there were at least two hundred Death Eaters at Azkaban Island. How many were captured and were are you holding them?"

Harry stood and walked to the podium where he looked at the reporter for a moment before answering. "No Death Eaters were captured. They gave no quarter and received none. The few who remained alive were left to the mercies of their master."

A buzz went through the group of reporters and Harry frowned. "Friends, this isn't a duel under the Camelot Rules of Dueling, nor was it officiated by the International Duelists Confederation. This is war. The man on the other side of the wand is trying to kill you, not stun or disarm you. And if he can cause you pain in the killing, all the better, as far as he is concerned.

"There were over five hundred prisoners on that island and yet we only managed to rescue less than four hundred and fifty. Why? Because the Death Eater guards were indiscriminately killing the prisoners while they were fighting us.

"I would also remind everyone that capturing Death Eaters would have been impractical. There is no way to transport them across the Death Ward without killing them."

"But many of these guards were pure bloods!" shouted one reporter.

Harry pinned the man to his seat with a glare. "They were Death Eaters. Those same pure bloods would take pleasure in raping your children and forcing you to kill them under an *Imperio* us curse. Blood means nothing! They have chosen to wage war on society, offering no mercy. We're playing the game by their rules."

The man gasped and felt himself pushed back against his seat. Harry's magic flared and his eyes glowed with his anger. "As far as we are concerned, wearing the uniform of Voldemort is a death sentence, no matter what your blood."

Another reporter stood up. "Mr. Potter, what can you tell us about this Brotherhood?"

Harry frowned, but before he could speak, a voice called out.

"I'm sorry, but that topic is covered under the Official Secrets Act. We are unable to confirm or deny anything you might have heard about it," Amelia said, standing from her chair.

Harry shot her a grateful glance.

"Minister Bones, what is the official position of the Ministry on capturing Death Eaters?" shouted Michael Rourke.

Amelia walked to the podium, which Harry gratefully gave up.

"The Ministry's position is a simple one. We are at war. We do not intend to capture Voldemort's forces, but to eliminate them. Some might think this is a harsh policy and that because Voldemort's forces are comprised mostly of pure bloods, we should be more lenient on them. But I don't agree. They have conquered our country, killed, raped and looted our countrymen, muggle and magical. They deserve no mercy and will get none," Amelia said harshly.

"What about those men who were captured in Northern Ireland?" shouted another reporter.

Brogan Mallory stood up. "The Death Eaters captured in Northern Ireland were interrogated using truth serum. Each confessed to killing at least one person, in many cases multiple people. As they were captured by Aurors acting in a military capacity, they were tried by a military tribunal and executed for their crimes. While we Irish might not fight with the same... fervor...as our British cousins do, we are no less committed to protecting our sacred soil from this scourge."

There was a moment of shocked silence from the press. No one had known about the fate of those captured in that raid. The news came as a surprise to the reporters who had grown accustomed to a lethargic and incompetent government.

Finally, Rourke broke the silence, "Mr. Potter, one final question, if I might. Rumor has it that you recently married. Is there any truth to that rumor?"

Harry stood and walked to the podium again. "To answer your question, yes. I am afraid all those magazines that like to label me as an eligible bachelor will have to change that title. I married Hermione Granger on the first of August."

Harry held out a hand and, blushing, Hermione stood and joined him at the podium, clasping his hand tightly. Several photographers took pictures

and questions were shouted at the happy couple. Before things could get out of hand, some of O'Dalley's constables appeared and began to usher the press from the room.

After the reporters had left, Healer August stood and faced everyone. "I've taken the liberty of having lunch prepared for us in the VIP lounge. If you would all follow me, please?"

With the reporters gone, Harry was able to relax. He thought it interesting that both Amelia and Mallory were different people in front of the reporters than they were when the press were gone. Amusingly, both Mallory and Amelia noted that, press or no press, Harry was unchanged.

The conversation around the table was more relaxed and Harry was surprised to find that Mallory could talk Quidditch as well as anyone. After the meal, the Irish Minister made his excuses and left, leaving Healer August, Amelia and his friends.

Leaning back in his chair, he felt the crinkling of the parchment in his pocket. He pulled the two letters out and looked at them curiously before opening them. After reading the first letter, he grinned slyly.

"Amelia, would it be possible for you to join us for dinner tomorrow evening?" he asked.

"I can, Harry. May I ask why?"

"It appears that someone I invited to dinner has finally accepted. As this is more of a state visit, I think it would serve our best interests if you attended," he told her, his amusement obvious.

Amelia raised an eyebrow and readjusted her monocle. "And may I know the name of this individual?"

Harry looked up from the letter, his eyes dancing. "Consider it a surprise, Amelia, one that I think you will enjoy. Trust me."

Remus and Tonks both winced.

Hermione frowned. "*Harry, what are you up to?*"

*"I'll explain tomorrow before our guest arrives, my heart. All you need to know right now is that we'll be entertaining some very special goblins."*

Hermione nodded.

Amelia had watched the non-verbal byplay between them, but was unable to glean anything useful from it. "Very well, Harry. I'll attend your little dinner party," she said with a shrug.

Harry bowed slightly in acknowledgment. *It's going to be an interesting evening*, he thought with a grin.

Putting the first letter away, he opened the second. Within seconds his eyebrows had raised to his hairline. "Remus, Hermione?" he said, quietly. "I'm not sure what to make of this."

He handed the letter to Remus, who held it so that both he and Hermione could read.

*Potter,*

*I just had an interesting conversation with your former Headmaster. The man has seriously gone around the bend. He believes you are going to kill Voldemort and take his place as the next Dark Lord. He also believes that he should be guiding you so that he can become the next Merlin.*

*Honestly, the man is not the man I followed in the fight against Grindelwald, and the first war with Voldemort.*

*Your little mix up with him in Haven cost him the sight in one eye, and one arm is so badly burned it might as well be useless. Despite all that, he wouldn't stop trying to break through my mental shields to convince me to join his side. As a result, I've kicked him out of where I'm staying. I'm positive he's heading back to Ireland, so practice CONSTANT VIGILANCE!*

*I'm old, Potter, I'm beat up and old, and I thought I could sit out this war. Now, I'm not so sure. I don't know what these old bones can offer you, but I'll support you.*

*Good show at Azkaban!*

*Alastor Moody,*

*Auror, Retired.*

Remus read the letter again, then he looked up at Harry. "I'll alert O'Dalley that Dumbledore could be back in the country. He'll contact the Irish."

"What about his offer?" asked Hermione.

"I don't know," Harry replied with a shrug. "Maybe I'll pass it off to Draco and let him mull it over. I don't think Draco should be his contact, however. Moody would never trust a Malfoy and he will always see Draco as a Malfoy. You remember how he was around Snape."

"Amelia or myself perhaps," offered Remus. "He knows me from the Order and he knows Amelia from his days at the DMLE."

"It wouldn't be a bad idea to start up some sort of underground movement back home," Hermione said.

Remus looked at her, his eyes bright. "Moody would be perfect for that, if we can convince him to do it. And if this letter is legitimate," he replied.

"We'll mull that question later. I think we can come up with a way of figuring out which side he's on... if it's him at all. Right now, I think I'd just like to go home and lay down for a while."

Hermione looked at him, concerned. "Are you alright?"

He smiled. "Truly, I'm fine. But this is the first time I've been out since I got shot and we did a lot of walking. I'm beat."

"Remus, make our excuses, will you?" Hermione murmured as she grabbed Harry in an embrace. Before he could even question what was happening, she tandem apparated them both back to their bedroom.

Harry stared at her in shock. "Why, you cheeky minx! You borrowed power from me to apparate us!" he exclaimed.

Hermione was already turning down the bed. "Of course I did. Now get out of those clothes and into something more comfortable. You'll feel better after you've had a nap."

He sighed, realizing the truth of her statement and started to undress. He stripped down to his boxers and climbed into bed. He laid on his side because his ribs still twinged every now and then. The bed shifted and he felt Hermione climb in next to him. Her hands gently massaged his shoulder muscles and he leaned back into her touch. His last conscious thought was of how much he loved her.

Hermione let her hands slide down his back before dropping away completely. "I love you, too, Harry Potter," she said softly, then climbed out of the bed to go find Narcissa. She had an important dinner to plan for and didn't know what to feed goblins.

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### Author's Notes:

Well the last chapter was an interesting one. Some people loved it, others hated it. Some wanted Hermione hung out to dry, others wanted to burn Harry at the stake and still others blamed it all on Miles. Then there were the few who hated all the sissy talk about feelings. Lord, they're going to throw up all over their laptops from this chapter, aren't they? Of course, some of these same people seem to think it's perfectly acceptable to walk away from a life and death situation without the slightest mental scar.

(Bob here) It kills me how many people want to see Hermione permanently punished. T'aint gonna happen, people Look, three people screwed up and if you want my take on it, Miles did the biggest screwup of them all. Ultimately as the commander of the forces, he messed up. Now can we please get on with the authors notes?

~Alyx raises an eyebrow~ You're the one holding the AN's up with your rant, dear.

Yah yah Alyx... now hush and let me rant..

For the record, Harry and Hermione should be acting more adult from here on. We're getting tired of their temper tantrums and have threatened them with a nice time out in the corner for the next 3 chapters if they don't start behaving.

To the person that posted a review four days after we posted the last chapter and complained that we hadn't updated. Well, thanks. I would like everyone else to know we are deliberately delaying this chapter because of this person. No pudding for you fella (or should that be gal?!)  
MUHAHAHAHA!

Hmmm how many chapters will this story be? Frankly, Scarlet, I haven't a clue. Our chapters have been getting longer and I still can't really say how many chapters there will be. This chapter is a prime example. In our plot file the visit to see the rescued contained three whole plot points. The actuality of that section was 10 pages of scene. So the answer is, the story will contain as many chapters as necessary to get to the end. Helpful, eh?

Ok we spelt Whinging wrong. Shoot us. What do you want? Your money back? (Cackles wildly)

Ok, Crys, I read your review and I'm coming over, unmedicated, to visit. (Just kidding) As a point in fact, Dudley was being trained to kill Harry. The problem is the trap got messed up when the assault force showed up instead of Harry.

**Special Notice:** We are not responsible for any beverage you decide to spit up on your computer because you ran into something you thought funny. Read at your own risk or put a cover over your keyboard/monitor!

Someone wants to know if we have a problem with Christians. Not in the least, they make excellent lion food and are great at BBQs. But seriously, from a Wizarding standpoint I would say YES! They would have a problem with Christians, especially the rabid brand we seem to grow here in the US. Eocho would have a major problem with these little suckers as they are directly responsible for the death of his culture. So, do we have a problem with Christians? Not if they are well seasoned and cooked right! (And for those whose sense of humor was surgically removed at birth, THIS IS A JOKE!)

Musings was missing Susan and Terry in the last chapter. Unfortunately it's just not possible to ensure that every person appears in every chapter. For example, Dumbledore has been out of sight for the last few chapters and then re-emerged in this one. We tried to keep him out, but the bastard just muscled his way in. I have the bruises to prove it. (Alyx here. Aren't those bruises lovely, ladies and gentlemen? Give the man a smattering of applause, won't you? Eep! He's not going to let me get away with that one!)

(Shows Alyx the paddle from the Standard Disclaimer and watches her pale.)

Matt T. Thanks for the idea of drowning Harry. We've never done that before and it sounds almost as good as killing him off by dropping a ton of flobberworms on his head. We'll try to figure out a good way to drown him.



*Bobmin*  
*FanficAuthors.net*

# Sunrise Over Britain

## Chapter 15 - Dinner Guests and Mad-Eye Madness

### Standard Disclaimer:

Bob sat in front of his computer and appeared to be puzzled. Alyx paced behind him, wringing her hands and watching him carefully. The computer buzzed and whirred and the blank screen beckoned invitingly.

Finally Bob sat back and threw up his hands in frustration. "I have no clue what to write for a disclaimer!"

Alyx moaned and waited in fear. In California the apocalypse began with a shifting of the earth's crust, Tokyo fell under the heels of Godzilla and London burned. On a small stage in the middle of cyberspace, Severus Snape looked at Bob with hope in his eyes.

"I get off this time?" he whispered in front of the open microphone.

"You couldn't get off even with instructions!" Yelled Harry from the audience.

"Just say the words Severus, we'll do you next time," Alyx said, eyeing the man that looked amazing like Alan Rickman with a hair disease.

"Ahem. The author's of this story wish everyone reading it to understand that they own nothing in the Potter Universe, all rights to the characters belong to JK Rowling and her many corporate flunkies. We own nothing and make no claims to owning anything. Heck, we don't even own our cats!"

Snape looked up from the script. "I can't believe you made me say that!" He protested, looking at Alyx.

"Don't worry about it Alan... I mean Severus," Alyx said with a purr.

"OH PLEASE!" Luna shouted, then she stood up and shot a hole in Snape's chest shaped like West Virginia.

Everyone stared at Luna in shock and Alyx glared at Bob.

"Honestly, it wrote itself this time!" Bob pleaded, then cringed when she reached for the paddle.

"I'm outa here," Bob muttered in fear before teleporting away.

"You bastard! Get back here!" Alyx screamed.

"Ain't love grand Hermione?" Harry asked. Hermione nodded and went back to polishing Harry's wand.

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### Sunrise Over Britain

#### Chapter 15

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#### Padfoot Manor (September 10th)...

Narcissa looked up from the book she was studying when Hermione opened the door to her room. The younger woman clutched a quill and parchment close to her chest, and her eyes held a look of panic as she stepped into the room.

"What's wrong, Hermione?" Narcissa asked, putting her book down.

Hermione walked over to one of the chairs and threw herself into it in a very un-lady like fashion. She had looked for Narcissa last night, but the older woman had been visiting with Andromeda and was unavailable.

Narcissa frowned at her. "You know, ladies of your station do not throw themselves about like that," she said frostily.

"Yeah, well, I'd throw myself out a window if I thought it would help with this dinner Harry set up," Hermione shot back, then she flushed and murmured an apology.

Narcissa hid a smile. She hadn't heard about any dinner plans, but if it was flustering Hermione it had to be interesting.

"So, tell me about this dinner and we'll see if we can fix the problem."

Hermione leaned forward on her chair. "We're having four Goblins to dinner tonight. Goblins! I don't know what to feed a Goblin but Harry called this a state dinner! Also, Amelia will be there in her capacity as Minister and she'll probably bring Arthur, as well. And if it's really a state dinner, then Ragnok will probably be coming. I know Harry invited him to dinner. And what do Goblins eat? I've been through a dozen books and they all say something different!"

Narcissa leaned forward and touched Hermione's hand, interrupting her tirade. "I remember the panic I felt when I first hosted a formal dinner, my dear. It is scary. The first thing to know is that your elves know exactly what to do. Dobby!"

There was a pop and Dobby appeared, looking anxious. He relaxed a little seeing Hermione. Despite knowing that Narcissa was forced to hurt him, he was never quite comfortable with her.

"Dobby, Master Harry is hosting a formal dinner this evening. We'll need food for at least twenty, plus four Goblins," Narcissa said.

Dobby looked to Hermione for confirmation. When she nodded at him, he perked up a bit. "Dobby knows where to get some Goblin foods. Would boiled Dubog on a watercress base be alright with mistress?"

"Boiled Dubog?" asked Hermione dubiously.

"It's a Goblin delicacy. Not that I've tried it. From what I understand, they take the beast and toss it into a pot of boiling water," Narcissa replied.

"Alive?" Hermione asked in outrage.

Narcissa looked at the younger woman and smiled slightly. "Yes, Hermione, alive. Tell me, do you like lobster?"

She looked at Narcissa, a bit confused now. "Of course I like lobster."

"Lobsters are usually cooked alive. If they aren't, they can become quite poisonous," Narcissa replied, before turning back to the waiting elf. "Dobby, let's prepare for a buffet meal. Lobster and lamb for the humans and Dubog for our special guests. Also, check the cellar for brandy. Goblins don't care for our wines, but they have a taste for brandy. Make sure you put one special bottle of our oldest brandy aside, as a gift for Ragnok."

Dobby nodded and vanished with a pop.

"I always feel uncomfortable dealing with Dobby," Narcissa murmured sadly. "Lucius made me do so many foul things to that poor elf, when all Dobby wanted was someone to appreciate him."

"Harry's told him that he's part of the family. Dobby could call himself Dobby Potter and Harry wouldn't object in the least. I thought he was going to explode with joy when Harry told him that he's family," Hermione offered.

Narcissa eyed Hermione carefully for a moment. "Yes, well, Harry and Dobby do have a bit in common, both were abused. I think Harry would rescue anyone from that sort of situation," she said quietly. Then, with a slight shake of her head, she returned to the main subject. "Now then, dinner is mostly taken care of. If I know Dobby, he'll have elves cleaning the manor until it sparkles. Were you really working on a menu when you walked in here this morning?"

Hermione looked down at her feet and tried to hide the parchment in her fist.

"Dear, even if you and Harry were muggles, with his wealth you would have told one of your servants what to do. We don't have to specify everything, just name the main courses and let the servants do the rest."

Hermione looked down at her feet. She wasn't used to dealing with servants and, frankly, her cooking skills were terrible. It was something that bothered her quite a lot.

Narcissa leaned over and patted her hand kindly. "Don't worry. This is all part of growing up. Soon, this will be second nature to you. Just don't make the mistakes I did."

Hermione smiled gratefully and, after a few more minutes of small talk, stood and left the room, content that Dobby had the meal planning firmly in hand. Standing outside the door, she paused and wondered what Harry was up to. He had been slipping off to another room to work on some project of his, and he was keeping it pretty close to his chest. All she could sense was that he was concentrating very hard on something. Making her decision, she went in search of him.

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### **Padfoot Manor, Basement workroom...**

Hermione had quickly tracked down Harry, but found herself confronted with a door and a sign that read "Danger! Keep out!"

"*Harry, are you in there?*" she sent.

"*Hermione?*" he sent back, sounding startled.

"*Who else would it would be?*"

"*Erm... no one, really.*"

Hermione sighed and placed her hands on her hips. "*Harry, what in the name of Merlin are you up to in there? You've been disappearing into this room since Danni told you it was alright for you get out of bed!*"

"*Hang on a second. I'll get the door and you can come in.*"

A moment later the door opened and she entered the room. She was surprised to see Eocho standing in front of a chalkboard. On the floor were two of the strangest contraptions she had ever seen. Then she spotted the Arithmancy equations all over the chalkboard.

Just what are you up to in here, Harry?" she asked, turning to face him.

She watched him survey the room full of strange equipment and equations scrawled on the walls, then he shrugged and turned back to her.

"Well, it was an attempt to make a new transportation system, but it didn't work out too well."

Eocho drifted over with a scowl on his face. "The Maglios is being too harsh on himself. He has accomplished much."

Hermione eyed the strange device on the floor. It looked like a very large window frame with no glass. The base was covered in glowing runes. Next to it was a pedestal with a circular knob resting above it. The knob appeared to be movable. She reached out to run her hand over the window frame, but Harry smacked her hand away from it.

"NO! Don't touch it until I shut it down," he said. He fiddled with the knob for a moment, then pushed it down into the pedestal, causing the glowing runes to fade. To Hermione, the control seemed to resemble a cross between a joystick and a combination lock.

"There, now it's safe. The pedestal controls the portal," he said, as if it were obvious.

"But how does it work?"

Harry's face went blank for a moment, then he scowled. "Well, it only partially works and I haven't been able to figure out why."

"Perhaps if you started from the beginning, Maglios, you would not be confusing your mate. She has a keen mind and she might be able to see what we have not."

Harry ran a hand through his hair and limped over to a stool, where he sat down and looked at her. "Wizards transportation leaves a lot to be desired. Most people can't tandem apparate easily, or far enough. The Floo system is hundreds of years old and hasn't been updated in all that time. It's dirty and disorienting for first time users and small children. Portkeys aren't much better and for a family the children invariably need a motion sickness potion before using one. Most people can't apparate across the country, let alone around the world.

"When we visited the stone circle, you said that some believed they were a form of instant transportation. Then you said you didn't believe that because the circles were tied to specific astronomical events, like the solstice or equinoxes. That got me thinking though. Wouldn't be nice if you could make a way of stepping from one place to another, without any whirling, twirling and spinning?"

"That's what I've been trying to make here. A way of traveling from, say, Padfoot manor to Diagon Alley, just by stepping through a portal. When you set the pedestal to the right destination, a connection is made that allows the portals to overlap in space for a time. We're going to need something like this when the war is over."

Hermione looked again at the portal, only this time she was suitably impressed. She examined it for a moment, then turned back to Harry. "So what's the problem? Doesn't it work?"

Harry scowled and Eocho stepped forward. "The Maglios is impatient. His portals work, only nothing living can pass through them without being killed. He can send all manner of objects and foodstuffs through the portal successfully. It just needs refining. However, he fails to see that his portals can be used in our war to send material over great distances," Eocho said, frowning at the frustrated young man.

"Yes, Honored Teacher, we have gone over this. But to be really effective, sending living things is necessary," Harry objected. He had visions of using the portal to move large groups of fighters. If he could only get the damned thing to work!

Hermione walked around the portal and the pedestal several times. She could see a glowing portal on the far side of the room. She turned to glance at Harry for a moment.

"*You've done something marvelous here. Now stop belittling yourself,*" she chided him gently via their bond.

"How have you been testing this?" she asked, her interest now fully piqued. She had no intention of letting Harry tear himself apart over a perceived failure.

"We've done all sorts of objects, food, charmed items and so on. When we tried a few conjured mice, they didn't survive the trip. Then I had Dobby catch a few real mice, just to be sure there was no difference, but the results were the same."

"So the portal contains the runes for controlling the transport. What does the pedestal do?"

"The pedestal contains most of the controls for the transport mechanism. It determines which transport frame it will send to. Each frame is uniquely keyed. The pedestal acts like a dial, allowing you to tune in which frame you're sending to."

"And it works for everything, except living creatures?" she asked again.

When Harry and Eocho both nodded, she turned a practiced eye towards the chalkboard. "Are those your only notes?"

"No," Harry said defensively, "I have a notebook."

He summoned the large notebook and Hermione recognized it as the same one he had spent the last month scribbling in. He handed it to her and she took it with a raised eyebrow.

He shrugged. "Maybe you can see what we've done wrong, Hermione. Neither Eocho nor I can figure it out and I was hoping to demonstrate this

today," he said, sounding disappointed with himself.

Hermione thumbed through his book for a few minutes, while Eocho and Harry looked on. After several minutes, she looked up at Harry, her brow furrowed.

"I'm not sure I understand all of this, Harry, but I've already spotted a few sections where the idea seems a little shaky. I'm not saying it's wrong, I'm just saying I need to study this to understand what you're trying to do. If this portal of yours works for everything except living creatures, you've already solved one problem. Inanimate objects can only be sent via floo or portkey if someone is holding onto them. Is there a size limit to how big an object the portal can transport?"

Harry walked over to the far side of the room and dialed something in on the pedestal. The window frame shrunk down to the size of a small shoe box. Then he returned to where Hermione stood and reactivated the nearby portal.

"Hermione, levitate that bench over to the transport frame," Harry said.

She looked at the six foot long bench and then at the transport frame, barely five inches wide. Shrugging, she pulled out her wand and levitated the bench.

When the bench crossed over the runes of the base there was a snapping sound and the transport frame seemed to fill with a liquid that bubbled slightly and glowed. The bench touched the liquid, seemed to stretch impossibly, then vanished with a pop. Hermione looked shocked, then remembered the receiving frame. Turning quickly, her eyes widened slightly. There, twenty feet away, the bench lay in front of the frame, which had expanded to fit the bench perfectly.

Harry chuckled at Hermione's expression, while Eocho looked on, amused. "I won't say it's limitless in size, but you could probably drive a lorry through it and have it come out intact and functional on the other end," he told her.

Hermione stepped back and crossed her arms for a moment. Then she made up her mind. "Harry, get some elves to set up these two portals of yours out in the front yard, say two hundred feet apart."

"Hermione? What are you up to?"

"You'll see this evening, Harry. Trust me," she told him, caressing his cheek gently. "Go take your bath now. I'll want one before I dress and I don't want to have to fight you for the bathroom."

Harry smiled crookedly. He then powered down both portals and left the room.

Hermione watched him go and wished she could join him. She was startled out of her thoughts when Eocho spoke.

"He is disappointed. He so wanted to show you a complete, working portal."

"I know, Honored Teacher, but my husband fails to recognize his own genius. Remus was right, Potter men seem to stumble onto ideas that earn them fame and fortune. My husband is no different," she said, with no small amount of pride.

"He may be disappointed, but I for one am thrilled at what he's done. Tonight, we'll show off an advance prototype of the Potter Portals to the leader of the Goblin nation, as well as the Minister of Magic. The economic potential is nearly unlimited."

Eocho eyed her for a moment, surprised. "I had not thought you would care much about such things, my daughter," he replied, his expression becoming unreadable.

"I don't care for them, Honored Teacher. But I must make plans to ensure my family is taken care of. What kind of wife would I be if I didn't look out for my husband and our children?"

Eocho was silent for a moment, then he nodded. "Plan for your family, my daughter, just do not fall into the trap of greed. It is an easy trap to fall into and has consumed many a good person."

Hermione bowed her head, acknowledging Eocho's gentle warning. "I shall be most wary, Honored Teacher."

Eocho studied her for a moment longer, then he smiled. "Go, my daughter. Read the book the Maglios gave you. Perhaps you can see what we cannot."

Hermione clutched the precious book tightly and walked from the room.

After running several errands, she caught up with Harry in their bedroom nearly an hour later. He was sitting at their breakfast table, wearing only his boxers and reading a parchment, his body still damp from the shower he had taken.

"Something interesting?" she asked as she began to undress for her bath.

"Not really," he replied with a shrug. "Caleb is thinking about a raid on the other two camps we know Voldemort has set up. But no one seems to know where they are, or how well they're protected. We're having a bit of a disagreement over what we should do next and we're trying to work it out."

"Oh? I haven't heard about any disagreement. What seems to be the problem?"

Nothing major. I need to start hitting back at his forces, including the British Army holding the cities. He wants to do more rescue missions," he said, frowning.

Hermione stopped undressing and looked at him inquisitively.

"Oh, he's probably right. The raid on Azkaban has flooded us with offers of fighters and equipment from more than twenty countries. If we accept all the help being offered, we'd have several thousand fighters. Remus is already pulling his hair out trying to figure out where we can put them all. There's a big parcel of land immediately to our north that's owned by the muggle Irish government. Remus wants to see if the Irish Ministry can talk the Irish Government into selling it off."

She sat on the edge of the bed and frowned. "You don't sound very enthusiastic over the idea."

"I suppose it would be a good idea, but..." Harry paused and sighed. "Rescuing people is nice, but it doesn't bring us any closer to going home, Hermione. We'll probably accept the help. Merlin knows we'll need it."

Hermione sat back, resting on her elbows, and looked at him. "You know, you never really said where you want to live after the war," she said softly.

"I like Padfoot Manor, but it's not home to me. Grimmauld is alright, I guess. It's close to Diagon Alley and London. But Hogwarts was the only place I ever considered home.

"As far as where we'd live, that's something we'll have to talk about. We own twelve properties from the Potter family, including six overseas, and we own another fourteen properties from the Blacks. If we can't find something suitable among them, I'll build you a home you'll be happy to live in.," he replied, his eyes defocused. In his mind, he could see a home with lots of space for children to play and maybe even his own Quidditch pitch.

Hermione smiled. Harry didn't realize it, but he'd broadcast that image to her. His vision of home sounded perfect. She shook her head, then grabbed her robe and clothing. She wanted to soak before tonight's dinner and think about things. Between his portals and his plans for after the war, she had a lot to consider.

She walked into the bathroom, while Harry turned back to the parchment he was reading.

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### **Draco and Luna's room (Padfoot Manor)...**

Draco stood staring into the mirror while he tried to adjust his tie for the fifteenth time. He had better things to be doing with his time than worrying about some special dinner Harry was holding. It irritated him no end that Harry knew he had better things to do.

It wasn't helping that Draco's foul mood was brought on by yet another prank from the Weasley twins. It seems that every time they were about to deliver some new toy for people to use in the field, they celebrated with a series of pranks against anyone and everyone.

Draco had found himself sporting a decidedly bushy Hermione-like look this morning when he opened his office door. Sitting on his desk was a new invention from the twins that they felt might be useful - Hover shoes. Apparently, with these shoes, the wearer would be able to walk on water, or even air, for up to a minute. The twins thought it might be useful in evading capture.

The door opened and Draco watched Luna enter the room. She casually walked over to him and wrapped both arms around him. He leaned back a little into her embrace and closed his eyes. Because of their unique bond, physical intimacy, even just holding each other, was a very pleasurable experience.

"I like the hair, but don't you think Harry might confuse you for Hermione?" she asked, smiling slightly.

Draco knew she was holding back her laughter. "Oh, go ahead and laugh. But one of these days I'm going to get those Weasels back."

Luna giggled and she quickly straightened out his tie before turning to get dressed herself. "You've been saying that for weeks, Dray, and you have never managed to prank them back."

"Hey! Whose side are you on?"

Luna turned to look at him. He watched her in the mirror and couldn't help feeling more than a little aroused, what with her standing in just her bra and panties.

"I'm on your side, Dray. But you've been trying to act like a Gryffindor and I have to admit that it's a little disappointing. You've been trying to prank them back and you know that's not a very Slytherin thing to do."

"Luna!" Draco exclaimed, his expression mortified. "You wound me! Me? Act like a Gryffindor?"

She eyed him with amusement, her hands on her hips. "Oh, really? Then how come you're thinking about pranking back? A Slytherin would want to do something so that they'd never prank again."

He paused, his brow furrowed in thought. He had been trying to prank the twins back and that was like trying to win against a chess master when you are barely able to play! He had been trying to play by their rules, when he should be making up his own. His eyes narrowed for a moment and a sly grin crossed his face.

Luna nodded satisfactorily. Draco was coming around on the issue. Then she pulled out one of the Black family robes to wear and frowned. *The*

*family robes are really quite dull*, she thought.

"I wonder if I can convince Harry to change the color of these robes," she said, mostly to herself. Then she waved her wand, changing the black robe into one of bright orange. On the skirt portion there were flaming pink Flamingos, which walked across the fabric and looked around curiously. Around her neck she wore a chain of live minks.

Draco blinked and wondered if his eyes would ever recover from the shock. "Luna, my love, you can't do that to the family robes. We only wear them on formal occasions anyway, so would it hurt very much if you wore them as they were supposed to be?"

"But black is so boring, Dray," she protested.

Draco bit his lip and did his best not to laugh. "Tell you what. If Harry says you can change the colors of the robes, then go ahead and do so. You know the rules, that sort of change needs to be approved by the head of the family," he said, trying not to smile.

"Fine!" Luna said airily, then she walked from the room in her now neon robes.

A moment later she knocked, then opened the door to Harry and Hermione's bedroom. "Harry," she said in a serious tone, ignoring the fact that he had fallen off the bed, half naked, and was scrambling to cover himself using a blanket.

Hermione stared at Luna in confusion. She, too, was barely dressed. She had just reached around to hook her bra strap when the blond barged in.

"Harry, Draco says I have to ask you for permission to change the family robe color," she said. She looked at him expectantly, ignoring the nearly naked Hermione now sitting on the bed, staring between the two.

"Luna! I'm not dressed!" he protested.

"Pish posh! You don't have anything that Dray doesn't. Besides, this is more important. Now, about the family robes?"

"Any color you want, Luna," Harry said, while huddled under the blanket. He kept snaking a hand out to reach for his pants, but they were just out of reach.

"Thank you, Harry," Luna said. Then she waved her wand quickly, before walking out of the room.

Harry breathed a sigh of relief, stood up and reached for his pants.

Hermione's eyes bulged and she slid off the bed, laughing hysterically. Luna's parting spell had planted the words 'Hermione's love muffin' along the back of Harry's boxers and he couldn't see it.

Harry eyed her suspiciously for a moment before putting on his pants.

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### **Dinner with Ragnok and company...**

Harry stood at the bottom of the grand staircase, waiting. Hermione rushed about checking on everything. Narcissa followed close behind her, double checking, much to Hermione's relief. She was hosting a formal dinner tonight and it made her more nervous than taking her OWLs.

Amelia had arrived a few minutes earlier and, after greeting her, Harry managed to steer her into the sitting room, where the house elves were serving drinks and hors d'oeuvres. The doors to the sitting room were open, so all of the Brotherhood, and Harry's guests, could see him waiting expectantly.

At precisely six o'clock, a blur appeared in the foyer in front of the stairs and Harry moved forward to welcome his guests. The portkey had delivered four goblins to the foyer. Hermione joined him, facing the group of Goblins.

Harry removed and expanded his staff, tapped it once against the floor and released it to hover silently next to him. Then he held his hands out, palms up, to show they hands were empty.

"On behalf of the House of Potter, I bid thee welcome, honored guests. I offer you sanctuary and protection during your visit. If by my life, or my magic I can defend thee, it will be done," Harry said.

Ragnok's eyes widened hearing him offer the ancient goblin greetings. What happened next surprised everyone.

"Mirshak et kru argallü!" Hermione said haltingly.

All four goblins grinned toothlessly at her words.

"*What did you say?*" Harry sent Hermione.

"*It's gobbledegook, but it means 'My mate and I welcome you.'*" she sent back.

Ragnok approached them. He bowed for moment then straightened. "We accept your sanctuary, honored host and if by our lives or our magic we can defend thee or thy house, it will be done," he said, giving the appropriate response to the ancient greeting.

A crowd slowly formed up behind the Potters, watching curiously.

Ragnok held out a hand with two fingers outstretched and another Goblin came forward, taking his hand. "It is good to see you again, Mr. Potter. May I introduce you to my mate and life companion, Leenar?"

The second goblin was slightly shorter than Ragnok, but dressed in a similar manner.

Harry and Hermione nodded politely to Leenar.

"And this is elder Gapsit, and his mate Morla," Ragnok continued.

After acknowledging the other two goblins, Harry introduced the people standing behind them. Ragnok raised one eyebrow when he came to Amelia, but since this was largely a social visit, he said nothing. Amelia, on the other hand, was dumbfounded. Harry had managed to do something no Minister had accomplished. He had set up a meeting with the leader of the Goblin nation and his chief adviser.

Hermione grabbed Harry's hand after all the introductions were made, then she turned to Ragnok.

"Director, dinner will be ready shortly. However, before we sit down to dinner we would like to show you something that you might find not only interesting, but profitable," she said.

Ragnok's eyes widened slightly, but he nodded for her to lead the way.

Hermione led the large party out the front doors and out onto the lawn. There, several elves were setting up Harry's portals.

She stopped the group in front of one of the portals and turned to face everyone. "My husband has, for the last several weeks, been working on an idea. I will warn everyone right now. Do not touch these devices, as they are just prototypes and still quite dangerous. Harry? Would you please demonstrate?"

*"What are you doing?"* he sent her. *"You know these don't work right yet!"*

*"Trust me. Just show them the portal in operation."*

Harry demonstrated the portal, but asked that everyone hold off their questions until dinner. After twenty minutes of explanation and demonstration, he led everyone back into the manor and to the formal dining room.

Leading the goblins into the dining room, Ragnok and his guests looked approvingly at the boiled Dubog, while Hermione looked at it, as well as the lobster, and swallowed nervously. Taking a plate, she chose the lamb, just to be safe.

Ragnok sat next to the head of the table. Harry had intended to offer him the head spot, but he didn't get the chance. Taking the seat himself, he then offered to pour brandy for his goblin guests, who looked at the bottle eagerly.

There was little conversation while everyone ate. In the end it was Ragnok who broke the near silence.

Picking up his brandy snifter, he swirled the liquid around, inhaled deeply and sipped. Leaning back on his chair, he looked at Harry. "You didn't invite us out here for just a meal, as pleasant as this company is, Mr. Potter. You had a motive, did you not?"

Harry raised his glass in salute, acknowledging the point. "Yes, Director, I do have two motives in mind. The first was simple. I'd hope to enlist your aid. The second is more important to me and to our world."

Ragnok looked intrigued and he motioned for Harry to continue.

"Very well then, let's start with the second reason. Across the table sits Minister Bones. As far as I can tell, no Director of Gringotts has ever had any contact with any Ministry, except following a war between our two peoples. Now, far be it for me, as a private citizen, to poke my nose into politics. But it seems to me that the Magical world - not the Wizarding world, not the Goblin world - but the Magical world suffers because of the suspicions between our two peoples. I'm not suggesting that you immediately rush out to make a new treaty, but as you can see, Director, our peoples can get along with each other," Harry said, gesturing down the table where Amelia was laughing at something Gapsit had told her.

Ragnok glanced down the table and his eyes widened slightly before he turned back to Harry. "You make a strong point, Mr. Potter. Perhaps it would be to our benefit to open a dialog with your Ministries."

Harry bowed his head for a moment, then he raised his own glass in salute. "If I may be of service in this, Director, you have but to ask."

"I think I may ask for a moment alone with Minister Bones, after dinner. Perhaps in some out of the way sitting room or study?" asked Ragnok.

"My house is at your disposal, Director. Dobby?" Harry called.

Dobby appeared by his side. "Dobby, would you see that Minister Bones and Director Ragnok are made comfortable in the main study after dinner?"

Dobby nodded and vanished with a small pop. Harry glanced apologetically at Ragnok, who smiled benignly at him. Even though Goblins did not use House Elves themselves, they were well versed in their behavior and antics.

"You said you had two reasons for our invitation, Mr. Potter?" Ragnok prompted.

Hermione looked over from her conversation with Ragnok's mate, Leenar. "Yes, Minister. My husband wants to talk to you about his portals and



their use during the war. But I'm sure you have already recognized their commercial value," she offered.

"Indeed. If, as you say, you will be able to eventually allow for animate object transport, as well as inanimate cargo, the commercial possibilities are endless," Leenar murmured, jumping into the conversation.

Ragnok watched the two females converse with amusement.

"I have every confidence that we'll overcome this final hurdle. Then it's just a matter of cleaning up the portals and packaging them for market," Hermione replied.

"How do you envision their use?"

"There would be two markets, consumer and commercial. The consumer market would allow for families to use them between other consumer portals, or between homes and commercial public portals, for a fee."

"Maintaining the public portals would be a time consuming and resource heavy task and you lack the infrastructure to support such an endeavor," Leenar pointed out.

"Perhaps we'll franchise out the commercial management," mused Hermione.

Leenar's eyes glinted with anticipation.

Harry watched for a moment longer, then he motioned back to Ragnok. "Director, while our mates figure out ways to make us even richer than we already are, I am interested in using the portals for the war effort and immediately following the war."

Ragnok tore his eyes away from the two females and motioned for Harry to continue.

"Director, you have facilities, other than the main branch banks, which you've protected. Not all of those facilities connect to your underground track system and the vaults, correct?"

Ragnok nodded reluctantly.

"What I would like, Director, is permission to use some of your facilities to pre-position material, and perhaps fighters, if we can fix that particular problem. Right now we have no grand plan as yet, no idea of exactly what we'll be doing. All I'm trying to do is lay the groundwork, the foundation for getting the material over to a secure location that Voldemort's men can't breach."

Ragnok leaned back and considered his reply very carefully. The Goblins rarely got involved in Wizarding conflicts because they rarely picked the winning side. He took another sip of his brandy and tried to formulate a diplomatic reply that didn't commit him one way or the other.

"We'll cooperate fully with you, Lord Potter," Leenar said succinctly.

Both males looked at their mates in confusion. They'd gotten involved in their own conversation and had forgotten about the women.

"We will, Leenar?" exclaimed Ragnok.

"Of course, my mate. We usually cooperate with our partners. Lady Potter and I have just concluded an agreement that will give us commercial control of his portals for freight transport. We will pay the Potter Family Trust a mere three sickles royalty per pound of freight," Leenar said smugly.

Ragnok sat back silently for a moment, calculating. The amount of money paid to the Potter family would be substantial, but the amount of money earned by Gringotts would be astronomical! Even if they never get the portals working for people, the freight business alone would make it worth the risk.

Ragnok raised his glass to Leenar. "I bow to your suggestion, my mate," he said, then he turned to Harry. "It seems, my Lord, that our mates have outwitted us both."

Harry reached out and gently touched Hermione's hand. "Yes, Director. I fear you are correct. In that regard, we are both lucky to have such intelligent mates."

Hermione looked startled, then her expression turned serious. She had, in an effort to make today's dinner go off without a hitch, run roughshod over several people in the manor, including her husband. She was about to say something when Harry stood and offered to show Ragnok to the study.

When Harry and the Director left the room, Hermione's smile faltered a bit and she tried to sample what Harry was feeling from their bond.

Amelia was enjoying herself, much to her surprise. When Harry mentioned a formal dinner with special guests she had thought he had meant the American Secretary of Magic. He had been making some noise for a while about visiting Haven. She would have bet her entire family fortune, which wasn't much, that she wouldn't be meeting with Goblins at this dinner.

Gapsit and his mate proved to be engaging conversationalists. With a longer life span than any human, the Goblin Elder was able to recall happenstances from hundreds of years ago. She was surprised to hear him explain several so-called rebellions and how most of them were misunderstandings brought about by the inherent mistrust between the humans and the Goblins.

She turned when she felt a touch against her arm, then she looked down to see Dobby, Harry's personal house elf watching her with his huge eyes.

“Yes?”

“Mistress Minister, Master Harry Potter requests that you join him and his guest in the master study. May I show you the way?”

Amelia nodded, then turned to her dinner companions and made her excuses before following the elf out of the dining room.

Amelia's surprise hit a new high when Dobby ushered her into the study where Harry and Ragnok sat casually conversing. Harry looked up at Amelia and stood up, smiling.

He turned to Ragnok and bowed slightly, then he bowed to Amelia. “I will leave the two of you to your discussion,” he said. Then he called Dobby and instructed the little elf to bring Amelia and Ragnok whatever they needed.

The two politicians watched Harry leave the room and, for a moment, there was utter silence.

“A most interesting and formidable young man,” Ragnok murmured. “Did you know that he doesn't speak in terms of the Wizarding world, like so many wizards do? He talks of the magical world, where Goblins, Centaurs and House Elves are equals to Wizards and Witches.”

Amelia shook her head and frowned. “I know his elf isn't bound to him. Harry treats him like a member of the family. And while his wife, Hermione, does have a bound elf, that elf bosses her around as if she were a child. Harry was never exposed to the many prejudices of the Wizarding world, and those he has been exposed to, he rejects outright.”

Ragnok looked thoughtful for a moment. “It seems our host would like us to do the same, Minister. He feels that, for the sake of the Magical world, it would be best if we worked together to achieve a greater understanding and acceptance between our two societies.”

Amelia leaned forward on her seat and stared at Ragnok in amazement. “That's it? He had no idea of treaties or asking for aid or anything like that? He just wants us to be friends?”

Ragnok chuckled and offered to refill her glass. “Amazing, isn't it? He invites us over here and basically tells us to cease bickering and be friends.”

Amelia lifted her glass in toast to Ragnok. “Since he has been able to get us talking, nothing else he does will surprise me.”

“Indeed, Minister, nor I,” countered Ragnok and for a brief moment both looked towards the door Harry had just exited.

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### **Harry and Hermione's bedroom, later that night...**

Harry walked into the bedroom a little tired from the day, but rather pleased. Amelia and Ragnok seemed to part on friendly terms and they even made noises about setting up a meeting in the coming weeks. When he started to get out of his dress robes, he finally noticed the muted pensive mood his wife was in. She was considering something hard and whatever it was had her worried.

“What's wrong, Hermione?”

She sat on the bed facing away from him with her head bowed. She was only half dressed.

“Am I too pushy, Harry? I know I made you demonstrate your portals today when you felt you weren't ready yet. Then Leenar and I went ahead and make a deal right under your nose...and Ragnok's too, I suppose. The more I think about it, it seems I've always been bossy, pushing you and Ron to do homework, to study, not to break rules. Bloody hell, I even pushed you into our sex life before we got married!”

“Right, and I fought hard against that, didn't I?” he commented dryly.

Hermione shot him a grin, then her expression turned serious again.

“*Seriously... Am I really that bossy?*” she sent him, her voice suddenly uncertain.

Harry walked around the bed and knelt in front of her.

“*Love, your bossy when you need to be, and perhaps that's the public image you portray. But I know otherwise. I've seen you chew your lip in doubt. Sure, you nag me to take my potions when I'm sick and I complain to you about it. But don't you understand how much I enjoy knowing you care enough to nag at me?*”

She laughed a little and ran her hand through his hair fondly, but Harry could tell she wasn't convinced.

“*Hermione, let's look at what you do.*”

“*What do you mean,*” she sent suspiciously.

“*A couple months ago, before we got married, you had a conversation with Remus. During that conversation he implied that it was up to you to make sure we had enough money for everything we wanted to do in our lives.*”

“*Yes, I remember that conversation. Are you telling me that he set me up?*” she sent, her inner voice was now laced with anger.

Harry sent her a calming caress via their bond. “*No, he didn't set you up. He tried to help you overcome your reluctance to our wealth. He wasn't*

*lying. From what I understand, my mother handled a lot of estate management for my father, but only because my father wanted to make sure she learned how. It was wartime and he wanted to make sure she understood how to manage our family's assets in case something happened to him. I don't claim to fully understand all this money stuff, but I trust you implicitly with it, and I know you won't do anything that would hurt our family. And when the time comes, you'll be able to teach me about it.*

*"You did something today that never occurred to me. I was ready to give the Goblins portals in return for placing them in strategic locations we could maybe use during the war. Then you come along and set up a deal that will fatten the family fortune even more. I knew the portals had value, but I didn't care about that. To me, they were just a wartime tool. I am overwhelmingly proud of what you did today. If I had one objection, it would be that you didn't ask me first, or discuss your plans with me ahead of time. But the end results couldn't have been better if I'd planned them myself.*

*"Getting back to your original question. Are you bossy? The answer is, sometimes yes, but only in those areas where you believe you have a firm understanding of the subject and you believe you have some measure of control over the subject. You took control of our finances and relieved me of a burden I didn't want. When Voldemort is gone, we'll sit down and work out new duties for both of us."*

*"So you don't mind me barging in and making decisions like that?"*

*"No, not really. To be honest, I would have preferred if you'd talked to me first, but I can see how it wasn't possible, considering what you accomplished today with the dinner party and making sure everything ran smoothly. Besides, I know you, love. You're not bossy where it really counts."*

"Oh? And where is that, Mr. Potter?" she asked, slipping back into normal speech and arching an eyebrow at him.

Harry got up off his knees and placed both hands on the bed, one beside each of her hips. She was forced to move back on the bed and she looked at him, surprised.

"Even when I'm discussing operations against Voldemort, you only offer an opinion at best. There is no doubt in my mind, however, that once Voldemort becomes a thing of the past, our roles will shift again," he said.

"What do you mean?"

"Well, we have so much money we don't have to work to put food on the table. We'll be able to do work we enjoy, without having to worry about finances. What do you want to do after the war? That's going to be an important question for all of us. What will be the role of the Brotherhood be after the war? None of us have really thought about it much. I know I haven't."

He shifted slightly and tried to hide the flash of pain he felt from his leg. Hermione's eyes narrowed and she grabbed her wand. Before he could say anything she was levitating him onto the bed.

"Can't have you hurting when you can easily avoid it," she said, then she rolled on the bed until she was next to him.

He wrapped an arm around her and their conversation slipped to the non-verbal as they exchanged thoughts and images. Before either realized what was happening, they fell asleep, sharing their dreams. A short while afterwards, Dobby and Winky popped in and placed a blanket over them both.

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## **Haven School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, First Year Defense Class (Sept 11th)...**

The first years filed into the classroom somewhat uneasily. Professor Stonefist had been absent for their first two classes and Professor Pickerton had filled in for him. Professor Pickerton was a soft spoken man for the most part and his teaching methods were quite gentle. No one knew what Professor Stonefist was about, except that he was a huge, intimidating looking individual.

A hush fell in the classroom when the door to the Defense office opened and Stonefist walked out. Under his arm was a huge box, which he handled easily. Stonefist didn't bother wearing professor robes, preferring instead to dress in jeans and a t-shirt.

Placing the box on the desk he looked up at the class. "All of you, get out of those robes for this class," he growled.

There was a scramble as the class tried to get out of their robes as quickly as possible.

"You!" he barked at one student who had shucked his robe and taken his seat. "How long is your wand?"

"T-Thirteen and a half inches, Professor," said the first year timidly.

"Thirteen and a half inches!" roared Stonefist, causing most of the students to jump in fright. "Then how do you plan on carrying your wand Mr... Mr. Middleton?" he asked after consulting a seating chart.

"Umm. I'm not sure, Professor. My back pocket, I guess," the boy answered, his voice a bit shaky.

"That's an interesting way to lose an ass cheek, Middleton. When the time comes for you to explain to your first girlfriend just why you're missing an ass cheek, please be so kind as to invite me. I'd love to hear that conversation," Stonefist barked out. "I want all of you to listen up! You've all experienced accidental wand flares. It's a common problem with young students who've yet to learn to control their magic. Now imagine, you're walking down the hall, your wand in your back pocket, and it flares. I'm telling you now, people, I will not have any of my students running to the

infirmiry with a flaming ass! Do you understand me?" he roared.

He heard a few murmurs and nearly growled. "I can't hear you!" he bellowed. "Now speak up when spoken to."

"Yes, sir!" the class bellowed back.

"Better, much better," he said as he reached into the box on his desk. A moment later he pulled out a strange looking leather object and held it up for everyone to see. "This, ladies and gentlemen," he continued in an overly loud voice, "is the junior edition of the standard Auror Wand Holster. These beauties have been donated to the school, thanks in part to the Ministry of Magic, and Smith and Wesson, the American arms manufacturer.

"Now, you'll note that each holster is exactly a regulation five point five inches long. Why don't I see anyone writing this down?" Stonefist paused, then nodded in satisfaction when the class scrambled for parchment and quill.

"Better... Now, as I was saying. Although Auror holsters are made normally of dragon hide, this one is standard leather, though it contains the same spells as a standard holster. These beauties are summon resistant, flame resistant and water resistant. They contain an automatic shrinking charm that will reduce the size of your wand to precisely five point zero inches.

"Each holster is also charmed to extend and resize the wand automatically, based on a specific hand movement. Releasing the wand from your hand will cause it to automatically retract to your holster. And finally, in the event that your forearm is broken, the holster will prevent your wand from damage. This is a good thing, ladies and gentlemen. A very good thing.

"In a few minutes, each of you will come up and get one of these. You will wear these at all times! You will sleep with your wand in it's holster and on your arm or by Merlin I'll make you learn to sleep without an arm!

"Over the next month we will learn to use these holsters, as well as proper wand care. Once you've mastered that, we'll start on something fun, getting into shape! Now, step up here and get your holster. For homework tonight, I want everyone to read and understand the holster's instruction manual. I also want each and every one of you to write a letter of thanks to Mr. Jedidiah Smith of Smith & Wesson for giving you these holsters."

Stonefist leaned back and watched the kids come up with more than a little amusement. His friend Jed had offered to outfit the entire school when he had learned that his old Gunny was going to be teaching kids. America and Canada, unlike the European nations, started their kids off with training wands much earlier in life and leather holsters were a common item for kids.

He was satisfied. These kids would learn from the beginning how to handle themselves. His other students had finally gotten out of their basic PT stage, thanks to the use of a time turner, and he had turned them over to the hand to hand combat instructor for a new set of bruises. He nearly chuckled, thinking about it. He didn't want to be Harry Potter when his wife got home from her new classes tonight. In the meantime, he'd teach these kids and wait for the next batch of Aurors to arrive. Aurors that he had to turn from cops to soldiers.

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### **Cairngorm Mountains, Scotland...**

Nippers looked up from filling the bucket with stream water.

"Who there?"

Another elf stepped out from behind a tree. The short creature was dressed funny for an elf. He wore a leather jerkin that came down to just below his waist. On one sleeve were strange markings and he wore a belt with a variety of tools, including a dagger.

"I is Toby, Commander of the Haven Scout Elves," the other elf said with quiet dignity.

Nippers' eyes widened and his ears drooped a little. "I didn't know. I sorry, Sir."

House elves and their brand of magic had been ignored for so many centuries. Few wizards were even aware that the elves had a secure method of communications that spanned all of the continents. Wizards like Harry Potter and Draco Black were only now coming to appreciate their abilities. Nippers was well aware of the large group of elves that had joined with the humans at Haven to fight the evil consuming the land.

"What brings Toby to me?"

Toby poked Nippers in the chest. "We knows you staying wit peg legged man wit one eye. I have message from General-Lord-Harry-Potter-Black-Sir for peg leg."

Nippers winced from the poke, but nodded. "What message?"

Toby reached into a pouch at his belt and pulled out a sealed scroll. "You give to peg leg. I come back here tomorrow to get answer."

Nippers nodded and clutched the scroll tightly. Having completed his task, Toby vanished with a pop, leaving Nippers looking around fearfully.

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### **The Ministry of Magic, Haven (Sept 12th)...**

Amhar Coeur de Lion was infuriated. He had been discharged only a few days ago from the hospital and sent to a small cottage to live. House elves delivered food to his house everyday, but that was all the contact he had with anyone and that wasn't right! Didn't they know he was a member of the Wizengamot and a direct descendant of Richard I, the Lion Heart? He had royal blood flowing through his veins!

Amhar stepped into the lobby of the building and found himself in confusion. Normally the lobby of the Ministry of Magic was a sedate place where people rarely spoke and when they did, it was in hushed whispers. *Things are definitely different about this building*, huffed Amhar to himself. People bustled about and there was a steady hum of conversation. Spotting an information desk, he walked over to it.

“Good morning, sir, and welcome to the Ministry of Magic. How can I help you?” said the young woman behind the desk.

His eyes narrowed when he noticed the woman wore a name tag identifying her as a student volunteer. “I wish to speak to the Minister of Magic,” he replied, barely able to conceal his disdain for the young student.

“Yes, sir,” the student replied. “The office of the Minister is on the third floor, section two, east. Just follow the butterfly.”

The student released a butterfly made from folded parchment. It hovered in front of Amhar for a moment before taking off for one of the nearby staircases. Amhar shuddered. *No lifts?* he asked himself as he followed the butterfly.

Following the paper butterfly quickly led Amhar to the Office of the Minister. He opened the door and walked into the outer office.

He was surprised and appalled to see so many muggle items in the Minister's office. Once it had been a bastion of old pure blooded traditions, but it seemed this new Minister was having nothing to do with that.

A clerk looked up from her typing.

“Name?” she asked in a bored tone.

“Tell the Minister that Amhar Coeur de Lion is here and wishes to see her immediately.” Amhar stated imperiously.

The clerk flipped open a calendar book and scanned it for a moment. “I'm sorry, sir, but the earliest I can get you in to see the Minister is three weeks from this Thursday. If that is suitable, I'll need the reason for the meeting. The Minister is a very busy person.”

“B-B-But I'm Amhar Coeur de Lion!” he exclaimed, nearly shouting. His face turned a puce color and he started to clench his fists. He was about to tell off this insufferable cow of a clerk when he felt a hand wrap around his arm. Turning, he eyed the large man with disdain before noting the badge he wore that named him as a Constable, whatever that was.

“I'm sorry, sir, but if you can't control yourself, I'll have to ask you to leave,” the man told him firmly.

Amhar stepped back and frowned. He had never been one for any sort of physical activities and burly men made him nervous. “Get your hands off me, oaf! Don't you know who I am? I'm a member of the Wizengamot. I'm Amhar Coeur de Lion and I demand to speak to the Minister!” he shouted angrily, trying to shake off the constable.

The constable frowned, tightened his grip and Amhar suddenly found himself being propelled from the office. The man easily carried him down the stairs and let him loose in the lobby.

“I don't care who you are, mister. The Wizengamot has not been reformed, so your name means nothing to me. I'm letting you go with a warning. If you come back here and disturb the peace again, I'll lock you up in the town jail. Now get out of my sight,” the constable said, fingering his wand menacingly.

Amhar flinched. He realized only then that he had not yet replaced his wand and backed away from the constable. Standing outside of the Ministry building a few moments later, he clenched and unclenched his fists in anger. No one treated him like that! He'd see that man fired if it was the last thing he did!

Amhar stormed angrily away from the Ministry building. He paused for a moment in front of Gringotts, but didn't enter. He had been told that his family vaults in London were inaccessible, and his investments in most wizard businesses had been lost when Britain fell. Standing there, he took stock and realized that for all intents and purposes, until he could get to the substantial wealth in his family vaults, he was broke. He couldn't even afford to replace his wand! The Government had given each person in the hospital one hundred galleons and that was all he had to his name.

Struggling to contain his anger at his poor treatment, he trudged back towards the minuscule cottage he had been assigned. He was oblivious to the fact that most people were delighted with the small, two bedroom cottages, and wouldn't have cared had he known.

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## Cairngorm Mountains, Scotland (Sept 14th)...

Moody watched the stream carefully from cover. He was wearing a cloak of invisibility, hiding behind a tree and he had silenced himself. The note said to be at the location at ten in the morning. Of course, being who he was explained why he'd arrived at six to take up his current position to wait and see what happened.

The large silver-gray werewolf padded silently towards the stream and the area he was supposed to meet Moody. Larger by far than any regular wolf, with front legs twice as long as the rear, the powerful creature sniffed twice and quickly located Moody's hiding place. Remus was sorely tempted to creep up behind him in this form and howl but, knowing Moody, he'd start casting spells. That was something they couldn't allow to happen. Not out here in the open, at least.

Remus changed back into his human form and moved forward, deliberately making enough noise so that Moody would hear him. He stopped at the edge of the small clearing next to the stream, not ten feet from where Moody hid.

Come on out, Alastor. I know you're hiding over there," Remus called softly.

Moody spun and swore when his peg leg caught on the uneven ground and nearly caused him to fall. "Dammit, Lupin, how did you know I was here?"

Remus smiled knowingly and tapped his nose. "Are you going to come out from under that cloak or am I supposed to sit here talking to nothing?"

"How do I know it's really you, Lupin? You could be polyjuiced!" snarled Moody.

"At the Order Christmas Party in 1979, you got drunk and tried to dance a strip tease for Minerva McGonagall. I do believe she still has a signed pair of your boxers as a souvenir of the occasion," Remus offered smiling.

Moody pulled the invisibility cloak off and grinned. "Come on, then. The cottage isn't far away, and it's safe enough. We can talk there."

Remus followed Moody, noting how remote this area of the Scottish Highlands was. A person could easily get lost in the mountains.

Before long they sat across from each other at a table. Remus glanced around the cottage quickly before turning back to his companion.

"We were surprised to get your letter, Alastor. To be honest, Harry didn't know what to make of it at first."

"Aye, well, I was nearly as surprised when I sent it. Had it not been for Albus, I would have sat out the war here in my hole."

Remus eyed Moody carefully. The mention of Dumbledore put him on guard. "So, how is the old man?" he asked, trying to sound casual.

Moody stood and stumped over to a cabinet and withdrew a bottle and two glasses. "He's as daft as a drunken loon, Remus. Totally lost his cracker and I haven't a clue how it happened or why so few of us saw it."

Remus shook his head sadly. "I can't answer that question, Alastor. The old man lost it a lot earlier than anyone thought. But that's not what we're here to discuss, is it?"

Moody poured two glasses of fire whiskey and held one out to Remus. "Not hardly," he said with a snort.

Remus placed the glass down on the table and leaned forward for a moment. "I'll be frank with you. Harry doesn't trust anyone from the Order anymore. But you seem to hold a unique position in his mind. I think you're one of the few people from the Order that he'd like to trust."

Moody nodded approvingly. "So, where does that put me exactly?"

"In a position to earn his trust. We have need of you, but not over in Ireland. We have need of you right here in Britain."

Moody looked at Remus questioningly. "Oh?"

"We need someone to start organizing here. There are rumors of Aurors hiding out and fighting a guerrilla war. We know of at least two muggle groups we've heard about. What we want to do is organize them. Get them to coordinate, work together. We have the backing of both the Magical and Muggle Ministries on this. We can supply food and material, both muggle and magical, depending on who it's going to.

"Your job would be to contact these groups and convince them to work with you. Teach them to take orders via wireless messages and supply them with what they need. You'll also be used occasionally to help guide teams we send in. Are you interested?"

Moody knocked back another shot of whiskey and nodded. "Aye, Lupin. It's better than sitting here and wondering what's going on in the world."

Remus smiled for the first time since meeting Moody. "Excellent! We'll start by sending you some elves with food and other gear you'll need. They should arrive tomorrow. Is there anything you'd like to request?"

"I wouldn't mind a bottle or two of good stuff," Moody said with a barking laugh. He held up the nearly empty bottle of cheap whiskey and looked at it mournfully.

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## Haven and Padfoot Manor...

While Remus and Moody talked of important matters. Amhar left the Ministry building and walked around the town. He was dismayed to see what looked like newly opened muggle businesses right next door to magical ones. Seeing Ollivanders gave him a little relief, as did Gringotts. But next door to Ollivanders was a muggle coffee shop offering coffees and muggle newspapers. There was even a muggle radio playing in the store!

Amhar Coeur de Lion was a pure blood and more than a bit of a racist, even if he didn't support the Dark Lord's policies. It made him angry to see that Haven was a comfortable mix of both muggle and magical. It was disgusting, in his opinion. Muggles and Wizards weren't meant to mix this way.

Approaching the street his cottage was on, he noted a large manor house in the distance and stopped.

The house looked huge and old. That meant money, pure blood money, and a lot of it. Amhar didn't hesitate. Many pure blood families fawned at his feet because of his particular blood connections. It was something they envied, something they craved. For years he had sampled the very best of the pure blood community, it's wealth and it's women, all because they were willing to sacrifice their money and daughters for the blood of the Lion Heart. Why, if he played his cards right, he'd be out of that wretched cottage before nightfall!

As he approached the manor house, he saw many house elves working on the lawns, indicating the owner of the manor was magical. More sure of himself now, he walked up to the front door and knocked. A moment later an elf opened the door.

“Yes? Can I help you?”

“Tell your Master that Amhar Coeur de Lion wishes to speak with him.”

Then, the unthinkable happened. The elf shook her head!

“I am sorry, sir, but the Master is busy and cannot be disturbed,” the creature said, her voice firm.

The little elf tried to shut the door, then squeaked in fright when Amhar grabbed her and pushed his way into the house.

“I don't think you heard me properly, you wretched little excuse for an elf! I said to tell your master to come now. I don't care if he's sleeping with his mistress or bugging his sheep!” growled Amhar. He raised one hand to strike the creature for her impertinence, but a vice-like grip caught his arm by the wrist and held fast.

“You do not want to do that,” said a voice from behind. “Sissy, you are excused. Go help Winky in the master bedroom.”

The little elf vanished with a pop.

When his wrist was released a second later, he whirled to face a young man, dressed in muggle pants and a t-shirt that read, “*Back off! You're standing in my aura.*”

Amhar stepped back from the youth and looked at him with disdain. He ignored the glow from the youth's eyes and the waves of magic flowing from him. “You, boy! Go get the Master of the manor,” he ordered.

Harry looked at him for a moment, ignoring his order. “I don't know who you are, nor do I really care, but if I catch you ever attempting to strike an elf again, you'll wish you hadn't.”

“You can't threaten me, boy. Now, do as you've been told. Get your father, or whomever holds Lordship over this manor, and tell him that I wish to speak with him immediately,” Amhar blustered.

Harry's eyes flared and his expression hardened at the man's choice of words. “I am the Lord of this manor,” he said, his voice quiet, but hard.

Amhar blinked in surprise. *This? This child is the Lord of the Manor? Perhaps his family was lost when Britain fell.* He stepped back and put on his best charming smile.

“My apologies, my lord, I am Amhar Coeur de Lion, a member of the Wizengamot, at your service,” he said, then paused, waiting for the young man to make the connection to his name.

Harry stood, frowning. The man had seriously angered him and he had been about to throw him out when he suddenly announced himself as though he were the son of Merlin.

Amhar started to fidget. This hadn't happened before. His name was so well known that any member of polite society would have recognized it immediately.

“Harry? What's the problem?”

Both men turned to see Hermione coming down the stairs. She was limping slightly. It was only her third day of hand-to-hand combat training and Harry had been upstairs helping her with her bruises when Dobby told them about the situation down in the grand foyer.

Harry placed a hand on the banister and looked up at her. She was dressed in shorts and a t-shirt, making it easier for him to apply the healing salve she needed.

“It's nothing, love. I'll be with you shortly,” he told her with a tight smile.

Amhar bowed before Hermione. “You must be the Lady of the Manor?” he asked.

Hermione nodded in confusion, “Yes, I'm Hermione Potter.”

Amhar's eyes widened in shock. “Potter? This is the Potter residence?”

“Potter-Black, actually,” Harry replied in an icy tone.

Amhar addressed Hermione. “From which family are you from, my Lady? You don't seem to resemble any of the great families.”

Harry stiffened and stepped forward, his hair fell back from his forehead, revealing his scar. “My wife is muggle born, not that it's any of your business, sir. Now I would ask you to leave before I eject you myself.”

“You're *Harry* Potter?” Amhar asked, fearfully. At the young man's nod, he blanched. “You destroyed the Ministry, killing hundreds of pure bloods!”

No, I destroyed the Ministry *building* , killing hundreds of *Death Eaters* . That they were pure bloods was merely bad luck on their part," Harry countered dryly.

"It's people like you who caused You-Know-Who to ruin our world!" Amhar stated angrily.

"It's cowards such as you who allowed Voldemort take over in the first place. Now I have to clean up your mess," Harry said flatly. "Now, leave my house."

Amhar gasped and paled when the Dark Lord was named. Only then did he really look at the young man standing before him. The air around Potter shimmered and roiled with magic and his eyes glowed a bright, eerie green. He looked to be unarmed, but Amhar knew he could have a wand concealed nearly anywhere nearby. He backed away, frightened, and stumbled to the door. Once outside, the door closed behind him with no one touching it.

Hermione was shocked by the anger she felt from her husband. It was nothing like the rage he'd felt over the ransom note, but she could tell he was deeply angry and it was mostly because of the strange man. She widened her bond and sent him a gentle, mental caress. He shuddered and visibly made the effort to calm down.

"Sissy?" he called finally.

A small female elf appeared a moment later. "Yous call Sissy, Master Harry, Sir?"

"Yes, Sissy. In the future, if someone puts you in that situation again, you are to come to me or Mistress Hermione right away to report it. For now, however, I want you to go speak to the Pappy. Tell him that if that man hits an elf, any elf, he is to be denied all elf services and I am to be told about it immediately. Do you understand, Sissy?"

Sissy nodded and vanished.

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### **Ballincollig, County Cork, Ireland...**

Dumbledore grumbled and used his wand to re-wrap the dressing on his arm. It had been over a week since Alastor Moody had kicked him out of the safe house in Scotland and now he was back in Cork, in the same boarding house he had used a few weeks earlier.

To say he was annoyed was an understatement. He'd gone through all the potions that Alastor had given in the first few days. He'd tried toughing it out, but it just wasn't possible. Pain numbing charms only lasted for a short while, and there was little he could do without a steady supply of potions.

When he ran out of pain relieving potions four days ago, he ran out of options. He needed the potions and more, but he knew he was a wanted man in Ireland, and probably on the continent as well by now. Using a glamour, he'd purchased a reusable portkey to travel to Haiti. He chose that location because he didn't want to risk going to a country where the Ministry might be looking for him. The Haitian Ministry was something of a joke in the Wizarding community.

He had gone over to Haiti, spent several hours under the dubious care of a witch doctor who had been surprisingly effective in mixing muggle medicine and magic. He was given a cream to put on his arm, and now had an ample supply of pain relief potions. He also came away with a bright purple eye patch, which he thought to be quite dashing.

Now he sat in his little room and pondered the future. *Alastor Moody will make sure all my old contacts with the Order knowabout my behavior*, he thought angrily. *I'm being betrayed at every turn! First Lupin, then Potter and Tonks...*

He'd need help to accomplish his goal, but it wasn't going to come from the order as he'd originally hoped. He had several different Order accounts he could tap into, all under aliases so his identity would remain safe. With those accounts, he had nearly two hundred thousand galleons. Surely that would be enough to buy the services of some wizards and their wands.

*Yes, I will hire some mercenaries, perhaps from Romania*, he thought.

"Then we'll see how Mr. Harry Potter likes being on the receiving end of my employees," Dumbledore said aloud with a bit of a giggle. He ignored the nervous twitch he saw in the mirror, as well as the occasional giggle that slipped out. He'd become well versed in ignoring that which carried little relevance to him. What others might see as impending madness, Dumbledore merely saw as inconvenient.

*Soon Harry, soon I will come for you.*

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### **Padfoot Manor...**

Harry rolled over in bed and reached out with a hand, only to find empty space. He lifted his head and looked around, but the bedroom was empty.

"*Hermione?*" he sent. He knew she was close by.

"*I'm in your study, love.*"

"*Couldn't sleep?*"

"*We both seemed restless, so I figured I'd take a look at your equations again.*"



Harry sighed and sat up. *"Stay there, I'll come in and join you,"* he sent to her.

*"That's not really necessary."*

*"Actually, it is. I woke up because you weren't in bed. If nothing else, we'll have a cup of tea and talk Arithmancy and Runes. Merlin knows that should put us to sleep."*

*"Prat! I like Arithmancy and Runes."*

She grinned to herself when she felt his amusement over the bond. He was teasing her. She knew he was proud of her intellect but sensitive about it. His gentle teasing reminded her that not all knowledge came from a book.

She glanced up and smiled when he padded in barefoot and wearing only his boxers. She knew that he was often aroused just by the sight of her naked, or nearly so. She had to admit he did the same to her. He turned to sit next to her and she frowned, seeing the two dark red circles on his back. New scars provided by the bullets shot by Dudley. She always cringed a little when she saw them and felt a pang of guilt over them.

"They'll fade in time," he said in a hard tone, then he smiled an apology at her. "Sorry, you were thinking very loudly and not blocking."

"You have a handsome body, scars and all," she said softly, then she widened her bond enough to let him taste a little of the desire she felt as her eyes roamed his body.

Harry smiled. During their experiments when the bond was new, they'd found it extremely difficult to send an emotion they weren't truly feeling. Unlike thoughts and conversations, emotions were too difficult to fake over the bond.

Harry reached up with a hand and caressed her cheek for a moment, then he turned serious again. "So, have you made any headway?" he asked, then nudged her towards his notes.

She glanced back at the book for a moment, then turned back to him. "Some, actually. It took me a while to figure out exactly what you were doing, but I think I've managed it. Each portal is given a number, a unique way of identifying that particular portal. So if I wanted to travel from my portal, which is numbered eighty seven, to your portal, which is numbered forty three, you'd tune in the number on the pedestal and away you'd go."

"Right, but..."

"Hang on a moment, Harry. I see your objection. All of your portals have been on a tens boundary, ten, twenty, thirty, forty and so on."

"Right."

"And you did that because the Celtic runes for numbers not ending with zero can be extremely cumbersome, correct?"

Harry nodded mutely. He still wasn't sure where she was going with this.

"The pedestals use three different rune sets, each in their own compartment. Nordic, or viking runes, which tune in the portal, Greek runes, which provide power to the pedestal and to the portal, and finally Welsh runes, which do a variety of tasks, such as controlling the timing and commanding the portal frame to open and close."

Harry nodded. He knew all this and had been over it time and again with Eocho.

"I think the problem is in the pedestal. Your use of viking runes allows you a greater degree of control in tuning than your portal can handle. For example, through no fault of the operator, you can tune in the pedestal to open portal twenty point two. And because you are slightly off tune, living matter cannot survive the trip. The pedestal is too precise for the portal frames."

Harry sat quietly for a moment, soaking in what she had told him. "It makes sense," he said finally. "The obvious solution is to use the same rune sets for tuning, but these aren't the final versions I had wanted to use anyway."

"Oh? Why not?"

"Because they're numbers, like muggle phone numbers. The Wizarding communities would balk at pure numbers. I was hoping to use something like what they use for the floo network. You know, like 'Diagon Alley' or 'The Burrow' as a destination."

Hermione chewed on her lower lip for a long time. Harry's idea made more sense, but it complicated matters tremendously. They now had an idea of what was wrong, but she wasn't sure of what to do about it.

She was about to tell him so when their bond shifted and she felt the oddest sensation. For a brief moment, it seemed almost as if his thought process had sped up tremendously. When the feeling subsided, he looked at her with a lopsided grin.

"What was that, Harry?"

"What was what?" he asked back, perplexed by her question.

"The bond seemed to widen and it was almost as if you were thinking so fast I couldn't make anything out of it."

His eyebrows rose and he chuckled. "It finally happened, eh? Now you know how you make me feel."

“What?”

“Hermione, for years we've teased you about being the smartest witch of our age and you've hated it. I know you have. Even now I can feel your annoyance building. What you don't realize is that for all the teasing, you are probably the smartest witch in the age. When we first bonded, I'd notice times when your thinking seemed to speed up so much I couldn't tell what you were thinking about. It happens a lot with you. I notice it several times a day.

“I can memorize whole books, thanks to my Matura, but I have to really work at it to take things to another level. You read a book and start immediately moving beyond that point. I can't do that. I have to bring up a picture of a page in my mind and consider what it says carefully, then apply it. Rarely can I see beyond that point, but I'm no genius like you are. What you felt from me was just me thinking of a way to fix the portal, since you found out what the problem is. Building things and making them work are fun and seem to come easily to me. It inspires me to come up with new ideas.”

She frowned at him. She hated when he put himself down, but she had to admit his analysis was probably spot on. She just never realized that she was doing the same thing. “You're not dumb, Harry. Just because you...”

He waved her to silence. “Perhaps, love, but I sincerely hope our kids get your intelligence. I'll settle for them getting my good looks,” he said, trying to appear arrogant, but empty-headed.

Hermione growled and lunged at him, fully intending to torture him mercilessly. She knew all of his tickle spots and planned on making use of them. Halfway through her lunge, a painful hitch in her side distracted her and she landed on top of him, clutching at her ribs in pain.

Harry wrapped his arms around her carefully. “Did we missed a rib or two?”

She nodded against his chest, still tense and afraid to move.

“I know this training is necessary, Harry, but...”

“No buts about it, Hermione. If you and the rest of the Brotherhood are going to stand by my side when I face Voldemort, I need to know you can take care of yourselves. I need to know you'll be capable of fighting, with and without a wand.”

She nodded against his chest, disliking, but understanding the truth of his words. She and the others had complained when Harry had assigned them to the boat for the Azkaban attack, so he had enrolled them all into the program that turned Aurors into soldiers. He hadn't told them that they would be training using a time turner to stuff eight hours into a four hour period, or that the trainers were brutal, sadistic people who enjoyed their jobs way too much to be healthy. Although, to be honest, she was sure that, outside of his classes, Gunny Stonefist was probably a very nice man. But did he really have to yell so much?

Hermione had never been a very physically active person and the training was intensely physical. She'd come home every day and Harry would spend an hour just helping her get over her aches and pains. Most nights she'd collapse, exhausted, into bed. It made her feel guilty because she was simply too tired to do any more than be held by her husband.

For all of her guilt, however, Harry's reaction to her training seemed to make it much worse. He was supportive and considerate, preparing her baths and giving massages. His understanding and total lack of complaint only made her feel even more neglectful.

Harry cast a pain numbing charm on her sore ribs. She smiled tentatively up at him and he helped her to her feet.

“I've got some new salve Danni sent over. She thinks it will help with the bruises and aches. Let's get you into the bedroom and we'll see if we can fix that up for you.”

She looked him, noting the loving concern in his eyes, and her composure cracked. Her lower lip trembled and her eyes filled with tears.

“*How can you put up with me?*” she sent him, along with a wave of emotions.

He reeled under the onslaught and turned to her, surprised by her outburst.

“*I come home exhausted and in pain and all you do is help me. We're newlyweds! Doesn't it bother you that we've only made love twice since the beginning of the month? And even then, it was over quick!*”

Harry sat back down on the chair, feeling as though he'd been struck, and stared up at her for a moment. Then he scowled. “Hermione, sit down,” he said commandingly and gestured towards a nearby chair.

She sat gingerly and looked at him, afraid that he would now tell her how disappointed he was with her, how angry.

He leaned forward and wiped his face tiredly with one hand. “Hermione... I don't... No that isn't... I want... No... Oh, bloody hell!”

She blinked in surprise at his words, then he caught her gaze. His eyes were piercing in their intensity. He pinned her to her seat with his gaze and gently entered her mind using legilimency. Her vision grayed out.

“This is what I felt before you came into my life.”

His words seemed to echo in her mind just before he sent her a gestalt of his loneliness. It was a soul tearing feeling and she shuddered back from it, and from him. His words burned into her mind. Tears flowed freely and she wrapped her arms around herself, as if warding off a blow. Even his memory made her ache for him.

“And this is what I feel now.”

Another feeling flowed into her and she gasped as her body filled with a sense of joy and wonder. Her body shook at the magnitude of his feelings. He was no longer alone and he rejoiced. She felt a deep and abiding sense of peace, a barely controlled passion for her and an overwhelming desire to do anything to make her happy. Again his words seemed to bounce and echo through her consciousness. The feelings eroded her previous impression of loneliness until only a faint echo of it remained.

Just as suddenly as it had started, it was gone and she stared at him, shocked. He sat, watching her come out of the vision.

“I don't complain, Hermione, because there is no reason to complain. What you're doing, you're doing for us. So that, five years from now, there will still *be* an 'us'. You're learning to fight and I know it hurts. I know it makes wish you hadn't agreed to it. But when the training is done, you'll be thankful for what you learned, especially when you're actually called upon to use that training. You'll also have learned that a little exercise each day is a good thing...”

He paused for a moment, then grinned. “How will you keep up with our kids if you're not in shape, love?” he asked smugly.

She rolled her eyes. “Oh, please. You're telling me I have to give birth to them *and* chase them down when they get older? Think again, Mr. Potter. I birth 'em, *you* chase 'em!” she exclaimed, her laughter pouring over the bond and making him snicker.

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### **The Town of Haven (Sept 15th)...**

Amhar walked slowly towards the town hall to once again check the bulletin board where they posted job openings. Even he had to admit that he had to do something with himself. So far, all of the openings were beneath his station. They never seemed to post jobs looking for directors or managers. For the thousandth time since he had been released, he cursed his own foolishness for not becoming a Solicitor, like his father.

“Amhar?” said a vaguely familiar voice.

He stopped and turned. He recognized the man walking towards him, but couldn't place him.

“Councilor Coeur de Lion? I thought it was you! What a fortunate meeting,” the fellow said.

Amhar frowned for a moment, then it clicked for him. “Ah, Councilor Gripse. I was unaware that you were living in this... place,” he said, unable to keep the disdain for Haven out of his voice.

“Oh, yes. I was one of those rescued from Azkaban, like yourself,” replied Gripse.

Amhar sniffed and waved a hand dismissively, then a thought occurred to him. “Tell me, Councilor, did they rescue many Wizengamot members from Azkaban?”

Gripse suddenly looked around warily. “Some, Councilor, but the Supreme Mugwump is not in Haven. From what I understand, he has been declared a wanted criminal by the Irish Government, as well as our own.”

“Our own,” Amhar spat in disgust. “We have a Minister who wasn't elected, and no governing body. And they are treated as if they are the legal Government. Even the muggles recognize them!” He turned on Gripse then, spewing forth his rage and sense of outrage. “You were always the mouthpiece for our muggle loving Mugwump and look at what it got him! Hunted by his own government. What remains of the Wizengamot is scratching in the dirt to make a living. I saw one of our esteemed members tending bar the other night! It's outrageous and undignified!”

Gripse pulled Amhar away from the crowded entrance of the town hall. His diatribe was attracting too much attention. They settled in front of a fountain with a statue of what was supposed to be Merlin. Amhar frowned and stared at the statue for a moment. He had seen that face before, but where?

“Councilor,” Gripse began, “you need to be wary with your words. More prudence and less outrage, I'd suggest.”

Amhar's eyes narrowed and he was about to dress down his comrade when he spotted several town constables entering the square.

“Perhaps you are right, Councilor Gripse. What would you suggest we do?” he asked, solicitously.

Stanley Gripse nodded in understanding. He, too, had spotted the constables entering the town square. “What I think we need to do is find all of the other Councilors who might have been rescued. If there is enough of us, the government will have no choice but to reform the Wizengamot.”

Amhar sat on the edge of the fountain and considered Gripse's words. Reforming the Wizengamot would be the first step in making sure the Government adopted a more pro pure-blood policy. Then they could deal with things like the Muggle Mayor, or that half blood, Potter.

“Yes, your advice is quite good, Councilor Gripse. Let us search out and organize our fellow Councilors,” Amhar said quietly.

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### **Aviemore, Scotland (Sept 16th)...**

Captain Michael McHardy checked the perimeter one last time before settling down for the night. His troop, what was left of it, was a ragtag mix of units and barely thirty men strong. Originally, he had led a company of the Blackwatch, third battalion of the Royal Regiment of Scotland, a proud

unit with a proud history that spanned three hundred years. What he left was pitiful. Ten men from his original outfit and nineteen others from various other units and home guard.

They did what they could, but it wasn't nearly enough. Their supply situation had moved from poor to critical and, as much as he hated to do it, he had taken to raiding civilian stores for food and material. They had one beat up short wave radio and no transmitter, hence no contact with the outside world. Arms and ammunition were in short supply and they had no medicines at all. Not that it mattered, they had no one trained to use them.

McHardy pulled his filthy blanket up around his chin and tried to sleep. There were elements of this war he wasn't prepared to deal with. It was bad enough that this had turned into a civil war, but supporting the conquering army was a force of civilians with abilities that made no sense to him. And that troubled him.

"Make no sudden moves, Laddy," said a voice that pierced the darkness.

McHardy slowly pulled the blanket away and looked at the strange man who crouched down next to him. He held a stick, like those people supporting the army. McHardy felt his stomach lurch. They'd been caught!

"No, lad, you've not been caught," said the strange man. "Or rather, you've been caught by the right side. Now, sit up slowly and we'll talk for a bit."

McHardy sat up and glanced around to see that his perimeter guards were still walking around, ignoring his predicament.

Alastor Moody chuckled at the consternation the young officer was feeling.

"They won't notice us, lad, but we have other, more important matters to talk about. You're the first unit command I've approached and you won't be the last. We're organizing, my boy, and we're going to fight back. You're not alone, not by a long shot..."

Moody pulled out a bag and started to pull items out of it - far more items than the bag could possibly hold. McHardy stared in shock when Moody casually handed him a satellite radio. He continued to pull food and clothing out of the small bag until there was a large pile laying on ground next to him.

"Look, I don't have a lot of time for explanations. Let's just say that the other side has people with special abilities helping them, and now your side has people with the same abilities. I will contact you every three days, or send you a message. If I send you a message, expect it to be signed Mad-Eye. If it isn't, don't trust it. Bug out and I'll find you again. You're to use the radio twice a day, at five hundred hours and seventeen hundred hours. Tell them what you need, they'll send it to me and I'll get it to you."

Moody pulled out a small flask and peered at McHardy carefully before giving it to him. "Here. This will wake up anyone who's exhausted, no matter how tired a person is. Just a sip for a dose. Use it sparingly. When you need more, I'll see if I can get it to you. In the meantime, make a list of what you need. Your people want you to cut off the A9 just before the A9/A95 intersection, make it unusable. Figure out what you need for the job and we'll get it to you. I'm also supposed to tell you that on some jobs, you'll have something they called air support."

Moody shrugged his shoulders and looked at the dumbfounded McHardy, waiting. When the muggle commander finally began to nod vigorously, he reached out and squeezed his shoulder. "Good lad. Keep a stiff upper. I'll be back in three days."

Moody released McHardy, stood and walked calmly out of the camp, passing a guard who never saw him.

McHardy shook his head, then checked his watch. Another three hours and he'd be able to call in on the radio. Another three hours and they'd no longer be alone! He caressed the precious radio and wept silent tears. They had seen beyond the edge of sanity and now were being pulled back.

"Sergeant! Sergeant!" McHardy called loudly.

A moment later a man dropped down to his haunches beside the Captain's bed, then paused when he saw the large pile in the darkness. "Sir?"

"Get two men and tell them to start going through this material, Murphy. We have food and clothing to distribute, and help is on the way," McHardy said softly.

Murphy spotted the precious radio the Captain held in his hands like a newborn babe and his eyes widened. Then he grinned wildly and gave his captain a textbook salute. "Sir!"

Three hours later, the Captain aimed the portable antenna at a spot just above the horizon and waited until he heard a warbling tone. Blackwatch, third battalion of the Royal Regiment of Scotland was back in business and under the command of his Majesty's government. Even more importantly, the men on the ground knew it. Plans were already being made to augment the unit via airdrop, hopefully bringing it up to at least one hundred strong.

The newly promoted Colonel McHardy slowly took apart the radio, shaking his head. It had been an interesting conversation. His was the first unit to report in, and would be the lead unit in consolidating all of the units that remained loyal to the government in exile.

McHardy stood. He felt like a new day was approaching and he was full of energy. Army command had given him the coordinates of a base that had a large underground component. The base had been built for World War II and had been unused for years, so there was a good chance they'd be able to use the underground section as a base of operations.

He looked around, watching his men enjoy a their first hot meal in a week. He'd wait until they were done before breaking camp and heading towards their objective. They needed the break.

## Padfoot Manor (Sept 17th)...

This morning's briefing was different. Caleb arrived with a second man following him. The man was a squib, and a representative of His Majesties' Government in Exile. Amelia followed the two men in, with Remus behind her.

Harry stood and looked at the newcomer Caleb had brought.

"My lord, may I present Michell Anderson? A former group captain in the RAF, he is now our permanent liaison between our Ministry and the British Government in Exile," Caleb said.

Harry nodded and extended his hand towards the stranger. "Welcome, Captain. I trust you are being well taken care of?"

The man took Harry's hand, gripping it firmly in his own. There was no attempt to squeeze, as is often the case when two men shake hands. It was just a firm grip.

"Yes, my Lord. I have been well briefed by Deputy Minister Newman and my accommodations are most comfortable," Anderson replied, then he released Harry's hand and glanced over at Hermione admiringly.

"Ah, my wife, Hermione Potter," Harry said, introducing the two of them.

Anderson bowed slightly and took Hermione's hand in his, bending over to kiss it lightly before releasing her. With the introductions complete, everyone sat.

"Caleb, why don't you start us off today?" Harry suggested.

Caleb nodded to Anderson. "With respect, my lord, I think it would be best if Captain Anderson delivered this briefing. After all, this is one of the reasons he's come to Haven."

Harry turned to look at Anderson. "By all means, proceed Captain."

Anderson looked around briefly until he spotted the large map of Britain on the wall. "May I?" he asked. Harry nodded and Anderson walked over to the map.

"Conditions in Britain are deteriorating rapidly. Lack of food, fuel oil and petrol are prevalent. Though some parts of the country are still under power, large portions have not had electricity since mid-April and the bombing. There are rumors of typhus in some of the camps and satellite imagery is picking up evidence of mass graves.

"Unfortunately, there is little that can be done to help our people. The controlled elements of the British Army hold vast areas of the country and maintain an iron grip on what resources they need, even as the civilian populations suffer. Of course, there was considerable confusion on our side. We had no contact with anyone on the ground until recently. We were forced to rely on what ever help other governments were willing to provide.

"Now that situation is starting to change, thank God. With the help of your people on the ground, we have made contact with elements of the Blackwatch, the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders as well as others. Right now we have them performing some small acts of sabotage and reconnaissance. Surviving units in the field are being consolidated into a single unit that will concentrate on making our return easier..."

Harry held up a hand, stopping Anderson. Then he turned to Remus. "Mad-Eye's doing?"

Remus nodded, his grin almost feral.

"How is he managing without giving away his location?" Harry asked.

"Q Branch came up with an amulet that masks his signature and makes him look like an elf," Remus said.

Harry shook his head in admiration, then turned back to Anderson. "My apologies, Captain. Please continue with your brief."

"Yes, my lord.

"On the international front, we've been extremely fortunate. The United States is willing to commit its entire military strength behind an effort to retake Britain, assuming that certain conditions are met first. Canada and Australia are also offering support, but they aren't imposing any conditions. Now, as to our European allies..."

"Excuse me," Harry said, interrupting Anderson again.

"Yes, sir?"

"What condition are the Yanks imposing?"

"The Americans do not want their military fighting wizards, sir, and they clearly recognize that wizards and muggle cannot fight together and still maintain the secrecy of the Wizarding world," Anderson said in a soft voice. This was a major sticking point with the Americans, and he knew exactly what it meant to those in Haven.

Harry sat back on his chair, rubbing his chin absently. "So, it all boils down to us first," he murmured, then glanced over to Caleb.

"Yes, sir. But I think we both knew it would have to happen that way."

"And our current estimate on Voldemort's forces?"

"He has between two and three thousand Death Eaters," Caleb replied.

"And ours?"

"We have close to nine hundred ready, with six hundred more in training. Another two thousand have been offered and we've been accepting them in small lots. The American Department of Magic has offered to set up a training camp, as has the Canadian Ministry. To be honest, I was planning on recommending we accept their offers. We haven't the room here for so many people."

Harry ran a hand through his hair. "Merlin! How is this being paid for?"

"We're covering it, Harry," Amelia said. "Gringotts has guaranteed loans and we're making some promises to reduce import duties on certain products, as well as easing off some restrictions."

Harry nodded thoughtfully. He had been worried that he was somehow supposed to pay for all of this.

*"Relax, love. That won't happen. Governments do not want to deal directly with individuals. They're more comfortable dealing with other governments."* Hermione sent him.

Harry nodded to himself and reached out to touch Hermione's hand.

"So, we're talking about Aurors taking out the wizards before the muggles can move in to clean out the controlled troops. But if we remove the element of control, won't the British army just fold up in confusion?" asked Hermione.

Caleb shook his head. "We thought about that, my lady, but we have evidence to suggest that most of the existing army is no longer being controlled, but is still going along with it."

While Hermione dealt with her shock, Harry nodded and turned to Caleb.

"Doesn't this suggest that we need to start hitting at targets to cut into his wizard force?" he asked the Deputy Minister of Defense. This had been a sticking point between the two of them.

"It does, Harry, but I still think we need to hit those camps and pull those people out of there," Caleb countered.

"It's not my place to say, but can't the two ideas be combined somehow?" asked Hermione.

Harry and Caleb glanced at each other, each considering the idea from a different aspect.

"It might be doable. If we can empty the camp and then set a trap to catch reinforcing units?" Harry suggested.

Caleb's eyes glinted with the prospect of saving more people and hurting Voldemort badly. "I think we need to look into this later, Harry. If we do this, it's only going to work once."

Harry turned back Anderson and smiled. "Good brief, Captain. I apologize for cutting you short this morning. What else do we have?"

As Anderson sat back down, Amelia sighed.

"Well, Caleb stole a little of my thunder by talking about the Americans and Canadians and their training camps, but we're looking into getting that rolling within the next month or so," she told Harry.

"One more thing. I have been approached by several members of the Wizengamot who have pointed out to me that even under the official war powers act, I have neither the authority nor the right to dissolve that body. Of the twenty eight members of that body who were rescued, some twenty four have been released from the hospital and, while not enough to achieve a quorum, they are enough to force me to reopen the Wizengamot.

"I've been putting them off, telling them that I didn't have a place for them to meet, but I can't keep it up for much longer."

"Exactly what can a Wizengamot of that size do, anyway?" Harry asked.

Amelia and Hermione exchanged a look. "They can hold trials, start investigations and tie our people up for weeks giving testimonies," Amelia answered. "Fortunately, we have a number of the rescued members who are squarely on our side, a large block of neutrals and others."

"Yes," Harry said musingly. "I think we met one of those 'others' not too long ago."

Amelia nodded knowingly, Amhar Coeur de Lion visited the Ministry building daily and was quickly becoming a major nuisance. He had teamed up with several other Wizengamot members who had nothing better to do but sit around and complain and they were doing just that - loudly, in her Ministry building.

Harry leaned back on his chair and steepled his fingers. "Would we really have that much of a problem if we allowed them to reform?"

Amelia started to say something but noticed Hermione all but bouncing in her chair. She smothered a grin and motioned for the younger woman to

explain.

“Harry, in it's current configuration, the Wizengamot might be a crippled body, but it can still cause significant disruptions in what we're doing. Realistically, the Wizengamot is patterned after the Muggle Parliament, but it has never receive crown approval. I suppose we could allow them to reform and, if things got too unwieldy, we could appeal to the crown to dissolve the body.”

Harry watched Hermione as she spoke and thought about what she was saying. It didn't sound that bad, but it left him feeling uneasy, nevertheless. His single experience with the Wizengamot still left a foul taste in his mouth.

“There are several Wizengamot members who I would like to introduce you to. Most of them are solidly on our side and have been looking for ways they can help with our efforts. With your permission, I'd like to bring them by in a couple days? Perhaps on the thirtieth?” Amelia asked.

Hermione checked Harry's appointment book and nodded to him.

“Sounds alright, Amelia. Bring them round for dinner. We'll eat, then talk about what they can do for us. In the meantime, let's get some elves building a meeting place for the Wizengamot. I don't think we can hold them off with promises much longer.”

Amelia nodded, then looked hesitant about her next topic.

“What is it?” Harry asked, seeing her expression. She looked decidedly uncomfortable. Whatever she was about to say, it couldn't be good.

“Harry, I know how hard you've been working and I know exactly what your role is in this war. But it's time for you to do more.”

“More?” he asked, echoing her comment and looking at her stupidly.

Amelia straightened on her chair. “Yes. You have accepted so much responsibility in this war and yet you have tried to remain what you've always been - a private citizen. That can't last much longer. For one thing, you're starting to undercut my authority as Minister,” she said quietly.

Harry was about to jump from his chair in protest, but Hermione stopped him.

“*No, love, hear her out. Her position is a valid one.*” she sent him.

“I don't mean that you're doing it deliberately, Harry. But you are a very famous individual who just accidentally got nearly the entire Mid-East nations to come in on our side. Brogan Mallory, the Irish Minister, is more interested in talking to you than he is in talking to me. Both the American and Canadian Ministers have expressed their desire to meet with you to discuss war issues. Even His Majesty has inquired to see if you might be available at some future time for a private audience.”

Harry's expression was one of horror. This was the very last thing he wanted or needed in his life. When Remus began to chuckle, Harry shot him a death glare and grew frustrated by the fact that the old wolf didn't have the decency to cock up his toes and die on the spot. Finally, he turned to Hermione.

“*Well?*”

“*Hear her out, my heart, I don't think it's as bad as you think.*”

“What would you suggest, Amelia?” he asked.

“Arthur and I have spoken about this in considerable length in recent weeks. We feel that an official posting is the only solution...”

Harry tensed, waiting for the hammer to drop on his head.

“*Oh, honestly, Harry. She's not going to kill you. Relax.*”

“... and since all the Deputy Minister posts are currently filled, we felt that an Ambassador-ship would be the next most appropriate position. There have been several Ambassadors-at-Large in our history, and those posts were usually filled by the most extraordinary people,” Amelia finished quietly, her eyes shining with both amusement and affection.

Harry stared at the Minister dumbly. He knew his mouth hung open, but could do nothing at the moment to fix it, as his mind was too busy shuddering back from the jaws of the trap Amelia had so carefully laid out.

He finally shook his head, trying to clear it. “*What?*” he croaked in disbelief.

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## Authors Notes:

Dear Alyx.... no, just kidding.

Yes, you guessed it, this is the part of the file where we respond on people for leaving us nasty reviews and beg for donations of donuts or pizza. No anchovies please.

Yes the Goblins have come to dinner and may return again in the not too distant future. Boiled Dubog anyone?

Goblin support? Only if there is a way of lining their pockets, but as you can see, we sorta have that well in hand.

Aengus... yes we will.

Lurk, what can we say. Draco married Luna, that makes him slightly off. Having a private bathroom isn't unusual for executives by the way.

James, wipe up your drool please, you're clogging my keyboard.

That's it. I've had so many comments about our Christian authors note that I'm turning Hermione into a Moony and I'm taking up shintoism. I've been unable to convince Alyx to join the first church of Bob, where she worships... Me... so I'm going to be a druid, reformed... I get to worship bushes.

Olliver will reappear occasionally. He is not a mainline character and will only show up on occasion. But he'll be back.

Several have asked about our updateless list, but it seems that people weren't taking the list seriously enough. You all are supposed to go read those stories, then send annoying emails to the authors whining about when are they going to update again. Get it now? But seriously, the list will be back. I didn't want to make it a regular thing or I'd run out of stories to complain about.

Alyx and I both humbly apologize for producing three dimensional characters instead of the usual two dimension fanfare Scott. I hope you'll forgive us for giving you believable characters, we'll try to do better next time.

AK, That is Abraxan's style. Not necessarily ours. While we've had Harry hurt on numerous occasions, most of the time it's been stuff easy to fix. His only lasting injury, came early on in Sunset and I do not anticipate him having another extended hospital stay anytime soon. There is simply too much to do for him to be lying about in bed. And as far as the flaming author's notes go... we reserve the right to flame, sear, deep fry, bake, boil and broil.

Deborahsu, tell your husband he's wrong. The ship shouldn't matter. What should matter is a decent story that is believable within the framework of that universe.

Moody will be recurring, but don't expect him in Haven anytime soon. We have other plans for him.

Schlager\_5321, the purpose of the stones will become more clear soon. We are starting to see more rune based magic starting with this chapter.

Robert, you are reading too much into it. But then, you're a Bob, so I will let you. We Bobs are a specially gifted lot eh?



*Bobmin*  
*FanficAuthors.net*

# Sunrise Over Britain

## Chapter 16 - Politics and Angels

### Standard Disclaimer:

Severus Snape stepped onto the stage dressed in a chef outfit.

"Ahem," Alyx said, looking over Bob's shoulder.

"Huh?" Bob asked intelligently.

"A chef outfit?"

"Sure, watch this!"

Snape glared at Bob and looked pleadingly at Alyx, but there was nothing our fair co- author could do. Bob had control of the Word Processor and was holding it hostage for donuts again!

Alyx shrugged in resignation and Snape's shoulders slumped in defeat.

Amy walked across the stage holding a sign reading, "Now presenting, Chef Snape, and the amazing Technicolor Penguins."

Snape's eye's bulged after reading the sign and he threw down his cauldron and meat cleaver in frustration, never noticing that he sliced off four toes in the process.

Out in the audience, Harry Potter leveled his wand and fired off a transfiguration spell at Snape.

"That's it! I reffoose-a tu du uny mure-a stunderd deescleimers! Yuoo tvu deleeberetely turtoore-a me-a und meke-a my leeffe-a a leefing hell, yuoo hefe- a me- a cuukeeng pushuns fur oold sneke-a leeps und I vunt' poot up veet it uny mure-a! Bork Bork Bork!"

Snape stopped talking and blinked in surprise. "Bork bork bork?" he asked himself.

Bob grinned at Alyx, who had to admit that this disclaimer was at least sufficiently different.

Hermione grinned at Harry and shot Snape with another spell.

Snape moved forward, frowning. He knew if he didn't say the words, something really bad would happen to him.

"De Authows of this stowy wish fow me to expwain that they make no cwaims to the wights to the chawactews contained hewein, uh-hah-hah-hah. Aww chawactews fwom the Hawwy Pottew univewse awe the sowe pwopewty of JK Wowwing and hew howde of cowpowate wawyewes and bean countews. Oh, dat scwewy wabbit! No Mooses wewe hawmed in the cweation of this message."

Snape slapped his hands over his mouth and looked around in panic.

Amy walked back in carrying a basket and a large carving knife. A hand poked out from under the cloth covered basket. Snape gulped in panic and fled for the stage door. In a flash, he was gone.

Harry stood up and faced Bob, his expression outraged. "Hey, you bloody wanker! You let him go!"

Harry's angry shout still hung in the air when the theater was suddenly rocked by an explosion and the audience was showered with dust from the ceiling.

"Nah," Bob told him smugly. "He ran into the minefield outside the back of the theater. Now, let's talk about you calling me a wanker? Did you want to get laid anytime soon during this story?"

Harry blanched and looked around wildly.

Hermione grinned at him. "I told you not to piss off the authors."

Bob turned to Alyx. "Well?"

"So, where were the Technicolor Penguins?" she asked.

"We didn't have time. Snape, the pansy that he is, ran off before we got to them."

"You'd run too if you were constantly being blown up, cut up, shot into space, trampled by hypogriffs... Wait a minute!" She turned to stare at Amy suspiciously.

"What? So I'm a masochist!" Amy exclaimed, shrugging. "Besides, the Weasley twins are too cute."

Alyx looked between a grinning Bob and a smirking Amy and threw up her hands in despair. "I give up," she cried, and walked off as her dreams of becoming the next literary giant burned to ash on the pyre of Bob's twisted sense of humor.

## Sunrise Over Britain

### Chapter 16

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#### Padfoot Manor, Evening (Sept 18th)...

Hermione was exhausted from another day of hand to hand combat training. She ached in places she never knew she could ache, but she was also starting to feel better about herself. Harry had helped her take a bath and she had noticed during his gentle scrubbing that she was developing noticeable muscle tone. She'd laughed when Harry suggested that they should occasionally spar and, given the problem with his leg, that she'd probably beat him.

Afterwards, Harry had applied the salves Danni had sent over, then he had Dobby bring her a nice soothing cup of tea before sending her to bed. He told her he had a few dispatches still to go over before he could join her.

She climbed into bed and turned on her side to watch him as he went over his paperwork, but found it difficult to keep her eyes open. In minutes, she was sound asleep.

Harry watched her carefully from the breakfast table where he occasionally rustled parchment to make it sound as if he was doing something. He leaned back in his chair and, for the first time in nearly a day, he relaxed his shields slightly. It was bad enough keeping his shields up to keep out Voldemort, but shielding a small portion of his mind from his wife was hard work!

That morning Amelia had sent over the paperwork, along with his credentials, diplomatic passports and the like for his new role as Ambassador at large. He had spent several hours that morning talking to the Minister about his role and what he could and could not do. He was rather impressed with the abilities of an Ambassador, and with Amelia's help, he used those powers for the first time today.

Harry shook his head in disbelief. He still had problems accepting what Amelia had thrown at him, but Hermione managed to convince him to see it from Amelia's perspective and he'd finally given in. Like it or not, he was now an Ambassador. He had already found one use for it, so maybe it wasn't all that bad.

He stood and checked his watch. It was nearly time.

"Somnus," he said, pointing a finger at Hermione. She glowed a slight pink for a moment and her sleep deepened.

He walked over to the bed, pulled the blankets off of her and then levitated her off the mattress. He reached into the front pockets of his pants, making sure he had their passports and the trunk with their clothes. Then, reaching into the back pocket of his pants, he pulled out a special portkey he'd been supplied with earlier in the evening. He gripped Hermione's hand and gave the portkey a squeeze.

A second later, they were gone.

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#### Surprise (Sept 19th)...

Hermione rolled over in bed and her eyes opened suddenly. Something was wrong, but she couldn't put her finger on it, as she was still groggy from sleep. She could hear Harry bustling around the room, but there were other noises as well, unfamiliar noises that didn't make sense to her. There was a faint hum, and the sound of traffic?

Sitting up, she blinked and looked around in surprise. The huge windows weren't her normal bedroom windows, nor was the bed hers. The view from the window was completely foreign, though breathtaking.

"Harry!" she called in alarm.

"Coming! I'm just finishing up with room service!" he shouted back in reply.

"Room service?" she whispered questioningly. Climbing out of bed, she moved to the windows and stared out at what could only be Central Park and the rest of Manhattan Island to the south. Due south she could see the Empire State Building, with the World Trade Center towers looming in the distance.

Harry pushed a cart into the bedroom and frowned when he saw her out of bed.

"Harry, how did we get to New York?" she asked, turning to face him. She pointed over her shoulder towards the scenery out the window.

"Hermione, I can't serve you breakfast in bed if you don't stay in bed," he protested, ignoring her question.

"But... but..."

"No, no buts. Now, get back in bed so I can serve you breakfast," he replied, pulling her back to the bed and pushing her down. Once she'd settled back, he placed a tray across her lap and poured her a cup of tea, just the way she liked it.

"No more questions for now. We have a schedule to keep. Some shopping and sightseeing this morning, then lunch at some place called Tavern on the Green. I hope they don't mean a golf course. Back to the hotel by two for your spa appointment, then we have tickets to a show and late night

dinner cruise with some friends afterwards," he told her firmly.

Hermione goggled at him, dumbfounded. "But what about our training... Haven... and how did we get to New York without having to go through customs? And how did I sleep through the trip?"

Harry stopped nibbling from his tray and looked at her. "Well, if you must know, I placed a sleeping charm on you last night. As to customs, well, let's call it diplomatic privilege. Maybe there's some advantages to being an Ambassador after all," he mused.

Hermione blinked, still a bit shocked. Then, uncharacteristically, she giggled. He leaned over and took a slice of bacon off her plate and held it to her lips.

She glared at him for a moment before taking a bite.

She watched him warily as he picked up a slice of bagel that looked to be a half mile wide. "And why are we in New York?" she blurted out before he could stuff something else in her mouth.

He put the bagel down, cocked his head sideways and stared at her for a moment, puzzled. "Hello? September nineteenth, remember? And whose birthday is that?" he asked archly. He wisely resisted the temptation to knock on her head.

When Hermione's jaw dropped, he laughed.

"You prat!" she said playfully and slapped him on the arm. "I thought you had forgotten about my birthday. I even asked the elves if you had anything planned. Winky and Dobby never said a word."

Harry stood and placed his food tray back on the serving cart. "Of course not, love. Dobby works for me and Winky would do anything to make you happy, even if it meant withholding information about your birthday surprise."

She glanced out the window again and felt a tingle of excitement. New York City! She picked up her tea cup and drank quickly. Putting the cup down, she then handed him the tray and bounced out of bed. "So, sightseeing, a play and dinner? Then back to Haven?"

He looked up from placing the tray on the cart. "A play? It never occurred to me that you might like a play. Your mum said you were fond of opera. She suggested that we go to the the Metropolitan Opera House at Lincoln Center. They're playing something called 'Aida'."

Hermione's eyes glowed. She adored opera and was certain Harry would too.

"Look, Hermione, it's your birthday. I've arranged for us to have a small holiday. We have today, tomorrow and the next day before we return to Haven. It's just a weekend, but sometimes you need a break.

"Your parents will meet us tonight for the show and then we'll have a special party. They'll be with us until tomorrow evening, when they'll return to Haven. The rest of the time we're going to play the rich muggles and enjoy ourselves. For now, though, you might want to think about getting dressed. Something casual, I think. The limo's already waiting for us."

That evening, a much pampered Hermione Potter exited the limo and entered the Opera House with her husband. Her day had been a whirlwind of shopping and wonderful cuisine. She was amazed that Harry had managed to put this together without letting any of it slip. And while she was thrilled, she made the classic mistake of many opera lovers. She assumed that Harry would love it, as well. As a result, she never bothered to explain it to her husband, who she knew had never experienced it before.

They met Dan and Emma in the lobby. Her parents hugged her and they talked for a while. Hermione learned her parents were staying at the same hotel, one floor below them in an executive suite and that they had arrived that morning. They had spent the day sightseeing and doing some shopping. Both Dan and Emma had been to New York on several occasions, so it wasn't new to them.

Dan pulled Harry off to one side, while Hermione talked with her mum.

"You've never been to an opera before, or seen one on the telly, right, Harry?" he asked.

"No, sir, but Hermione seems awful excited about it."

Dan chuckled. "She would be. We stumbled on one in the British Museum back when she was seven and she loved it. So did her mother. Me? I think I'd rather undergo root canal without Novocaine. Just remember one thing. A husband is supposed to sacrifice occasionally to keep his wife happy. Never forget that and you'll do fine," he said, then laughed to himself and walked back to join Emma and Hermione.

As far as Dan was concerned, watching the Potters might be more entertaining tonight than the opera itself. But then again, almost anything would be more entertaining.

They found their box and, for a while, Hermione's excitement spilled over to Harry. That excitement lasted for about ten seconds after the curtain went up. From there, in Harry's opinion, it was all downhill.

Hermione was having a wonderful time. Her parents were in the next box over, enjoying the show. Harry sat next to her with a half smile on his face, obviously enjoying the opera. It wasn't until the intermission that she noticed a muted feeling through the bond. She knew Harry was there, she could feel him, but it was almost like he was muffled somehow.

She glanced over and noted that he was still seated as he had been all evening, eyes half closed, a half smile on his face.

*"What are you doing?"* she sent to him.

The thought hit his shields and rebounded, causing her to wince for a moment. She frowned. That shouldn't have happened. She leaned closer to Harry to ask him again, and was startled to discover he had cast a silencing spell on himself!

She frowned and tugged on his sleeve, hard. He blinked and looked down at her hand. The silencing spell vanished and he looked around the theater. The house lights were on and people were moving around.

"That's it? The shows over already?" he asked, not knowing he was busted.

"No, it's not over," she hissed at him angrily. It didn't help that both her parents had noticed Harry and were now laughing at them. "This is just the intermission. And what were you doing? Your shields were nearly at full power...and a silencing charm?"

He had the grace to look suitably embarrassed. "I'm sorry, Hermione. It's not exactly what I expected, you know? I never thought I'd sit here listening to people scream at each other. And what is with them, anyway? This is America. Why are they screaming in another language?"

"It's singing, not screaming, and many operas are in Italian," she said, grinding her teeth. She glanced over at her father, who had fallen out of his chair and was laughing on the floor. Her mother was watching them, biting her lip and doing her best to ignore her husband's mirth, lest he set her to laughing.

Hermione pointed a finger under Harry's nose and was about to say something when the lights flickered. She firmly grasped his hand and turned back to face the stage. "No more silencing charms," she growled.

Harry flinched in acknowledgment, and then winced when the curtain opened and the screaming began again.

An hour after the Opera, Hermione decided to forgive her husband. The limo had taken all four of them downtown towards Battery Park, where they boarded a small luxury yacht run by a wizard. As they boarded, the rest of the Brotherhood and several other important guests arrived by portkey. With everyone on-board, the boat left the dock for a slow cruise around Manhattan Island while dinner was served.

Near the end of the meal, Minerva McGonagall stood up and called for everyone's attention. It had been decided before hand that one person would offer a special toast to Hermione and Minerva had won the honor.

"Seven years ago, an exceptional student entered Hogwarts for the first time. Miss Hermione Granger was a muggle born student who looked at our world with eyes full of wonder. She wanted to learn all she could about that world. Hermione had a drive and a will to learn everything she could and along the way she also made some very important friends. I think her friends have had more of an impact on her life than any book she's owned.

"Hermione, on your eighteenth birthday, we, your friends, have joined together to wish you the very best. We know that there have been dark times in recent months, and there will be more to come, but we also know you are strong and will weather them. From all of us, to you, a very happy birthday and may you have many, many more."

Minerva lifted her glass to echoes of "Happy Birthday."

Hermione blushed and buried her head in Harry's shoulder for a moment, embarrassed. She'd had just enough champagne to make her tipsy.

Harry watched in amusement as his normally serious wife blushed, giggled and hiccuped her way through the evening.

After dinner, the boat cruised back to the pier where they said good night to their friends. It was a weekend and, except for the Grangers, everyone else was returning to Haven. Remus knew he could call Harry back via the Brotherhood medallion, so there was little worry that anyone would be missed, should a crisis arise.

Harry, Dan, Emma and Hermione piled back into the limo for the ride uptown to their hotel.

"This has been a wonderful evening," gushed Emma.

Hermione knew she was still a bit tipsy, so she wisely refrained from speaking.

"What plans have you for tomorrow, Harry?" asked Dan.

"None really," he replied with a shrug. "This is Hermione's birthday, so I have a bunch of brochures of things we can do. I figured I'd let her choose from them."

Hermione squeezed Harry's arm and leaned against him.

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### **Haven Operations Center (Sept 20th)...**

"Come in!" called Caleb Newman.

The door opened and Draco entered.

"You wished to see me, sir?"

"Yes, Black. Take a seat, please."

Draco sat down and waited expectantly. He had worked with Caleb before and had grown to respect the man.

"Black, we have an operation in mind and we need your help with it," Caleb said as he stood and walked over to a large map on the wall.

"We know of two large camps that are being used to hold wizards. We think both camps contain upwards of a thousand or more people. One camp is a 'family' camp, meaning there is a strong possibility of finding children incarcerated there. The second camp is adults only. The population of these camps could easily be ten times that of Azkaban."

Draco's eyes widened at the audacity of the idea that Caleb was proposing.

"Now, the first problem is that the Dark Lord and his followers have set up numerous camps for muggles. Without close observation, it's impossible for us to tell one camp from another. We need you and your scouts to find the camps for us."

Draco nodded thoughtfully for a moment. "Perhaps the smart thing would be to first locate all of the camps we can find, then go back and monitor them to figure out which ones are magical and which ones aren't," he began. Then he scowled.

"Sir, if these camps are larger than Azkaban, are we planning on a rescue attempt? We were barely able to handle the influx of three hundred and forty prisoners. How can we handle thousands?"

Caleb frowned and moved back to his chair to consider how to frame his answer. "The Azkaban raid was a classic operation that suffered from one overwhelming flaw. We assumed the prisoners would be in decent health. As we now know, they weren't. We're not going to make any such assumption if this mission is approved. Our Ministry is already exploring options, including receiving aid from the Americans and Canadians to process the prisoners. We've also contacted the International Red Pentagram and they're offering considerable support, including healers, medi-witches and the use of three portable hospitals.

"The problem here is that we're talking about a dual objective mission. Phase one will be to rescue the prisoners and get them to safety. Phase two will be to lay a trap for any troops Voldemort sends so we can take a nice bite out of his forces."

Draco nodded and pulled out a notebook from his back pocket. He scribbled a few notes in the book before closing it again. "I'll start putting together a search plan right away. The two step approach is, I think, the best way, as we'll have located all of the camps."

Caleb nodded. "Good. Have a first draft of your plan on my desk no later than ten hundred, day after tomorrow."

Draco started to stand, but Caleb held him up. "One more thing, Black. Your Q Branch."

"Sir?"

"Since the formation of your Q Branch, they've fielded some very impressive items for the troops. I know Miles was leery of their methods, but as I've never really met them, I thought you might send for them now. I have a few issues I'd like to discuss with them."

Draco started to sweat a little. Caleb and the twins? That was sure to be an unhealthy mixture of personalities. Reluctantly, he nodded and pulled out one of the new pocket sized floo communicators and used it to call downstairs.

"Q Branch, what's the password?" said a female voice.

Draco's eyes darted towards Caleb for a moment, then back to his communicator. "Helga, I don't remember the password, nor do I have time for games! Please let me talk to Fred or George."

Draco stiffened as a bolt of electricity passed through him. His hair stood on end and the very tips began to smoke. He made a small whining sound, then his tongue stretched from his mouth before snapping back with a terrible force. He slammed back on his chair and it flipped over backwards. Draco moaned for a moment before he got up, picked up his chair and sat back down.

Caleb leaned forward on his seat and eyed his intelligence chief with alarm. Draco slumped in his chair and smoked. Literally.

"No password, no Fred or George. And I am not Helga!" said the voice from the floo. "I'm tired of people confusing me with my sister! Do I look like her? No! Well, maybe a little, but only an idiot would think I look like her! Anyone with half a brain can tell us apart. Don't you open your eyes and look? I mean, for crying out loud, you wizards are all alike. You think we muggles look the same. Well, let me tell you something, Mr. Wizard..."

Draco hastily snapped his communicator closed and looked at Caleb apologetically. "Why don't I just pop downstairs and bring them up for you, sir? This way, I can make sure everything is... er...alright?"

Caleb nodded. "Do that," he said dryly.

Draco stood and swayed for a moment, before dashing out the of the office.

Five minutes later, Draco re-entered the room. His robes looked torn and he was holding a handkerchief to his nose, trying to stem the flow of blood. Behind him followed two red headed wizards, who Caleb recognized as belonging to the Weasley clan, and two pale, blond women he thought might be the Johansens. Each of the Weasley men seemed to be carrying a body part.

"So, you're our new Über boss? I'm Fred Weasley," said one red head. He reached forward with a hand, then grinned and shoved that arm under his other so he could offer his real hand to shake. Once he was done, he laid the arm and attached hand on Caleb's desk.

Caleb couldn't help but notice it was a very feminine looking limb, right down to the painted fingernails. He flinched back when the hand raised its middle finger, rudely offering its opinion of the meeting.

The other red head tossed a foot and part of a leg on top of the arm on Caleb's desk. "I'm George Weasley," he said, offering his own hand.

Caleb eyed the body parts on his desk suspiciously before shaking hands.

"Yes, I'm your boss, although you still report to Mr. Black. I called you here for a reason, but now I'm curious," he said, prodding the body parts with his wand, only to jerk it back when the hand tried to grab it.

Both of the Johansen twins giggled slightly and the Weasleys looked suitably embarrassed.

"Oh, that. Well, you see," said Fred

"We were testing our apparation mine," George said proudly.

"Precisely! It's a marvelous idea, really," offered Fred.

"Yes, step on the mine and it triggers," George replied.

"Guaranteed to splinch the person who steps on it," Fred said.

"Dead useful, we think," George replied in conclusion.

Caleb blinked and he grinned evilly at the two twins. "And these?" he asked, pointing to the body parts.

"Oh, those are Amy's, one of our lab assistants," Fred said sadly.

"Right. We're collecting her bits. If we find out where she apparated to," continued George.

"We'll be able to put her back together," Fred finished with a sad shake of his head.

"I still say we set the destination to Tibet," Fred muttered to George.

"No, it was Japan, around Mount Fuji, I think," George muttered back.

Draco stood in a corner of the office and resisted the impulse to whip out his wand and hex the both of them to bits.

"Gentlemen, please. I called you here for a reason," Caleb said in a strained voice. He looked suspiciously close to laughter.

"A reason? Well, that's different. Pay attention, brother mine!" George said imperiously.

Fred shot his brother an evil look, then turned back to Caleb and waited.

"I'm most impressed and pleased with the equipment you've come up with so far. But the one item in particular that has really caught our attention is your masking amulet. I realize that right now you've only made a few of them, but can you make more?" Caleb asked, leaning forward on his chair, watching them intently.

Fred and George exchanged a look, then Fred turned to Inga. "What do you think, love? You're the one in charge of production."

Caleb looked confused for a moment. "But I thought the Johansen girls were muggles!" he exclaimed.

"Oh, they are," said Fred.

"But they're right smart," offered George.

"Quite. We wouldn't get half our stuff out the door without them," Fred concluded, then looked at the two girls fondly.

"Well, Inga? Can we make more?" asked an impressed Caleb.

Inga pulled out a small calculator and a notebook. Her action was so smooth and so quick Caleb would have sworn it was done with magic.

"How many would you need and in what time frame, sir?" Inga asked in a husky voice that sent a shiver down Caleb's spine. He wondered briefly if the twins had any Veela in their background.

Leaning back on his chair, he considered his manpower estimates for a moment. "No more than four thousand units in, say, six months?"

Inga's eyes widened for a moment and she glanced over at Helga. Helga looked at her and nodded. "Hong Kong or San Diego I think, Sis."

"Excuse me?" asked Caleb in confusion.

"I'm sorry, sir. We were talking about where we could go for the manufacturing process. We can perhaps make a couple dozen, if necessary, but that many is beyond our abilities. We're really a department of prototypers, not manufacturers. As Helga said, we'll probably have to send the job outside of Haven in order to get it completed in time."

Caleb frowned for a moment. "While it might be alright to send this job out to some company to make, what would it take to manufacture here in Haven?"

Helga leaned back and eyed Caleb. "Money," she said succinctly. "It always boils down to money, sir. We'd need a building, enchanters, stone carvers to carve runes, potion makers, metal smiths, a foundry to smelt the metals... The list is pretty long, actually."

"And if I could get you that? Or at least access to a facility here in Haven?" pressed Caleb.

"Then you'd have a place where we could make your Elf-Masks or anything else you might need," Helga replied promptly.

Caleb nodded. It wasn't something he could promise immediately, but if he had heard Lord Potter's plans correctly, he was sure he could obtain use of the facilities for the war.

"I'll let you ladies know if we can get something set up locally for you. Oh, and for the future, please make sure Mr. Black is aware of the password?"

The four members of Q Branch grinned rather evilly and nodded before filing from the room. Draco stood in the corner watching the four leave and trying to figure out how to apologize to the boss when Caleb started to laugh.

When Caleb noted Draco's dumbfounded expression, he only laughed harder. When he was finally able to gain control of himself, he looked at Draco with an expression of sympathy. "Don't let them get to you, Mr. Black. Boffins are a strange breed, no matter where you find them."

Draco shuddered and wondered if he brought an extra robe he could change into.

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### **Padfoot Manor (Sept 22nd)...**

Hermione entered the study to prepare for Harry's morning meeting. He was going to be a little late. They'd returned from her birthday weekend only yesterday, and his leg was in bad shape this morning. They had done plenty of walking and shopping on their trip and now Harry was paying for it. Unsurprisingly, she had spent an inordinate amount of time in book stores, including the magical ones in the Wizarding district.

Her mother had wanted to do a bit of clothes shopping and found herself having to literally drag Hermione out of the book shops. That had changed when they hit Victoria's Secret. On exiting the shop, she'd smiled rather wickedly at Harry, much to Emma's amusement.

Hermione shook away the memories and quickly leafed through the letters waiting for Harry on his desk, deciding which ones could be re-routed for someone else to deal with.

A few minutes later Remus entered the room, followed by Draco, Caleb and Amelia. All three exchanged glances when they noticed Harry missing.

"He's running a little late this morning. His leg was bothering him and he needed a little extra time," Hermione told them quietly.

"I heard about your birthday party, Hermione. I'm sorry I missed it. I hope you enjoyed yourself," Amelia said with a smile.

"It was quite a party, Amelia," Remus offered with a laugh. "But don't ask Harry what he thinks of opera in front of Hermione."

Hermione blushed. "I wasn't that bad about it, Remus," she protested.

"I don't know, Hermione. You were tipsy enough to call him an Opera Hating Boob," Remus countered.

Draco hid a snicker behind a cough.

Harry opened the door then to find Remus and Draco laughing, Amelia and Caleb grinning and Hermione hiding her face behind her hands. "Not the Opera Hating Boob comment again?" He asked, sighing.

"I'm so embarrassed. I'm never going to live that one down, am I?" Hermione asked plaintively as Harry limped over to his seat.

He looked at his wife and hid his smile, then looked to the others. "Well now, it's a bright Monday morning. Who wants to start off?"

Caleb glanced at the others then raised his hand. Harry motioned for him to begin.

"On October fifth, we intend to start an intense campaign to locate all of Voldemort's 'relocation and re-education camps'," Caleb said, then he stood and opened a case and withdrew a map from it. He looked around for a moment, then pointed to a spot on the wall. "Might I hang this there, my Lord?"

Harry cringed. No matter how many times he had discussed it with Caleb, he couldn't get the man to call him Harry anymore. The problem lie with the fact that Harry played two roles. As Lord Potter-Black, Ambassador, he outranked Caleb, politically. The Newmans were a relatively new pure blood family and had no seat on the Wizengamot. But Harry was also Caleb's second in charge when in the field. It made for a confusing situation that Caleb solved by using his honorific.

Harry nodded and Caleb placed the map against the wall, then applied a sticking charm.

"It's a nice enough map, Caleb, but I have several maps of Britain, including that one on the wall," Harry said, pointing over his shoulder.

Caleb smiled faintly. "That's true, my Lord, but that map doesn't possess the qualities this one does. Our boffins at Q branch have borrowed one of



your ideas. I don't need to understand it in its entirety, but there is a larger map, just like this one, in our Operations Center. When a mark is made on that map, it's instantly repeated on about sixty other copies, including this one.

"On October fifth, nearly one hundred elf scouts will begin a mile by mile search of Britain. We expect the search to take at least two weeks. The elves will be teamed in pairs and, using a map like this, they will mark what they find while in the field.

"Also, Group Captain Anderson is willing to provide something he called Satellite photos, but they won't show the camps that might be hidden by magic."

Remus and Draco frowned, hearing that.

"Remus? Draco? Is there a problem?" asked Harry.

"Not really. I'm just not sure about the validity of muggle photography," Remus commented.

Draco nodded in agreement.

"Don't let it bother you, Remus. It's something muggles can do that we can't," Hermione told him.

"How can you say that, Hermione?" protested Draco.

Hermione rolled her eyes in exasperation. "Do you remember what happened at Stonehenge? I'd welcome you to the Nuclear Age, but it's not really all that welcoming. As for satellite technology..."

Harry leaned across his desk and touched her arm, stopping her lecture. "Draco, a satellite is a machine that muggles send into space. There are all sorts of satellites these days, but the ones Group Captain Anderson is talking about are among the very best. These machines are capable of flying over a country and taking pictures of incredible quality.

"Before you dismiss it out of hand, I'd suggest you let Hermione find you a book or two on the subject. Perhaps a couple books on muggle espionage techniques might also help. You can share them with Remus when you're finished with them."

Remus and Draco both flushed slightly. They knew they had both been dressed down a little, but it was a gentle slap. Hermione knew she could have handled the situation better, but shrugged it off and wrote a quick note about the books they'd need.

Harry turned back to Caleb. "Please, continue."

"Yes, my lord. As I was saying, we expect this operation to take two weeks, perhaps more. That means we won't have good location information until at least October twentieth. One of the reasons that Operation Breakout was so effective was our information on it's location and setup. We'll have to do the same thing here and much more.

"As you recall, this will be a two phased plan. Through most of October we will be planning the rescue and entrapment phases. Hopefully, by mid-November, perhaps sooner, we'll be able to mount an operation."

Caleb looked directly at Harry and their gazes locked. "I know I'm pushing on this, my Lord, but if the rumors are true, at least one of those camps is a family camp, with children. And winter is coming on."

Harry nodded grimly. Everyone was quiet for a moment, considering the implications of winter in one of the camps.

"Anything else, Caleb?" Harry asked quietly.

"Yes, sir, one more item. I've been in touch with my counterparts among the Yanks and the Canadians. They are willing to put up more troops for this operation. They've also offered to set up receiving centers of their own for the rescued prisoners. Their troops will arrive here a day in advance of our attack and return directly to their own camps back in America and Canada. Oh, and we just processed a large group of Saudi Arabian Cavalry that Miles had made arrangements for, but I'm not sure what we're going to do with them."

Amelia smiled benignly at Harry. This was exactly what she had been talking about. The cavalry wouldn't have been in Haven had it not been for Harry.

Harry caught the Minister's smile, but avoided making eye contact with her. Instead, he turned to Draco. "Good brief, Caleb. Draco?"

Draco pulled out a folder and opened it on his lap before looking at Harry. "As you know, we have two students of questionable loyalty at the school. This ordinarily wouldn't have been much of a problem, or much of a benefit, either. However, when Healer August appealed to Headmistress McGonagall for more student volunteers to help at the hospital, it opened a door of opportunity for us.

"Mindy Joyner, one of the students in question, has been allowed to help in one of the liaison offices at the Ministry building. There, we intend to feed her information she can then pass on to her Death Eater parents. Most of the information will be correct, though relatively harmless. The rest will be incorrect and, it's hoped, be of benefit to us at the right time. It is our hope that we'll be able to fool the other side into thinking this is a reliable source of information.

"Also, Amelia had made me aware of the upcoming issues with a reinstated Wizengamot. I am wondering if you want us to take a more active role in monitoring their activities?"

Harry scowled. "I don't know if we want to get involved in spying on our own people, Draco..."

Remus held up a hand. "It's a distasteful idea, Harry, but also useful in wartime. However, I think this is more suited to O'Dalley and his group. Maybe Draco should talk with him?"

Harry nodded grudgingly. He still didn't like the idea.

Amelia cleared her throat to gain his attention. "Speaking of the Wizengamot, the building for their meetings will be completed in early October. We deliberately slowed the pace of construction by using only a few elves. Those members who have been pressing for its reinstatement have backed off until the building is complete.

"One member, however, is already becoming a problem. You see, in the past, the money that paid Wizengamot members their salaries came from the seating fees and taxes, which were split between the Ministry and the Wizengamot. Very few of the rescued members would be able to afford to pay another seating fee, though one isn't due until the turn of the century anyway. So basically, the Wizengamot is broke. We, that is the Ministry, has yet to collect any taxes and, to be frank, I don't think we can, legally, collect taxes on incomes and profits earned in Ireland.

"Amhar Coeur de Lion has been pestering the Ministry to fund the membership to pay for their salaries and those of any staff they hire. Mind you, this isn't in the Ministry's charter, so I've been able to brush him off. I've heard rumors that he's approached Gringotts about a loan, but they also turned him down. He might seek you out next."

"I doubt that," Harry replied with a snort. "The last time that man was in this house, I threw him out."

Amelia pursed her lips for a moment. "Yes, well, the simple fact is, he has raised an important point. The Wizengamot does need funding. If they can't find it, members may decide their votes are for sale."

"Back to business as usual with them, then. Look, Amelia, I'll pay a wage to any man or woman who is willing to help in the war effort. Everyone, even the lowliest clerk in your mail room, is helping in their own way. But these people aren't helping. That idiot, Coeur de Lion, expected me to grovel because of his name, then he tried to insult my wife. He's lucky I didn't gut him and send him back to Azkaban," Harry replied furiously.

Amelia looked at him for a long moment, waiting for it to sink in.

He stared at her, his eyes growing wider by the second. "Impossible! You're suggesting I fund the Wizengamot? Are you out of your mind? The next thing I know, you'll be telling me to pucker up and kiss their asses!"

"Harry!" Hermione exclaimed.

"Not all of them are against you, Harry. Consider it a loan," Amelia told him, though she didn't sound happy about it.

"I just love how the government has become so free with my money," he growled, glaring at the Minister. "Tell me this. What happens if I don't front them a loan?"

Amelia sighed. "You know these people. They are the same ones who nearly sent you to Azkaban for protecting yourself and your cousin from Dementors. You can refuse to fund them and they will have no choice but to disband. But when the war is over, they will reform. And when they do, they will come after me, and everyone involved in the war effort. They will call our government illegal and charge us with treason. They will try to arrest you, your wife, your friends. You know what these people are capable of. In short, we risk going from one civil war, right into another..."

"We risk the same thing by putting them back into a position of power!" Harry exclaimed. "Can't you see that? Amelia, this does nothing to help the war effort. If anything, we'll be working against ourselves if I fund these people."

"We either deal with this now," Remus said quietly, "or find ourselves in Sirius' position, always on the run, hiding from the Ministry when the war ends and the Wizengamot is reformed."

Harry bowed his head. "*Hermione?*"

Hermione sighed and was silent for a moment. "*I don't like it any more than you do, Harry.*"

"*What do we do?*"

"*Call it a loan, payable within three years, at twenty percent interest, and hope it doesn't blow up in our faces.*"

Harry sighed and shook his head. "Get the figures needed to Remus, Amelia. He'll get the paperwork rolling for a three year loan."

"I know this is hard to take," Amelia began.

Harry held up his hand, then raised his head and pinned the Minister to her chair with the sheer fury visible in his eyes. "Understand something, Amelia. This is the last time I will let you back me into a corner like this. If I thought I could live with myself, I'd apparate every bastard on the Wizengamot back to England and let them rot there. I did not build Haven so that the Ministry and the Wizengamot could play fast and loose with my money, time or the lives of those who live here.

"From this moment on, you will take any funding requests to Remus and Hermione," he concluded.

When Amelia grimaced and looked away with a nod, he sighed heavily and ran a hand through his hair.

"I know the Wizengamot problem isn't your fault, Amelia, and I've probably been more harsh than I should have been. But sometimes it's like we're

back to Fudge's government. I'm paraded in front of the press, given positions and titles that I don't want, then asked to fund a government body I loath. It all has an element of sliminess to it that's repulsive to me. How you can deal with this sort of thing on a daily basis and not go insane is beyond me," he told her, shaking his head ruefully.

"I do understand your reaction, Harry," Amelia told him sadly. "I actually expected much worse when I brought it up. I don't like the idea any better than you do, but I'm trying to head off a future disaster here and, once again, I need your help to do it."

"You'll have it, Minister," he told her quietly.

On that note, the meeting broke up and everyone scattered to their various jobs. Harry sat at his desk massaging his forehead. The day was barely started and already he had a headache.

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## Hogwarts Castle (Sept. 30th)...

"Lights!" Harry commanded in parseltongue, causing the torches along the wall to flare up.

He climbed to his feet and cursed silently. Someday he would learn to land properly while portkeying! Dusting off his clothes, he looked around. The crates with explosives and other pranks was nearly empty.

He banished the empty crates, then reached into his pockets and withdrew several others, which he then expanded to full size.

When he was done with the crates, he looked up and was surprised to see quite a few new ghosts hovering in the far corner of the room. He saw Penelope and motioned for her to come closer, but she shook her head sadly and turned away from him.

"They will not come near you, nor anyone else, my Lord," the Bloody Baron said as he appeared by Harry's side.

Harry turned and bowed to the Baron, who bowed in return.

"What is wrong with them, my lord Baron?" asked Harry curiously, his gaze returning to the ghosts in the corner. As far as he knew, nothing could harm a ghost.

The Baron turned and looked at the other ghosts for a moment. "The Dark Lord's foul rite is creating ghosts who lack the ability to tie themselves to a location. It is a problem that all of us ghosts will face soon enough. In time, even I will join the others, slowly fading away, trapped in our memories and unable to break out. The magic which anchored us is gone. Without it, we are all doomed."

He turned to the Baron, surprised. "What? You're ghosts! You can't die."

The Baron smiled sadly. "Tis a shame that Hogwarts never gets around to teaching their students about ghosts. Most ghosts still hold a piece of their soul. That, combined with their own form of ghost magic, allows them to anchor themselves to a place. Myrtle, for example, anchored herself to the girl's lavatory when the Ministry exorcised her, while I am anchored to the Slytherin Common Room.

"Unfortunately, the Dark Lord's foul ritual is creating ghosts who lack an portion of their soul, so their magic is weaker. Then there is the fact that magic has fled Hogwarts. This is causing the newer ghosts to lose power. Eventually, they will fade until nothing of them remains. Think upon it, my lord. To know you are fading away to nothingness and being unable to stop it? They are terrified."

"And what of you, my Lord Baron? Will you also fade?" asked Harry.

"In time, I, too, will fade. But unlike these poor wraiths, my soul will simply cross over. All of the older Hogwarts ghosts will suffer the same fate. But for these newer spirits, they have no where else to go. They will fade and be no more."

As the Baron spoke, the other ghosts moved closer. When Harry finally looked over, he recoiled from the sight. Several reached out in his direction, moaning piteously. "Save ussss..."

He turned back to the Baron, distraught. "Is there nothing that can be done? Can I do something to slow, or halt this process?"

The Baron shrugged his shoulders in reply. "We need magic to anchor our spirits, but the magic of Hogwarts has been steadily draining away since the Dark Lord assumed control of the castle. Soon, it will be gone."

"Just raw magic? Not a spell or anything?"

"Just raw magic, but that isn't something you can come by easily."

Harry looked around the floor for a moment, then he selected a small stone. "I hate to do this here, but the *Fidelius* Charm should prevent anyone from homing in on it," he murmured.

The Baron watched him carefully as he transfigured the rock into a large quartz crystal. Holding the crystal in his cupped hands, he started filling the crystal with his magic. It was raw power, uncontrolled and unrefined, and the air around the crystal snapped and sparked with electricity.

After ten minutes, he stopped and shakily placed the crystal on a nearby table. "Can you anchor to that?" he asked, panting from the effort.

The Baron glided over to the table and held out his hand, touching the stone. He closed his eyes and his form seemed to sharpen and brighten just a little. The Baron looked over at Harry in amazement.

"Aye, my lord," he said reverently. "It's not a permanent solution, but I think we can."

The Baron raised a bloody arm and waved to the others floating nearby. Harry watched as, one by one, the ghosts came forward and touched the stone. He smiled weakly when Penelope passed him. She curtsied low and cried ghostly tears.

"I don't know how long the crystal will last. Send for me if it dims. Do not leave the chamber except when you go out on spying missions. The only real solution here is to bring the magic back to Hogwarts and that will not happen until the Dark Lord is defeated. We are working towards that end, and your help is appreciated."

The Baron looked up from watching the last of the ghosts connect to the source of magic and he smiled at Harry. "Your faith in us will not go unrewarded, my lord. Far too often wizards ignore us because we rarely interact with the physical world. You have shown yourself a friend to our community and we will support your cause to the best of our ability."

Harry bowed his head in acknowledgment of the Baron's words, then he picked up the portkey and vanished.

There was a moment of silence among the ghosts, then a cold wind whipped through the chamber. The Baron clapped his hands and ghosts gathered around him. "Come, it is time to teach you new comers how to possess a living being and other skills. Then we shall send word throughout the spirit world. Harry Potter is our ally and friend, and we will aid his cause."

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## **Padfoot Manor...**

Harry waved tiredly to the men outside the door and they opened it quickly. All portkeys to the manor came in through a hole in the wards to one, guarded room in the basement. Charging the crystal had used up a lot of his energy and he was nearly exhausted. He climbed slowly up the basement stairs, and headed for the master suite.

He entered the suite a few minutes later and stopped in surprise when he spotted Hermione, Narcissa, Emma and Luna sitting at the breakfast table. Hermione turned when she heard the door open and she stood up in alarm after spotting him.

"Harry? What's wrong?" she asked, rushing over to his side.

Narcissa opened a pouch on her belt and removed a small vial. Her Healer training had advanced to the point where she was allowed to dispense certain, more restrictive, potions.

Hermione led Harry over to the bed and sat him down.

"I'm alright, just tired. I ran into something I didn't expect and fixing it took a lot of power out of me."

Narcissa uncorked the vial and handed it to him. "Pepper-up. Drink it," she ordered, her tone that of a Healer dealing with an obstinate patient.

Harry downed the vial quickly, then sat back as energy pumped through his system and bled off steam through his ears. When the steam finally died out, he looked more awake and energized.

"Now, tell us what happened," Hermione said.

"I went to visit the Hogwarts ghosts to get an update on what was going on and to restock Peeves' pile of goodies. But I found the ghosts in bad shape. The magic is fleeing the castle and many of the ghosts created by that ritual of Voldemort's are dying."

Hermione and Narcissa frowned. "But ghosts can't die. They are already dead," protested Hermione.

Harry waved a hand at the two women. "I know, but without the magic to sustain them, they are fading out. The older ghosts, and the ones who died in a regular way, will simply cross over. The ones made by that ritual will fade out of existence and they were terrified by it. Apparently, a ghost like the Baron, or Nearly Headless Nick, still retains it's soul, or a part of it. They still need to anchor themselves to a location, like Hogwarts, where the magic will sustain them. But Hogwart's magic is fading quickly.

"I left them a stone I charged with raw magic. It will provide them with a temporary anchor. Charging the stone was... tiring," he said.

"What does it mean when you say Hogwart's magic is fading?" asked Emma in a perplexed tone.

Hermione chewed her lower lip, thinking. "I'm not totally sure, Mum... Hogwarts was one of the most magical places in Britain. I don't even know if it will continue to stand with all it's magic gone," she said finally.

"Oh, it will stand," answered Harry. "Voldemort will see to that. It's too much of an icon in his eyes. What scares me is if he's there long enough, the castle will be permeated with dark magics. It would be very hard to turn the castle back into a school if it's filled with his evil."

Emma leaned back in her chair, her eyes alight with possibilities. "I don't understand half of what I should, but it seems to me that there must be a way of cleansing the castle. If you don't mind, I think I'll look into it, maybe talk to Professor Flitwick about it. Now that we know there's a possible problem, we can plan for dealing with it."

Harry smiled in her direction and nodded. "In the meantime..."

"In the meantime, Mr. Potter, I think you should lay down for an hour or two," Hermione said crisply.

Harry looked over at her with bloodshot eyes. "That is a good idea," he mumbled as the pepper up potion began to wear off.

Hermione pushed him back on the bed, removed his shoes, and drew the blankets over him.

"Perhaps we should continue our discussion in the study?" asked Narcissa.

The other women nodded and followed her out of the room.

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### **Haven School of Witchcraft and Wizardry (Oct 1st)...**

Headmistress McGonagall looked up from her lunch. The first years ran into the dining hall in formation.

"First years," barked one of the taller students.

"Who Rah!" the first years yelled in response.

"Fall out for lunch detail!"

Minerva frowned as her first year students scattered to various tables, then stood waiting for an order to sit.

"Sit!" barked that same tall student.

They immediately sat and began their meal. Minerva glared across the table at Miles, who grinned and shrugged apologetically. The simple fact was, Professor Stonefist, for all of his rough mannerisms, was turning out to be extraordinarily popular with the younger students.

Minerva had talked with several of the teachers and they were all unanimous in their opinion that this year's crop of first year students were among the politest and hardest working that anyone had ever seen. And as if to add insult to injury, the second years were beginning to fall into the same patterns.

She eyed the huge professor sitting across the table from her.

He had been watching his class with a trained eye and was generally pleased with what he saw. When he first accepted the job he thought it would be a nightmare training children, but instead he discovered an audience eager for his stories and even more eager to learn. The class didn't fully understand about the war, but they knew it was serious and wanted to do their part, even if all that meant was giving their parents one less thing to worry about by getting good grades.

"Professor Stonefist, if I might have a moment of your time?" said Minerva.

Stonefist turned and faced the Headmistress. "Of course, Headmistress," he replied.

Miles snickered. Minerva had complained to him on several occasions that Stonefist refused to call her by any name other than her title. Minerva shot Miles a glare, then looked at Stonefist.

"Professor, I wanted to commend you on your work with your students. I admit that, at first, I was alarmed seeing first year students marching through the halls. But all of the teachers are reporting considerably few disciplinary problems with the first year students than with the other grades," Minerva said, trying to ease her way into the topic she wanted.

"They are a good troop, Headmistress. Eager to learn. That's important," Stonefist said, and for a brief moment a smile tried to form.

Minerva shook her head at the impossibility of it. It was rumored among the students that Professor Stonefist had smiled only once in his life, and that time it was an accident.

Eithne O'Keefe, the divination teacher, stood and immediately moved to another seat further away. Minerva looked at her inquisitively, then turned back to Stonefist again.

"Yes, well, there is one small, slight problem I thought I'd raise with you, Professor. It seems a few of your students have written their parents and they, in turn, have written me, asking why I'm allowing a Professor to call his students... What was the term? 'Pus filled midget maggot munchers?'" Minerva asked in a painfully polite tone.

Miles snorted into his drink and sprayed Hagrid with tea, while Filius fell off his chair in shock. Hagrid looked at Miles in surprise as the man collapsed back in his chair, laughing. Hagrid reached down and picked up Flitwick, placing him back on his chair. The little man was giggling merrily.

Stonefist shot the little man a puzzled glance, then turned his gaze back to Minerva. "I shall endeavor to moderate my language, Headmistress," he said calmly.

Recognizing a victory, even if it was a Pyrrhic one, Minerva decided to retreat while she was ahead.

"Please do so, Professor. We can't have the parents complaining about the language being used by the faculty," she replied primly, then she looked over the wildly grinning staff in disgust.

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## Padfoot Manor...

Harry limped into the manor. He had taken time out today from the numerous planning sessions to spend some needed time dueling.

He used a specially built chamber in the Operations center to do his dueling training. The walls were reinforced to withstand spell blasts. Inside the chamber, Harry had his choice of human opponents or Golems, which were controlled by observers through a transparent panel. It wasn't uncommon when Harry was dueling for him to have an audience.

*"You're late."*

He looked up the stairs and spotted Hermione standing at the top, frowning at him. He could feel both anger and worry warring with each other over their bond. He leaned heavily on his staff and tried to grin through his pain.

*"Sorry, love. Dueling training today was pretty rough."*

Hermione's expression softened. *"Well, you better get up here, take a fast shower and get changed. Our guests arrived nearly a half hour ago."*

"Guests?"

"Don't tell me you forgot that Amelia was bringing some of the Wizengamot members by tonight?" she asked archly.

Harry groaned and wiped his forehead. "Fine, make my apologies to our honored guests and I'll be down as quickly as I can," he replied, then he apparated directly to their bedroom where Dobby and Winky were both waiting to help him get cleaned up and dressed.

Twenty minutes and several drying charms later, Harry apparated to just outside the sitting room where Hermione and Amelia were entertaining their guests. Taking a deep breath, he opened the door and entered quietly.

"Yes, the town was nearly completed before we started moving people in here," Hermione said. She glanced up and, seeing Harry, she smiled.

"My apologies," Harry said. "My duties at the Operations Center ran longer than I had anticipated."

Hermione scowled, noting he was still leaning heavily on his staff. *"Are you alright?"* she sent him.

*"I've had better days, but I should be fine."*

Amelia stood and walked to his side. "Harry, I'd like to introduce you to some of the more influential members of the Wizengamot," she said, leading him to the small group standing near Hermione. "From left to right we have Alastair McShaney, Martin Haskel, Trenton Largo, Cyrus Banebridge and

Agatha Umbridge," she said.

Harry's eyes widened upon hearing the last name and he looked at the woman warily. Yes, there was a resemblance between Councilor Umbridge and his defense teacher from fifth year.

"Councilor Umbridge is Delores Umbridge's younger sister, Harry," Hermione offered helpfully.

Harry relaxed somewhat and the short woman approached him, offering her hand.

"My Lord, I'd like to apologize for what my sister has done to you. I know only a little of her crimes, but I know she died supporting that foul regime," the Councilor said quietly.

Harry reached out and took her hand, smiling warmly. "You need not apologize, Councilor. I'm pleased to meet you... all of you."

Dobby appeared a moment later. "Harry Potter, Sir, dinner is being ready in the dinning room."

"Thank you, Dobby. We'll be right there," Harry replied before turning to the group. "Shall we retire to the dinning room?" When he led them from the room, he tried his best to minimize his limp in front of his guests.

Several hours later he sat with Hermione, Amelia and their guests, sipping sherry in the sitting room. Harry drank a glass of chilled fruit juice. One of the advantages of their trip to Egypt was learning about different drinks he could imbibe. The dinner, thanks to the elves, had been superb as usual. He made a mental note to find a way to thank them without throwing them into a panic that he might give them clothes.

"I understand, my lord, that you will be assuming your seat among us, now that you've achieved your majority," said Trenton Largo. He was a tall, distinguished looking gentleman, his hair even more salt and pepper than Remus'.

"Yes. I understand I can claim two voting seats, that of the Black, and Potter families," Harry replied with a smile. He was feeling a little better about that loan for the Wizengamot tonight. Each of these members were actively doing what they could for the war effort.

Largo smiled. "I heard about that. Of course, with so few members of the Council, there isn't much we can do for now."

"I'm sure that will change in time, Councilor," Harry replied.

"Excuse me, my Lord, but Haven... What will happen to it when we go home?" asked Cyrus Banebridge.

"Well, I own most of the land, as you know. But when we return to Britain, I'm sure some people will stay behind, laying down new roots. As room becomes available, others will move in. The school will remain. If I have anything to say about it, it will become the sister school to Hogwarts and students will attend classes at both schools. I've also spoken to Headmistress McGonagall about the possibilities of opening up a center for advanced studies and apprenticeships."

Several of his guests exchanged approving looks.

"As to the more official buildings? The Operations center will probably be purchased by the Irish Aurory, who has expressed interest in turning it into a training center. The manor, of course, will remain as it has, a part of my family's properties."

"My lord, if I might..." Umbridge began, but stopped when Harry waved a hand at her.

"Councilors, I know there are rules that we must follow in public and while the Wizengamot is in session, but frankly this formality is giving me a headache. Please, all of you, I'm just Harry, Hermione's husband. That's all I ever wanted to be and that's all I'd like to be called for the rest of the evening."

"Very well... Harry," Umbridge said somewhat uncertainly.

"It gets easier the more you say it, Agatha," Amelia told her, her eyes sparkling mischievously.

"I think I can speak for all of us here when I say I'd like to thank you, Harry. Not only for rescuing us from that prison but, more importantly, for what you're doing for the people," Umbridge said in a serious tone.

The rest of the Councilors nodded in agreement and Hermione smiled, watching her husband squirm under their accolades.

Harry mumbled something incoherent and Hermione leaned forward, laying a hand on his arm. He took a calming breath then tried again.

"Agatha, I can't possibly accept your thanks. There were nearly four hundred and fifty Aurors and others helping in that rescue mission. I just played one small part in it," he replied in protest.

Amelia snorted in disbelief and everyone turned to her. "One small part? Harry, the original idea was yours. You helped on the planning and you were second in command in the field when the operation took place. You had more than a small role in the rescue!"

"I think what Harry is trying to say is that is unfair to single him out alone when so many others took part in that mission," offered Hermione.

"Exactly!" exclaimed Harry. "There were so many good people helping there that day. They are all heroes."

There was a moment of silence, then Trenton Largo raised his glass in salute. "Well, then, to the Heroes of Azkaban!"

"And absent friends," added Harry quietly.

Everyone drank in toast, then Councilor Umbridge turned to Hermione.

"I understand you had the opportunity to visit the library at Alexandria recently?" asked Umbridge.

"Yes. Harry took me there as part of our honeymoon," Hermione said happily. "In fact, the Director of Magical Antiquities for the Egyptian Ministry sent us nearly fifteen hundred volumes, copied from their Druid and Celtic lore sections."

"My wife loves her books. In some ways I'm not sure if she doesn't think of me as a strange walking, talking book," Harry quipped, then he smiled at Hermione to show he was only teasing.

Hermione glanced at him, smiling sweetly. "*Yes, my husband. I can read you like a book, a dirty book, at that,*" she sent him, her tone full of amusement as he nearly choked on his drink.

"For myself, I found the trip to the library fascinating because of the conditions under which it exists. They are still restoring sections of it. I can appreciate the books and scrolls, although perhaps not as well as Hermione, but I found the idea of rebuilding an ancient library that sunk into the sea a wonderful use of magic," Harry said, trying to recover from Hermione's comment.

"I have heard of that project myself, but have never seen it," lamented Umbridge. "Indeed, the expertise needed to rebuild and reconstruct ancient texts might help us, once we return to Britain."

Hermione's eyes lit up and Harry motioned for her to answer. He leaned back on his chair and sipped his juice, while Hermione led the group into a discussion of how to recover and rebuild the damaged libraries after the war.

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## **Bucharest, Romania (October 2nd)...**

A tavern had been at this location for more than eight hundred years. The name had changed hundreds of times, as had the owner. It was now called the Bloody Axe and its sign, that of a huge war axe dripping illusionary blood, hung from the post just above the door. Through crusades, wars, and plague, the tavern and the little street it was on had been protected. This was the seedier side of Wizarding Romania. This was the side most people feared, where dark arts ruled and Werewolves, Vampires and evil wizards and witches did their business. Knockturn Alley was a walk in the park compared to this place.

Dumbledore was intimately familiar with this region and its customs. His Order had, at one time, used this region as a stepping stone to make contact with the Werewolf clans.

He slipped into the Bloody Axe and made his way towards the bar. The floor was dirt mixed with sawdust, and the only light came from torches along the walls. There was a brief moment of silence when he stepped into the room, and he tugged at the hood of his cloak to make sure it hadn't slipped off.

"Fire Whiskey," he said, placing a galleon on the counter.

The man behind the bar eyed the coin hungrily for a moment, then filled a large glass. The coin vanished in the process.

"You're a stranger to these parts," the bartender said diffidently.

Dumbledore nodded and said nothing.

"Best be keeping a close eye on your money then, stranger, or you're liable to find someone willing to slice your throat for it."

"They can try, but they might not like the results," countered Dumbledore. "I'm looking for Nickolai."

The bartender arched an eyebrow. "Nickolai only talks to people he wants to talk to. It's death to seek him out when he doesn't want to speak to you."

"He'll talk to me," Dumbledore said calmly.

"Bah! If you can find him, that is," the bartender replied with a chuckle.

"Oh, I don't have to worry about that. In fact, you'll find him for me."

The bartender looked around nervously but all he saw were the regulars to his tavern. "Why should I get involved?"

"Because the galleon you took from me was poisoned. If you want to live, you'll see that Nickolai meets me here in two days," Dumbledore said with a giggle, then he turned and walked out of the tavern, leaving the terrified publican behind.

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### Haven (Oct 3rd)...

Arthur pushed back his plate and sighed gustily. "That was excellent, Melinda," he commented. "For someone who didn't know how to cook a few months ago, you've sure come a long way."

"Thanks to your help," Melinda replied, smiling.

"I never taught you to cook like this."

"No, but you did teach me the basics. With that knowledge, Olga allowed me back into her kitchen and helped me to polish my skills. I know lamb chops aren't difficult, but I never would have tried to cook them had you and Olga not been willing to teach me."

"Lamb chops might not be difficult, but the cherry-pecan sauce you drizzled over them was wonderful," he told her.

"I'm glad you liked it," she said. Standing, she began to gather up the dishes on the table.

"I'll help." Gathering up his plate and glass, he stood up and groaned. "I think I ate too much," he muttered sheepishly.

Laughing, Melinda dumped the dishes into the sink. "Don't worry about the dishes. Dilly was a bit put out with me when I told her I was going to cook. She can be a demanding little thing when she wants to be. She ordered me to leave the dishes to her. So, if you'd like, we can take tea in the living room."

"Sounds good to me," he said as he dumped his dishes into the sink next to hers. "If I left now, I'd be waddling down the street."

"We can't have that, can we. Much too undignified." Removing a tray from the cupboard above the stove, she placed it on the counter and smiled when Arthur handed her two cups. Adding sugar and cream pots, she picked up the tray. "Will you grab the kettle there on the back of the stove? I set it to brewing just before we finished dinner, so it should be ready. It'll be hot, so make sure to use the towel there on the counter."

When he picked up the kettle, she turned and led the way into the living room. Once they were settled on the couch and the tea poured, they both leaned back and relaxed. They were silent for a time, comfortable enough with each other by now that moments of silence were easy, rather than awkward.

"Why has your schedule at the hospital been so erratic lately?" Arthur asked, finally breaking the silence.

"Payback," she said, smiling. "I spent time at the manor helping with Mr. Boot's treatment, which meant others had to cover my shift at the hospital."

He frowned. "That doesn't sound right. It's not like you were on vacation."

"It was, actually. Well, almost. Therapy is different. It can be demanding, but for much shorter lengths of time. At the hospital, I work twelve hour



shifts. At the manor, I worked between four and six, depending on what we had scheduled for Terry.”

“So you ended up with free time,” he said, understanding.

“Right. And those covering my shifts had to cut into their own free time to do it.” She shrugged. “Now it's time for payback.”

“You don't sound like you mind very much.”

“I don't, not really. It keeps me busy and I love my work. My time at the manor was nice, but I couldn't do something like that for long. I feel lost with too much free time. I never know what to do with myself.”

“You could spend more time with me,” he said quietly. When she looked at him, a bit surprised, he blushed furiously. “Sorry. Forget I said anything,” he mumbled into his teacup.

She placed her cup on the coffee table and turned to face him more fully. “No, I don't think I will.”

“Melinda,” he began as he placed his own cup on the table.

She reached out and took his hand. “It's my turn now. Be quiet and listen,” she told him gently. When he nodded, she looked down at their joined hands. “I enjoy the time we spend together, Arthur, but you're as busy at the Ministry as I am at the hospital. I was surprised you actually had time to come over for dinner. When we do go out, we're almost always interrupted, either by people wishing to speak to the Deputy Minister, or by the hospital calling me back because they need an extra healer.”

She stopped then and shook her head. Taking a deep breath, she raised her eyes to his, meeting his gaze. “What I don't think you realize is just how much I resent those interruptions. But we both have responsibilities that neither of us would shirk, no matter how much we may wish to from time to time. If I could find a way, I'd spend a lot more time with you.”

He reached out with his free hand and brushed her cheek gently. “We'll just have to be more creative with our time,” he murmured. Leaning down, he brushed his lips across hers once, twice. Hearing her breath catch, he deepened the kiss.

When his arms wrapped around her, she moaned and let him pull her down on top of him. Stretched out on the couch, they explored each other tenderly at first. But when she bit his lower lip, he grasped her hips and pulled her tightly against his erection. As her hips bucked against him, he bit back a groan.

It took a moment for the frantic knocking on the cottage door to register, but when it did, they both froze. A moment later, Arthur cursed.

“Someone better be dying,” Melinda muttered as she pushed herself up. Trying to tame her hair and straighten her skirt, she rushed for the door as Arthur stood and tried to fix his shirt, now missing several buttons.

Ready to tell the person at the door to get lost, she jerked it open and blinked in surprise. “Ginny?” Noting the way the young woman held herself, bent over slightly and clutching her stomach, she grew concerned. “Ginny, what's wrong?” she asked as she pushed the door open wider and helped her in.

“I was training and there was an accident,” Ginny said, panting from the pain.

“Why didn't you see the medic?” Melinda asked as they walked slowly towards the couch.

“Ginny? Merlin! What happened to you?” Arthur exclaimed as he rushed towards her.

“Dad? What are you doing here?” Her face flushed in embarrassment. “I was hoping to see Melinda alone.”

“Yeah, well, that makes two of us,” he muttered as he reached her side and helped her to the couch.

Her eyes widened as she noticed her father's shirt was missing buttons and hung open. Swinging her gaze to Melinda, her jaw dropped as she saw the healer's hair, her skewed skirt. “Oh, Merlin. I'm sorry! I didn't mean...”

“Never mind that. Tell me what happened,” Melinda snapped as she grabbed her wand from the mantel.

“I can't. Not in front of my father,” Ginny hissed.

Melinda's eyes narrowed.

“Don't be foolish,” Arthur snapped. “Tell Melinda what happened.”

“Dad!”

“Arthur, why don't you go into the kitchen for a few minutes? I'll call you when we're done.”

Looking between the two women, one stern, the other pleading, he threw up his hands in frustration. “Fine!”

Once Arthur had left the room, Melinda turned back to her patient and began casting diagnostic charms. “What happened?” she demanded.

“We're learning hand to hand combat. I was fighting with one of the instructors. I rushed him just as he tried to kick me. He missed his target and kicked me between the legs. I think he hit my pelvic bone or something, I don't know. The pain was intense! He sent me to the lockers and told me

to change and go home. Only, when I took off my training gear, I noticed blood.”

Seeing her embarrassment, Melinda understood. “When is your period due?”

“Three weeks,” Ginny told her, relieved that she didn't have to explain further.

“This is why you didn't go to the field medic?”

“The medic's a man!”

Melinda shook her head, smiling. “They've seen it all, Ginny. There's nothing to be embarrassed over. Hmm. Diagnostics show no internal damage,” she said, moving her wand around a bit. “But... Yes, there it is. Nothing to worry about.” She tsked. “That kick must have been pretty hard to cause this. Lacerations from the blunt force trauma, I'd say.”

Twenty minutes later, Melinda put her wand on the table and walked towards the hall closet. “Get dressed while I get you a few potions. I keep some of the more common ones here at home. Since the neighbor's child had his lip split open by his sister, I've learned to be prepared. Ah, here we go.”

Taking a few bottles from a bag on the closet floor, she walked back to Ginny and set them on the table. “Two for pain relief, one for the bruising. The bleeding has been stopped and the lacerations closed. However, there are a few things you need to abstain from.

“First, no training tomorrow. After that, you're too take it easy for a week. If your instructors have any problems with that, you tell them to talk to me. Understand?”

“Yes, Ma'am.”

“Second, no penetrative sex for one week.”

“What?” Ginny exclaimed as she looked up from buttoning her pants, her eyes wide.

“I know you're still a newlywed, but I mean what I say. Abstaining for a week isn't going to kill you, and you need to fully heal. I'm sure Neville will understand.”

“I wasn't actually going to tell him about this,” Ginny muttered as she sat back down.

“Now you don't have a choice,” Melinda said, grinning. “He'll understand. I want you to take a dose of the pain reliever while I go get your father.”

“Don't tell him!”

“Don't worry, Ginny. 'Female trouble' is usually enough of an explanation for most men. Take the potion. I'll be back in a minute.”

Ginny uncorked the bottle and took the potion. The relief was immediate and welcome. She set the empty bottle on the table and stood up, slowly. Feeling no pain, she sighed happily and picked up the other bottles.

“Are you alright?” Arthur asked as he walked quickly towards her.

“Fine, now,” she told him as he wrapped his arms around her and hugged her tight. “Really, dad, I'm fine.”

“You scared the breath out of me,” he told her as he pulled away and looked at her carefully.

“I'm sorry for it,” she said as she slipped out of his arms. “But I'm okay now. I think I'll head up to the manor and see if I can catch dinner with Neville.”

“If you need anything, or have any problems, you let me know,” Melinda told her as she walked the young woman to the door.

“I will. Thanks.”

“You're welcome. And next time, don't be embarrassed to go to the field medic. Had it been serious, you may not have gotten here in time,” Melinda told her sternly as she opened the door.

Ginny stepped into the doorway, then turned around and looked at Melinda, then her father. “So, umm, dad? Do the boys know about...” She waved her hand between him and Melinda.

“What are you talking about?” Arthur asked, frowning.

“Your shirt, Melinda's skirt? The fact that you both have rats nests for hair? It's obvious I interrupted something,” she said, her eyes dancing.

Arthur's eyes narrowed. “Ginevra Weasley! Don't you dare!”

“I don't understand,” Melinda said, looking between father and daughter. “Dare what?”

“Dad doesn't want me to tell the boys about the two of you,” Ginny said, laughing outright. “But I think they should know. The twins, especially.”

“NO!” Arthur all but shouted as he lunged for his daughter.

“Ginny, wait!” Melinda exclaimed as she reached for the younger woman.

Dancing away, Ginny laughed and, with a small pop, apparated away.

“Oh, Merlin,” Arthur groaned

“She wouldn't!” Melinda said, still staring at the empty doorway.

“She would,” he told her morosely.

“If she does, she better not come to me to treat her next injury. I'll make her itch for a week!” she growled as she slammed the door.

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### **Padfoot Manor...**

“Missy? Oh Missy, you must be waking now.” said the small piping voice.

Luna opened one eye and peered down at the small elf staring up at her. She had been sleeping, naked, and quite comfortably, on top of Draco. His arms were still wrapped around her. She glanced at the clock *Two in the morning? Someone must have discovered a smores infestation, she thought. They wouldn't wake me otherwise.*

“I'm awake. Has someone found that smores nest I was worried about?” Luna said softly. She really didn't want to wake Draco. They had fallen asleep after making love and he needed his rest.

“No, Missy. Twilla don't know about Smore's nest, evil creatures wif long teef and nasty eyes, but Master Hairyhead asked me to bring you a message,” said Twilla, waving a scroll.

Sighing, Luna reluctantly rolled off Draco and threw the coverlet back over him to cover his nakedness, before accepting the scroll from Twilla. Scanning the message, her expression changed and she stood. “Tell Hagrid I will be there within half an hour.”

Twilla nodded anxiously, then vanished with a pop, while Luna walked over to her wardrobe and started to pull out clothing.

After dressing, she left the message from Hagrid on the nightstand and hurried outside. Unlike Harry, who could apparate through the manor house wards, she had to walk. She reached the edge of the manor's wards, then apparated to the edge of the wards protecting the school.

Arriving at the school, she winced, hearing the discordant keening coming from the Angels. Hagrid and Headmistress McGonagall stood nearby, trying to figure out what was wrong with them.

“Could they be ill, Hagrid?” asked McGonagall.

“I don't think so Purfessor. I ain't sure what's wrong yet. Ah... here's Mrs. Black now,” Hagrid said, beaming at Luna. Her unique abilities with animals and other aspects of Nature made her a favorite of Hagrid's and Professor Sprout.

Luna hurried over, pulling the shawl about her shoulders tighter against the breeze. Summer was over and the nights were getting quite chilly.

“When did this start to happen?” Luna asked breathlessly.

“Within the last hour, Miss L... Mrs. Black,” Minerva said. She gave the young woman an apologetic glance, then looked over towards the dormitories where most of the lights were now on. Crowds of students hung out the windows, watching the spectacle.

Luna frowned. She had been working when she could with the Angels and they were not acting normally. In the past weeks, their true voices were becoming apparent, but the sounds they now made were nothing like their true voices. Normally very melodic, their bell like voices were a joy to listen too. Their voices seemed to contain a phoenix like quality, uplifting the spirit and bringing hope to the hopeless. But tonight the sound they made could only mean one thing. They were in pain for some unknown reason.

“Oh, you poor babies,” Luna murmured, then she stepped up to the two Angels. Both creatures looked at her and ceased their keening. Their expressions, however, were still those of pain and confusion, a great deal of confusion.

“It's all right,” she crooned to them. “No one here will hurt you.”

The two floating Angels stared at her and their expressions eased. Luna reached out with both hands and grabbed a hand of each creature. She smiled. “Do not be afraid. I can help.”

All motion, all sound, ceased in the clearing. Minerva and Hagrid looked around nervously. It wasn't normal for all night sounds to cease like this. Even the breeze had died.

A faint glow sprang up around Luna. Sparkles, like millions of fairy lights, filled the clearing and danced to some unheard melody. Minerva and Hagrid gasped when they saw the grass at their feet growing, spiraling upwards. Strange creatures began to pop in and out of existence in front of their eyes.

“Ah... Now I understand,” Luna said with a smile.

Between the two Angels, a light appeared and they moved closer together. Both Angels reached for the light with their free hand. The light slid up their arms and quickly covered both Angels, then widened to include Luna.

"Don't be afraid. It's a natural and wonderful process," Luna told them softly.

The creatures smiled at her, then extended their wings. Releasing Luna from their grip, they spiraled upwards together, each circling the other. As they went, the glow surrounding them changed from its normal white to a white with a hint of pink at the edges. Their voices filled the night air like the sound of hundreds of tuned bells in some heavenly choir. No one who heard their song could fail to be uplifted by it.

At the zenith of their flight, the Angels burst forth in a rainbow of colors before returning to white again. Slowly they spiraled down to the hover in front of Luna, Hagrid and Minerva.

Luna stood, mesmerized by the spectacle, completely ignoring the creatures popping in and out around her. When the Angels began their descent, she shook herself free from their song in time to see a small man, no more than a foot tall and with a huge phallus, appear. This time he was blue and the horn in the center of his forehead was a shocking yellow. He wore a polka dotted vest and he appeared to be enraged at her. He stroked himself a few times and proceeded to make many rude hand gestures at her. Then he noticed Minerva. He eyed her up and down for a moment before letting out a long low whistle.

"Behave yourself," Luna chided him gently.

The little man glared at her and vanished with a pop.

She chuckled and turned her attention to the two patiently waiting Angels. "This is not the end of the adventure. Soon it will be time to take the next step. When that time comes, call me and I will help you," she told them.

The larger of the two Angels moved forward and dipped slightly. Then to everyone's amazement, it opened its mouth and, using a perfectly modulated string of bell tones, said, "Thank you."

The two Angels then rose up in the air, soaring above the school, glowing and calling to one another. Luna watched them for another moment before pitching to her knees, her eyes filled with tears.

There was a pop of someone apparating in, then Draco pushed his way between Minerva and Hagrid. He stopped next to Luna and scooped her up in his arms.

"Let's take her over to Hagrid's cottage," suggested Minerva.

A few moments later, Hagrid opened the door to his home for the others. "Fang! Down, you mangy mutt! Down!"

Draco slipped past Hagrid, who was dealing with Fang, and lowered Luna down on a ragged looking couch.

"What happened?" Draco asked tensely. He didn't like seeing Luna upset. He sat next to her with one arm wrapped protectively around her.

Minerva conjured a tea set and poured Luna a cup. Draco accepted the cup with a smile, waited until she had calmed down before holding up to her lips to sip from.

"I'm sorry, Dray," she whispered several minutes later.

He cupped her cheek in one palm and she leaned into his caress. Unlike the bond that Harry and Hermione shared, allowing thoughts and emotions to pass freely, Draco and Luna's bond was different. They could share thoughts, with a lot of work, emotions were easier. But one thing they could share easily was strength. Luna sat quietly for a moment, drawing strength to calm herself and to settle her magic, which had flared high tonight.

"It's alright, Luna. I was just worried, waking up and not finding you. Then I found the note from Hagrid, and I could feel you were upset. I came here as quick as I could."

"Can yer tell us what 'appened to the Angels tonight, Luna?" asked Hagrid.

Luna looked up at Hagrid for a moment, smiling gently. "The Angels are a new species. Because of that, there are some things they know instinctively and some things they don't. Tonight, our Angels felt the imperative to bond with their mate. You see, they mate for life and the pull is strong, but they didn't know how."

"Will the others need the same help, Mrs. Black?" asked Minerva.

Luna shook her head. "No. What one Angel knows, they all know. I don't know how, but that's the way they are. Anyway, I had to help them with the first bonding. Now all of them, even those in Britain, know how it's done. By morning, most will have selected their bond mate."

"Did that Angel really speak?" wondered Minerva.

Hagrid glanced over at her and nodded. It was something he wanted to know, as well.

"The Angels are intelligent, Professor, like Centaurs or Goblins. Because they are a new species, they haven't had time to develop their own language... And I've been trying to teach the pair at the school to speak English. Until tonight, I thought I hadn't succeeded," Luna said with a dreamy smile on her face, then she turned to Draco.

"Oh Dray, you should have seen it. It was wonderful. I could feel the love connection between the pair, and when the bond was made, it washed over everything. If you think that tonight was something, I can't wait until they couple. We felt the spill over from their bond tonight and it makes me wonder

what we'll feel when they mate and have babies," she said. Her eyes became unfocused as she thought about it, so she never noticed Draco wince.

## Haven, The Weasley Residence (October 4th)...

Arthur trudged down into the kitchen, feeling groggy. He'd had trouble getting to sleep last night, for several reasons. His visit with Melinda had left him unsettled. Ginny's visit to Melinda's had put a crimp in the rest of their evening. To say the two adults parted that night with a great deal of sexual tension and frustration would have been an understatement.

Then there was the gnawing knot of worry in his belly over what Ginny was going to do. The Weasleys were vicious at teasing and Ginny barging in when she did and finding them disheveled gave her enough blackmail material to have him owing her for years!

He grimaced. There was only one way to undercut a potential blackmailer. He didn't like it, but it was probably for the best, anyway.

He cringed before walking into to the kitchen. He could hear the sounds of laughter on the other side of the door, and he was certain Ginny's voice was among them. She didn't normally come over for breakfast, opting instead to spend most of her free time with her husband, as she should.

He pasted a smile onto his face, opened the door and greeted his family. The room was more crowded than usual, making him suspicious. The twins and their girlfriends sat at one side of the table, while Bill, Charlie, Ginny and Neville sat at the other.

Everyone turned to look at Arthur when he entered and the sound level dropped to nothing. He blinked in surprise, and noted that that twins, both sets, seemed to be trying very hard not to laugh. Bill and Charlie were looking at him questioningly, while Neville seemed a bit nervous. And Ginny! Ginny watched him, a smug look on her face.

Arthur took his place at the head of the table, while those in the room remained silent. He poured a cup of strong tea and took one sip before putting the cup back down and standing up.

"That's it! I won't let you hold this over my head for the next year or two, Ginny," he said loudly.

Everyone turned to stare at Arthur. Ginny looked surprised.

"Yes, you came to Melinda's house last night and, yes, our clothes were in disarray. But we're adults. If Melinda and I want to get... ummm... 'friendly', that should be our business and no one else's"

Fred and George blinked, then leaned against each other, giggling. Arthur shot them both an angry glare. The Johansen twins' eyes lit up at the possibility of gossip. Bill sipped his tea, watching and listening to his father attentively. Charlie's expression alternated between anger, shock and amusement.

"I mean, really, Ginny. As much as I don't like it, your Mum's gone. I'm an adult, with adult needs, those same needs as you and Neville are just discovering for yourselves..."

Neville choked on his drink, spraying tea from his nose and hitting Fred squarely in the face. That lit off George, Inga and Helga. George slid under the table, clutching his sides, while Fred glared at Neville, who was still coughing. Ginny was turning a wonderful shade of red, trying to contain her laughter.

"And just because my shirt was missing a few buttons and her skirt was practically on backwards is no reason to suddenly think we're doing something dirty. And then, even after she helps you, you run out of there like you're going to tell the entire world about it."

"Dad," Ginny began.

"And don't think I don't know..." Arthur interrupted.

"Dad," she tried again.

"... what's going on in here. You've told them already, haven't you? I could see it in your eyes, young lady!"

"Dad!"

"Well, I won't have it. I like Melinda, a lot. It wouldn't surprise me if it turned out to be something stronger. I intend to keep seeing her, no matter what pranks or blackmail..."

"DAD!"

"WHAT?"

Ginny leaned back in her chair and gave him a sweet smile. "I like Melinda, Dad. It's one of the reasons why I went to her last night. I trust her and think you and she would be good for each other. But I haven't told a soul. Not even Neville knew what I saw last night. Until you came in here and started yelling, that is."

Arthur sat heavily in his chair and looked at the grinning and laughing people around him. Three people were still under the table. Neville, having recovered from his coughing fit, was holding Ginny while she tried in vain to muffle the shrieks of her laughter against his chest.

"Oh, bugger!" Arthur muttered. The laughter around him doubled.

Charlie shook his head in disgust. "I'm surprised at you, Dad. Ginny might have held out for some small measure of blackmail, but you know she prefers more practical slapstick type pranks. Blackmail isn't her style. And in order to cut her off at the knees, you come in here and confess to your sordid affair! The only thing missing is the photographs!"

Arthur peered closely at Charlie. He knew his son still grieved for his mother and was uncomfortable with Melinda, but Charlie's grin let Arthur know he was only teasing him.

From under the table a hand appeared and waved. George, it seemed, liked the idea of photographs.

"I don't know, Dad. I wonder if it's time we gave you 'The Talk'?" Bill asked in a serious tone. The rest of the table broke down in peals of laughter and Arthur sunk his head into his hands.

"I'm never going to live this down. I can tell," he moaned.

Ginny got up from her seat and walked over to hug her father. "Perhaps you won't, Dad, but if it gets really bad, maybe you can ask Melinda if you can stay over there for a while," she said with a grin.

Arthur looked up and smiled weakly at his daughter. "That reminds me, honey. Melinda said you can go to her the next time you're injured during training," he said, thinking of Melinda's threat. When he saw Neville's eyes narrow and sweep her body for injuries, he thought that maybe Ginny hadn't told him about her training accident. His daughter's grimace confirmed it.

His quick mind set to plotting. Revenge was, after all, a very sweet thing, and it wasn't often he had one of his children in the cross hairs.

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### **Bucharest, Romania...**

Dumbledore pushed his way through the door and walked to the bar. Behind the counter, the nervous bartender watched him fearfully. The past two days had been terrorizing for him. First his bowels tied up in knots, then he broke out into cold sweats. He was barely able to perform his duties, he was so nervous. It had taken most of his money, and some considerable begging on his part, to convince Nickolai to come to his tavern today to meet the stranger.

Dumbledore smirked under the hood of his cloak and motioned for the bartender to approach. The man did so, though hesitantly. Dumbledore tossed another galleon on the counter and the bartender flinched back from it in terror.

"Fire whiskey."

The bartender poured the drink, then used the towel he held to push the coin back at Dumbledore.

"O-O-On t-t-the h-h-house," he stammered, then flinched again when Dumbledore giggled under his hood.

"Have you done what I asked?"

"N-N-Nickolai is in the last booth in the back," stammered the bartender again.

He glanced up at the mirror above the bar. He could see Nickolai sitting in the back booth. Around him were several of his men. Dumbledore had expected no less.

Albus smiled and laid a small vial filled with a black liquid on the counter. "The antidote," he said simply.

When he turned and walked to the back booth, the bartender scrambled for the small vial.

He walked up to the table and sat down.

Nickolai sat, reading a paper and sipping a cup of Turkish coffee. Without looking up from the paper he spoke. "Andre says you have some business with me, and yet I do not know you."

"Let's just say I am here because I know you have wizards for hire, and you stable only the very best," replied Dumbledore in a low voice.

"How do I know you don't work for the Aurors?"

Dumbledore pushed back his hood. He had not grown back his beard and his white hair was closely cropped. He looked little like his former self.

Nickolai peered at him for a moment. "You look familiar, but I don't think I would forget a purple eye patch like that."

"No, you wouldn't know me, especially as I am now. But several years ago you met with an associate of mine, a man named Remus Lupin. He wanted your help in making contact with the werewolf clans."

Nickolai's eyes widened and he searched Dumbledore's face again. "But you're... Al..."

Dumbledore raised his hand, his wand gripped tight. After casting several silencing charms, he tucked it away and smiled. "Now you know who I am and why I want our meeting kept secret."

Nickolai folded his paper carefully and laid it on the table. In response to the subtle signal, two of his men stood and moved to prevent anyone from

coming towards the back of the tavern. Another man cast a set of security and privacy charms.

"Impressive, Nikolai. Now, can we talk business?"

"Anything for the great Albus Dumbledore," Nikolai said with a slight bow from his seat.

"I have need of some men, say fifteen to twenty, who are good with a wand, will ask no questions, but will follow orders," Dumbledore said.

Nikolai raised an eyebrow. "It sounds like you are going to war, my friend."

When Dumbledore failed to respond, Nikolai's eyebrow raised even higher. "Very well. I can get you such men, but it will not be cheap. How long would you need them for?"

"A month at the minimum, but perhaps I can sweeten the deal for you. If you allow me time to train your men, then when I am done, they will be worth so much more."

Nikolai thought for a moment. Men trained by the great Albus Dumbledore would be formidable indeed, and they would carry a higher price than his usual thugs. Perhaps he could turn this to his advantage.

"And if I let you train more than just the men you need, say, in exchange for a discount?"

*Training Nikolai's men wouldn't really take up any extra time. I was planning on training the men I used anyway, but I could always add more to the training,* he thought.

"You'll provide a secure place for me to train your men?" Dumbledore asked, then he had to suppress a laugh.

Nikolai eyed him nervously for a moment, then nodded.

"Deal!" Dumbledore said.

"Excellent! Come, my friend, we will have some excellent Gisca pe varza and then we shall introduce you to your new students," Nikolai said in a loud voice.

Dumbledore smiled. In the back of his mind he was wondering if there might not be a way for him to 'borrow' all of Nikolai's men when the time came.

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## Padfoot Manor (Oct 10th)...

*"Hermione Jane, will you kindly feed your cat once in a while?"*

Hermione looked up from her notes, startled. *"Harry? What are you on about? And where are you?"*

*"I'm outside with Eocho, Dobby and some other elves. We were trying to test a newtuning method for the portals when your cat decided to eat my test subject!"* Harry sent. His mental tone sounded like a cross between amusement and irritation.

*"Honestly, Harry, he's half cat, half kneazle. It's his nature to catch mice."* she sent back, then she walked over to the large window and opened it to look out at him.

"So how did you solve the tuning problem? And did you fix your addressing issue so you could use names instead of numbers?" she called down to him. He grinned up at her.

Harry pointed to a small book that floated next to the pedestal. "It's simple. The name of the receiving portal has a number assigned to it. For example, Haven School might be forty three. But you don't need to know that, just know you want Haven School, which you tell the Pedestal by speaking the name.

"Haven Operations Center," Harry said firmly.

The small book flipped open and the pages started flipping until it found the right entry, then the control stick on the Pedestal moved on its own.

He grinned up at her and pointed at the book. "The book is the key. It's a copy of a master book and automatically updated. Right now, every destination I give it goes to that other portal, but that will change once I start making more."

"But will it allow for animate transport now?" she called down.

Harry frowned and looked at the portals. "I think so. It took the conjured mice with no problem. I was about to use a real mouse when Crookshanks decided he wanted a snack. Dobby is put out over it too. We don't have a lot of mice around the manor, thanks, I guess, to Crookshanks, and it took Dobby most of the morning to find and catch one mouse."

"And what about the safety features I suggested?" she asked.

"They're all installed. It's age protected, you can't transport to an unknown destination, you can't transport to a portal that is already in use and so on. There were a lot of conditions and it means a much larger rune base for the frame itself, but I can see why you'd want all those safety features

installed.”

“Hang on, Harry. I'll come down. I want to see this for myself,” she called from the window, then she vanished.

“I guess she doesn't trust me,” Harry murmured to Eocho with a grin.

“I suspect she wishes to be able to share your triumph personally, rather than yelling out a window like a fishwife,” Eocho commented.

He chuckled at the imagery Eocho provided.

Harry sat on a stool next to the table they had set up to lay out their notes. On one side of the table a pile of rune stones lay in a jumbled mix. Several decidedly muggle-looking wood working tools also lay on the table, along with a massive tome.

“Did the stone circles ever really provide transportation, Honored Teacher? That's something I've wondered about,” Harry asked.

Eocho looked thoughtful for a moment. “I have never heard of them used as such, Maglios, but some circles were said to be gateways to the heavens. Did they mean gateways like your portals? That I cannot say, for I have no knowledge of it. Even in my time many circles had been abandoned, their purposes long forgotten. I remember my master telling of circles for healing and for fertility. He spoke of circles with many purposes. The first circles weren't even made by our people, but by an earlier race, whose memory and history has been lost.”

Hermione came up to them while Eocho spoke and waited quietly. Eocho rarely spoke of his past or his time. He would speak of the Brotherhood and it's history, but of his own personal history, little was known.

Harry looked a little chagrined. “I had thought the portals were recreations of what the circles did,” he said, then he turned to look at the nearest portal frame.

“No, Maglios. The circles might have been used for transport at one time, but that knowledge is long lost. I do not think you have brought the past back to life. Instead you have invented something new,” the ancient shade said with no small amount of pride in his tone.

Harry turned and smiled at Hermione. She looked at huge tome and arched an eyebrow at him.

“That's the master list of portal frames. Add a new frame to the master list and it will appear in every local book within it's range,” he told her softly.

“What's the range to the master book?” she asked.

He shrugged. “Right now there's no limit, but that isn't practical. We'll have to impose a limit of some kind, probably by region, like a muggle telephone book. But I couldn't set that up until we figure out what we're doing with the Goblins.”

Hermione nodded while she examined the upgraded portal. She had been talking with Remus about what they'd need to make these on a large scale. The project was daunting, to say the least.

Crookshanks wandered around the side of the Manor and, spotting Hermione, he ran over to weave between her legs. She reached down and picked him up, scratching his head.

“You can't set a frame to a destination that doesn't exist, Hermione. You'll note that this pedestal still has the manual tuner. That's because this is the more advanced control pedestal. The consumer pedestal will most likely look like a stand with the address book on it,” Harry explained, then he conjured a mouse and walked over to the pedestal.

“Diagon Alley,” he said in a loud voice. The book next to the pedestal flipped open and pages started to flip crazily, then it stopped and the portal frame filled with the bubbling fluid.

Harry walked over to stand near the frame and he flipped the mouse through the portal. Crookshanks, spotting the mouse, leaped from Hermione's arms.

“CROOKSHANKS!” she screamed.

Harry lunged, catching the cat by his hind quarter, but it was too late. His front paws had already touched the frame fluid.

Hermione watched in horror as Harry and Crookshanks seemed to stretch, and then vanish with a sucking sound.

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### Author's Notes:

YES! It's showtime! Hello my darling, hello my baby, hello my ragtime gal... urk... enough of that.

This is the dreaded authors notes. Our guest author couldn't be here tonight, so you'll have to make do with just little old Bob and Alyx.

To all those stargate nuts out there, no we are not patterning Harry's portals after stargate.

Other magical races? Let's see, we've had goblins come to dinner. Angels being born. Hordes of house elves... What more can you ask for?

The fidelius charm was dropped on the manor house. Harry just neglected to tell us about it. We've punished him severely for that oversight and he promises he won't do it again. If he does, we've threatened to put him into a gay Veela Draco fiction for our next story.



Steve, yes we will be revisiting Hogwarts and Peeves for a quick look this chapter. I'm surprised at the page counts, but then our files are bigger in Sunrise, than they were in Sunset.

Oh yeah, to the person offering to marry me. Ummm Can you send a resume? Perhaps some explicit photos as well? I know I'm married, but perhaps I can use them to motivate Alyx. No I didn't say that. Ignore that. Crap I'm doomed.

Amanda, we love your questions. We like questions, it shows we're making our readers consider the possibilities. Questions and more questions!

Yes great battles are coming... to Britain and Ireland.

Katherine Summers, Harry's Birthday? First off, we're tripping into October here and he got married the day after his birthday. You don't top that sort of present.

Yeah we admit that Draco/Luna is a unique pairing. And I have to tell you now, Draco likes it, but is convinced she's certifiable. Wait til you see what she does to him next chapter.

A Dubog is a log like creature found in swamps. You can find more information about it at the Harry Potter Lexicon Bestiary.

Musings, Alyx is most upset with you. She really wanted her own stalker and she was most disappointed when she discovered you gave up stalking her. If you'd like, I'll save you the trouble of stalking her and fedex her to you.

I'm sorry, but fish on my pizza is just so wrong. Maybe it's right for you, but I'll pass.

Darkangel, while Harry is indeed Lord of House Black and House Potter, no where in this fic or in Sunset did we say he's the heirs of the founders. Harry's involvement with the Wizengamot is entirely involuntary. He'd rather ignore Amhar and worry about the war.

Again, we will repeat, we are not responsible if you get grounded for reading our story. Or you lose your job, your husband, your kids or your cat. Fan fiction is addicting, but it shouldn't... oh heck, tell your parents to buzz off, you have another chapter of Sunrise to read! Just don't blame us.

*Bobmin*  
*FanficAuthors.net*

# Sunrise Over Britain

## Chapter 17 - Trick or Treat

### Standard Disclaimer:

"Why are you crying?" asked Alyx in confusion.

"Snape. We can't get him for our disclaimers anymore. He had a lawyer write us!" wailed Bob brokenheartedly.

"So use someone else," snapped Alyx, annoyed that Bob was interrupting Judge Judy for this trivial junk. She thought Bird was quite a hunk.

Bob's head snapped up. "Can I?" he asked hopefully.

"Of course!" she snapped again, then went back to watching her show.

The curtain pulled back revealing Fred and George tied to a spit over an open flame. Amy was slowly turning the spit.

"This isn't good," muttered Fred.

"Maybe we shouldn't have sent Bob that phony lawyer letter," replied George, wincing as the hot coals came closer again.

Amy stepped up to poke both of them and she frowned. Neither were cooked yet. She didn't notice when the back of her skirt had caught on fire.

"Distract her," hissed George.

"Oh... Right... The Authors of this story wish to make sure you know they make no claims to anything in the Potterverse. Harry Potter and associated characters are the property of J.K. Rowling exclusively," Fred said proudly.

Amy, discovering she was on fire, shrieked and ran off the stage waving her arms wildly.

"Well, that worked," George said smugly.

Fred eyed the fire below. "Um... we're still above the fire, brother."

"Oh, bugger!"

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### Sunrise Over Britain

#### Chapter 17

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#### Aviemore, Scotland (October 10th)...

Colonel McHardy watched the current operation with satisfaction. The sky was overcast, with a cloud cover descending down to about one thousand feet. The rain had ended earlier in the morning and now the sky was just right for a covert insertion.

His men had completed a sweep of the field, making sure it was clear of major obstructions. Now, he could hear the drone of the C130 Hercules making its final approach. High above, he could hear the sound of a fighter escort. The Hercules opened its rear doors and prepared for a LAPES, or Low Altitude Parachute Extraction System. The plane was barely ten feet above the field when the parachutes deployed, pulling the cargo laden pallet out of the back of the plane.

The pallet hit the ground and slid a bit. The parachutes helped to slow it down before it finally came to a stop. McHardy could have sworn he saw the pilot wave before the engines roared to full power and the behemoth pulled up and away.

McHardy's men ran out to the pallet. Several were pulling wagons, which they would use to carry the materiel. He looked up as an American F18/E screamed over the field at high speed, followed by a pair of RAF Tornado's. In the distance, he could make out the profile of a second C130 turning in for its approach to the field. The second plane carried an even more important cargo.

The plane leveled out below one thousand feet and again the cargo doors opened, only this time dozens of men spilled out of the back of the aircraft and immediately deployed their parasails. The first of the promised reinforcements, a contingent of sixty royal marines, had arrived!

Parachute operations were a tricky business, and people rarely land close to each other. However, the low altitude of the jump, in combination with the use of the highly maneuverable parasails, made it possible for everyone to land in the same field.

McHardy stood at the edge of the field, watching as his men continued to load the wagons. Movement caught his eye as one of his men led a parachutist towards his position.

"Colonel McHardy?" asked the parachutist.

McHardy nodded. The man stiffened to attention, then saluted. "Sir, Lieutenant Hanover, 3rd Commando. My men and I are to be under your command, sir. I bring dispatches and orders from command."

"Excellent, Hanover. Have your men assist mine in unloading that cargo. When done, we'll need to pull those wagons about three kilometers to a road where we've commandeered several lorries. Unfortunately, they lacked the ability to drive over this rough terrain, so we were forced to use the wagons and old fashioned man power. Tell me, do you have a medic or a surgeon with your team?"

"Both, sir."

McHardy closed his eyes in silent prayer for a moment. "Very good. You have your orders, Hanover. I want to get out of this field and back to our base before nightfall."

"Very good, sir," Hanover said, then he turned and sprinted towards a group of his men, shouting out orders.

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## **Parliament Building, London...**

Lucius looked up from the report he was reading when the door to his office opened.

"My lord, General Worthington is here, requesting an audience with you," said the Death Eater.

Lucius frowned. He reminded himself to renew the *Imperio* us curse on the good General. The curse was obviously weakening if the man was requesting an audience. Fortunately, the General wouldn't recognize him even if he did break free.

"Send him in," Lucius replied curtly.

The Death Eater bobbed his head and opened the door wider.

A moment later, a tall, distinguished looking gentleman entered. He wore the battlefield uniform of a general in the British Army.

The man walked crisply to stand in front of Lucius' desk, where he snapped off a salute.

"Well, General? You asked for this audience. What is it you need this time?" asked Lucius.

"My lord, in the past week we've become concerned about some events happening up in Scotland." The General paused, waiting for permission to continue.

Lucius sighed and motioned for the man to get on with it.

"As you may know, Northern Scotland, particularly around Inverness, was one of the last areas in the country to be pacified to our Lord's regime. I have always been concerned that some units loyal to the illegal monarchy might have survived by slipping into the rugged mountains of that region and hiding out. Our intelligence reports that insurgent groups are moving north, as if planning to meet up with some force in or around Inverness.

"We've picked up some radio signals that may be a coming from a satellite radio, but we haven't been able to pin anything down as yet..."

"Yes, yes. You have suspicions and whisperings. What do you want from me, General? Inverness is a long way from here and Lord Voldemort has cut my supply of 'helpers' by half. So I ask, what do you want me to do about it?" Lucius snapped.

Worthington gulped audibly, then pushed on. "My Lord, what I would like is your permission to send a detachment up north. Nothing major, you understand. Maybe the First Mechanized Brigade from Third Division."

Lucius frowned. Over the past months he had come to realize that these muggle forces consumed vast quantities of materiel when they were in the field. Moving a mechanized brigade would use up a lot of petrol. Although they could forage for what they needed once they left the London area.

He stood then and walked over to the window and looked out. In the distance, he could see columns of smoke rising into the sky, but that was really no surprise. There were always fire in London these days. With no fire services, they were usually allowed to burn themselves out. If the fire was too dangerous, the army would sometimes demolish the surrounding buildings to prevent it from spreading.

"Very well, General. I will allow this troop movement, but I cannot spare any of my men to help. Lord Voldemort has pulled in a number of them for additional training, and the rest are maintaining guard at the camps," Lucius said heavily, then he turned to look at Worthington.

"Mind you, General, I expect results! If there are rebels hiding out, I expect them to be caught and executed!" he said with a snarl.

"We'll get them for you, Sir," Worthington said, then he saluted before turning and walking from the office.

Lucius returned to his desk and sat down heavily. He glanced at the message from Hogwarts. His manpower problem didn't come from Lord Voldemort, but from Mulciber. He was sure of it. Mulciber had systematically stripped him of his Wizarding forces. He was even forced to employ muggle volunteers at one of the Wizarding camps.

He wadded up the parchment and threw it into the fireplace with a snarl. It was yet another, politely phrased request for more of his wizards. He couldn't allow this to continue. He'd have to go to Voldemort and complain.

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## **Padfoot Manor...**

Hermione gasped in horror as first Crookshanks, and then Harry, fell into the portal and vanished. Eocho echoed her gasp. She stood transfixed for a moment, then she ran as fast as she could to the other portal in the distance. That portal still contained the silvery liquid, so she couldn't tell if anything had arrived yet.

As she skidded to a halt in front of the portal, the liquid drained away and there was Harry, sitting on the ground, holding Crookshanks in his arms. Crookshanks looked very put out with Harry as the conjured mouse scurried away.

Eocho glided over to hover near Hermione as she stood staring at Harry.

"Crookshanks? I go through the portal and all you can do is think about your cat?" Harry asked, his expression incredulous. Then his eyes widened suddenly. "HEY! The portals worked!"

"Are you sure you're alright? Nothing wrong?" she asked, feeling faint.

Harry released Crookshanks, who looked at him over his shoulder before wandering away, content in the knowledge that cats were truly the superior species. Harry grinned at the cat, then he started to pat himself down. With a shrug, he looked up at Hermione.

"Well, I seem to be all here and in one piece. Two eyes, two ears, ten fingers, twelve toes," he said with a grin.

Hermione's legs gave out and she fell to the ground with a thump, still staring at him. Then they both heard a sound that was only rarely heard around the manor. Eocho was laughing.

Harry grinned at his teacher and stood up, brushing the dirt off the back of his pants. Then he glanced over towards the rose bushes where he could see a ginger colored tail whipping as Crookshanks stalked an interesting bug.

"You know," he said speculatively, "I wonder if Dobby knows a recipe for cat. I had planned on testing the portals with all sorts of animals before I got around to going through myself."

Hermione stood up and glared at him. "Don't you hurt Crookshanks. He's mine. Next time you want to experiment, use Hedwig. Assuming, of course, that she'll let you near her. You've neglected her horribly."

"I have not! She joins me on my morning walks, sometimes. She's enjoying her freedom here in Haven."

Hermione snorted in disbelief.

Harry pointed a finger at her, ready to continue the argument, when Eocho broke in.

"Enough! While the Maglios' trip was unforeseen, it was fortuitous. The Portals have been proven to work, and now we can plan to use them in our efforts. Let us return to the main portal and the table where we can consider our next steps," he said, then he turned and glided in that direction at a stately pace.

Harry looked sheepishly at Hermione, and they both turned to follow Eocho.

"*Don't you touch my cat,*" she sent him.

"*I'm not going to hurt him, Hermione. I'll just shave him.*" he sent back, along with a mental image that had her shuddering.

"*Do that and I'll shave you!*" she growled back at him mentally.

Harry smirked evilly and sent her back an image of the both of them in the tub, lots of bubbles and some very personal shaving. She shivered, then glared at him when she realized she was becoming aroused.

"*You know that wasn't what I had in mind!*" she sent, protesting.

"*Yeah, but now you're intrigued... Right?*"

"*I refuse to answer that,*" she grumbled.

Harry laughed out loud, causing Eocho glanced back at them knowingly.

Hermione sighed. It had become just one more thing she loved about her husband. He could tease her and toss out ideas that she'd reject from anyone else, but somehow, from him, they sounded reasonable.

"Harry?"

"Yes?"

"What was it like? Traveling through the portal, I mean?" she asked quietly.

Eocho, hearing the question, stopped to watch them.

"You know that the portals are supposed to be spatially linked so that there is zero distance between the two?" he asked.

Both nodded at him.

"Well, I don't think we were right about that idea. The problem is, Arithmatically, we were right, but only because Arithmancy can't take the concept far enough. This reminds me of something I read in a book about physics back around the Christmas holidays. Let me see if I can explain.

"The two portals link in such a manner that they overlap in space. But that isn't really what they're doing. It's impossible for two objects to occupy the same space at the same time. The muggles have known that for years. So what happens is there's a distance between the two portals, only it's a negative distance."

Eocho looked at him in confusion and Hermione took a step back and looked at him in awe. His idea bordered on the metaphysical and sounded like something she had read in her father's New Scientist Magazine.

Harry waved a hand dismissively. "Yes, I know it sounds crazy. Totally insane, actually. But it's the only thing that makes sense. It even corresponds to something the muggles know about already. They call them irrational numbers. I don't quite understand that myself. I'll have to find the right books. Anyway, getting back to your original question, the portals should be like stepping from one point to another, but it's not. Not even close.

"Stepping into a portal... alters your perceptions. It's like being in a long tunnel where someone has painted the entire universe on the walls. Until you are completely free of the entry portal, time seems to slow down and you see the beauty of the universe in all it's glory. It's breathtaking, and a little scary. Then suddenly you're free of the entry portal and you shoot across the universe in less time than it takes to blink your eye. Entering the exit portal, things slow down again until you're out."

He paused for a moment, thinking hard. "It's kind of a let down, if you think about it. For a brief moment you are given a view that has probably been seen only by the Gods. And then you're forced back into regular existence. It's both exhilarating and humbling."

He trailed off and his eyes seemed to focus on a distant point. Then he reached over and gently put one arm around Hermione's waist, hugging her.

She looked up at him uncertainly. "Will everyone have this reaction every time they pass through a portal?"

"I don't think so, my heart. Remember the joy we first felt when we learned to apparate? The novelty will wear off soon enough. But I see what you are saying. We should make sure everyone has gone through at least once before using it for troop movements."

He smiled at her impishly, then he looked up towards the other portal where several people were now standing. Eocho moved towards the others and Harry and Hermione hurried to catch up.

Remus, Tonks and the Grangers looked anxiously at Harry and Hermione as they approached. Harry was whispering something in her ear and she was blushing terribly.

"Harry? Hermione? I heard you shouting. What's wrong?" asked Remus worriedly.

Harry held up a hand. "It's nothing to worry about now, Remus. Thanks to Crookshanks, we now know that the portals are fully operational and capable of transporting living objects, including people."

"Crookshanks? I always thought that ball of fluff was a walking menace," Dan quipped. Emma smacked her husband upside his head.

"Leave Crookshanks alone, Daniel Marion Granger! He is a beautiful, majestic cat," she said sternly.

Hermione looked smugly at Harry, while he and Remus shared an amused glance over finally learning Dan's middle name.

"Marion?" Remus exclaimed turning to stare at Dan.

Dan walked away, muttering under his breath and refusing to reply.

Meanwhile, Crookshanks watched the silly humans with disdain from his shady spot under the bush and wondered when his human would be available for another head scratch.

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## Haven...

Morgan Lachlan opened the door to his shop. He was proud of it. Headlines and Beans was his pride and joy, something he had been trying to do for many a year, but could never afford. That was, until he heard about Haven and the favorable loans that Gringotts was offering anyone wishing to start a business in town.

Ironically, Morgan wasn't British, but Irish, and a squib to boot. He'd moved his family to Haven when he'd heard it was a town that not only tolerated muggles, but actively welcomed them. His shop was a perfect example of that. He offered coffee and pastries from mid morning until nearly dinner time. Along with the coffee and pastries, his patrons had their choice of nearly a dozen Wizarding newspapers and over thirty muggle newspapers.

The American Aurors, in particular, seemed to enjoy reading what was going on back home. His offerings included the Washington Post, the Chicago Tribune and the New York Times, as well as papers like the News Witch, the San Diego Summoner and the New England Journal of Potions and Herbology.

After he finished putting out the tables and chairs in front of the shop in the charmed, heated area, he returned to his spot behind the counter, where he began serving coffee. Business was so good he was able to hire a few kids to help out and still pay them a reasonable wage.

Morgan placed several orders on a tray and took it outside to a table of waiting customers. Placing the coffee on the table, he then distributed the

newspapers.

"Hey, someone hand me that Daily News. I want to check the Yankee scores," one of the Aurors at the table said loudly.

Morgan chuckled and flipped the tray under his arm with a practiced move. He turned to head back into Headlines and Beans when he felt a heavy blow to the center of his back and he was violently flung forward, through the plate glass window of his business.

The Aurors at the table reacted instinctively. In seconds their table was flipped on its side and they were huddled behind it, looking for targets. One of them, a field healer, crawled on his belly to the open door to get to Morgan.

Around the town square, numerous Aurors had heard the spell and seen the damage it wreaked, but no one had seen where it had come from. Everywhere people were crouching down, looking around warily.

Finally one senior Auror stood up from behind a table he was crouched behind. "Aurors, secure the square. Someone get the constables!" he shouted.

There was a moment of further silence, then everyone sprang into action.

"I need a field medical kit!" the healer shouted from within the store.

Several people rushed to him, offering their own field kits.

Michael O'Dalley ran out of the Ministry building, followed by several of his constables. Everyone was on edge, fingering their wands and jumping at the slightest noise.

Order was restored, though slowly. Morgan was rushed to Haven Hospital, while the constables pushed everyone out of the store, preserving the scene. O'Dalley arranged for the Irish to send a team of investigative Aurors to survey the scene.

Several hours later, O'Dalley collapsed in his chair. A respected member of the town had been seriously wounded and the Healers were still refusing to say if he'd pull through. The Irish investigators managed to locate where the spell had come from. They'd even found a cheap, broken wand at the scene. They'd bagged up the wand and took it back to their headquarters in the hopes of obtaining a trace on the user's core, but that was a long-shot on a broken wand.

O'Dalley wiped his face tiredly. There was no motive in the attack that he could see. Morgan Lachlan was popular, outgoing, and fit in wonderfully as a member of the community. One of the Irish Aurors suggested that this might be a hate crime, an anti-muggle crime. O'Dalley didn't want to commit to that idea, but he knew it was a valid point. To make matters worse, he'd have to bring the incident to Amelia's attention. It was the first serious, violent crime in Haven.

And if the itch between his shoulder blades was anything to go by, it wouldn't be the last.

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### **Haven, Wizengamot Building, Grand Opening (October 11th)...**

Harry stepped into the lobby of the new Wizengamot building with Neville at his side. Normally, Constance would have appeared in his place, but over the summer she had decided her grandson was adult enough to assume his role as he should.

Harry tugged nervously at his tight collar and wished he was someplace, anyplace, else. He glanced over at Neville and saw he was nearly as nervous as Harry was.

"Councilor Potter! Councilor Longbottom!"

Harry turned and saw Agatha Umbridge hurrying towards them, her purple robe billowing out behind her.

"I'm so glad you were able to make it. We were afraid that military operations might keep you from attending the opening session," Agatha said in a rush.

Harry smiled at the woman, then he turned to his companion. "Neville, I'd like you to meet Councilor Agatha Umbridge, the younger sister of our former defense teacher. Councilor Umbridge is one of the Minister's strongest supporters and has volunteered her time and expertise to help the Ministry rebuild the Department of Mysteries. Councilor Umbridge, Neville Longbottom, expert Herbologist and one of our unit commanders."

Neville's eyes had widened for a moment, but Harry's introduction put him at ease enough to shake Councilor Umbridge's hand.

Umbridge smiled at his introduction, then led the two men deeper into the building. "I realize that neither of you will be spending a lot of time here, but you both have offices in the building, and a staff consisting of a secretary and legal research assistant."

Neville and Harry exchanged a glance.

"I don't really think we'll be using the offices or people much, Councilor Umbridge," Neville offered tentatively.

Umbridge waved a hand. "I know, I know. But everyone has the same size staff and the same size office. It's a way of reminding the Councilors that we are all equal in the Wizengamot. As to today's opening meeting, I, for one, do not expect much to happen. We are an incomplete body and lack the necessary number of votes for us to do much in the way of legislation."

Harry and Neville nodded, following the Councilor as she led them into a large chamber. Around the walls were boxes for Councilors to sit in. There was a large open arena in the center of the room, along with a dais and podium from which someone could stand and give a speech.

Slowly the boxes filled up and Harry noticed an interesting pattern. He sat with Neville and a number of the Councilors along one wall. Amhar Coeur de Lion sat along the opposite wall with nearly an equal number of Councilors. And along a third wall were another group. The seating arrangements puzzled him.

He turned when he felt a tap on his shoulder. Neville leaned closer to him. "Notice the way we're sitting? I'm sure it has to do with who supports the Ministry and who doesn't."

He nodded and leaned back on his chair. His gaze caught Amhar's and the man stared at him with an icy hatred. Harry raised an eyebrow and smiled coolly in return.

"My lords! Please, can I have your attention..."

Harry's gaze turned back to the center of the room where Amelia stood waiting for everyone to calm down.

"Thank you. Not since the great Wizarding plague of twelve oh two has the Wizengamot been convened with so few members. There are few rules from that time to guide us, but we shall use the few rules that do exist. As Minister, it therefore falls upon my shoulders to bear the burden of acting as presiding Chief Warlock, since we have no current Chief Warlock..."

"I protest!" shouted Councilor Gripse.

Amelia turned to face Gripse and she adjusted her monocle. "You had a comment, Councilor Gripse?" she asked coldly.

Gripse hurried from his box and down to the center arena, where he stopped in front of the podium.

"Madam Minister, revered Councilors, while it is true we are barely a shadow of our former glory, we do still have a Chief Warlock, one who is much venerated by this august body and has brought us much noteworthy attention on the world stage. I speak, of course, of Albus Dumbledore, Headmaster of Hogwarts and the Supreme Mugwump of the International Confederation of Wizards."

Harry and Neville scowled.

"Councilor," said Amelia, "I am certain by now you are aware of the criminal charges pending against Albus Dumbledore. The man is a wanted fugitive. And not just by the British, but by the Irish..."

"Yes, yes. I know all that," Gripse said, cutting her off. "The simple fact is, Albus Dumbledore has not been tried, and not been found guilty. As that is the case, we have no grounds to remove him from his position."

Harry frowned and started to stand, but Neville held him back. He glanced at Neville, who shook his head and smiled before standing himself.

Amelia glanced up at Neville, surprised that he wished to add to the debate. She nodded to Neville who made no move to go down to the podium.

"Madam Minister, what our esteemed Councilor Gripse says is, regrettably, true. However, given the Chief Warlock's prolonged absence from this body and his doubtful return, as he knows he will be arrested if he does, might I move that we declare him in absentia. As per the rules of seventeen fifty two, we do have that right and do not require a quorum to do so. Such a declaration would require a mere majority vote, and it would clear the way for allowing you to act as Presiding Chief Warlock until a new one can be elected," Neville said. Then he sat, looking smug.

Gripse, still down on the floor, frowned up at Neville. Amelia blinked in surprise and fought to keep the grin off her face.

"I have a motion to declare Albus Dumbledore, Chief Warlock of this body to be in absentia. Do I hear a second?" Amelia called.

Harry felt Neville kick his shin and he jumped to his feet.

"Councilor Potter-Black? Do you second the motion?" called Amelia.

Harry glanced at Neville who nodded at him. "Erm. Yes, I do. Second the motion, that is," he replied haltingly, then he sat back down and looked at Neville. He was going to have a lot of explaining to do.

Amelia nodded satisfactorily. "All in favor of Councilor Longbottom's motion?"

Harry raised his staff, silently casting the voting charm. Down on the arena floor a pair of numbers tallied the votes.

Amelia watched the votes for a moment before turning back to the Wizengamot. "By a vote of twenty three to sixteen, the motion carries. I will act as Presiding Chief Warlock until a full quorum can be convened on the matter, or until Albus Dumbledore has satisfied his legal issues with us and the other Governments wishing to... speak to him."

Councilor Gripse scowled and moved sulkily back to his seat, upset over this slap against the Leader of the Light.

"Now, moving on..." Amelia stopped and looked up at Neville when he stood and walked down the stairs to the arena.

"Madam Minister, if I may?" he asked, approaching the podium.

"I yield the floor to Councilor Longbottom," Amelia said, taking her seat and looking at him curiously.



Harry leaned forward on his chair, watching carefully. He had no idea what Neville was up to.

“Honored Councilors, in the months since the Wizengamot last presided, there has been a considerable upheaval. Our country lies under the cruel yoke of tyranny and injustice and we, we few, have been thrown up on this distant shore, struggling to keep the ideals of our nation alive. Now we, as a governing body, can sit here day after day and examine the changes imposed by the Ministry, or we can approve them as they currently stand and move forward. I move that we simply approve them so that we can get onto to more important tasks.”

“I second,” called Harry from his seat.

Amelia looked around, then spotted Amhar Coeur de Lion standing. “Councilor, do you have a comment?”

Coeur de Lion was frowning heavily and he leaned hard against the front of his box. He had to derail this motion some how.

“Madam Minister, Councilor Longbottom makes an excellent suggestion, but one which is most impractical. There have been numerous changes that cannot simply be swept under the rug. The purpose of the Wizengamot has always been as an overseer of the Ministry, to insure that body does not overstep it's limits. As much as I respect my colleague I cannot, in good conscience, support such a measure. For all we know, the Ministry could have enacted laws which curtail our powers,” Amhar said, then he sat down smugly.

A number of the members looked uncertain after Amhar's comments.

Harry stood up. This was something he hated, but he couldn't sit back and do nothing.

“Councilor Potter-Black, do you wish to speak?” called Amelia.

Harry nodded. “I support Councilor Longbottom's motion. The only purpose this Ministry has had since it formed has been to take the war back to Voldemort. It has made no laws, passed no edicts or issued new regulations that have not been in support of that task. Any attempts to overturn that can hurt the war effort.” With a nod to Amelia, he sat back down.

One of the women sitting near Coeur de Lion stood. Harry recognized her as Maisie Littleton, a pure blood who had refused to follow the Dark Lord because he was a half blood. The Littleton's were at the cutting edge of the racist front, but the family was not known for being dark wizards.

Initially, Harry had been surprised to discover so many pure blood racists among those rescued from Azkaban. However, Amelia had explained that in the last year, the facts of Voldemort's ancestry had come to light and was privately circulated among the Wizengamot membership, many of whom rejected him because of his half blood status.

“Councilor Littleton, do you wish to say something?” asked Amelia.

“I do, Madam Minister. I suggest we either defer Councilor Longbottom's motion, or send it to a subcommittee for further exploration.”

Amelia eyed Littleton hard for a moment before turning back to Neville, who still had the podium.

“Councilor Longbottom?”

Neville looked up at Littleton, his eyes narrowed in speculation. Littleton smiled natively down at him. Then Neville turned to face Amelia.

“Madam Minister, I amend my initial motion to send the idea to subcommittee.”

Amelia blinked in surprise then nodded. “Very well, then. We have a motion to send the review of the Ministry's actions to subcommittee. Since this is an amended motion, does anyone second it?”

Harry sat still in his box trying to figure out why Neville changed the motion, while another Councilor stood and seconded it.

After a vote of twenty to nineteen in favor of sending the issue to subcommittee, the Wizengamot broke up for an early lunch before meeting again to determine who would be on the committee.

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### **Padfoot Manor, Later that afternoon...**

“Are you sure you don't want some, Harry?” Neville offered. He was holding a glass of fire whiskey.

Harry shook his head reluctantly and waited.

A moment later, Dobby appeared with a glass of fruit juice blend he'd invented. He beamed with pleasure, knowing how much Harry enjoyed the drink.

“I'd like to Neville, but...”

“Say no more. I wouldn't dream of entering one of our greenhouses after drinking this stuff,” Neville proclaimed quietly.

Harry rubbed his temples and sighed. He and Neville had spent the better part of the last four hours listening to people bicker over who should be on the damned committee. As far as Harry was concerned, the only thing the day had produced was a headache the size of Wales.

Neville, why did you amend your motion after Littleton spoke?" he asked.

Neville leaned forward on his chair, both hands wrapped around his glass. "It was a gamble, Harry. If the Wizengamot had approved everything the Ministry had done since late April, it would have created a precedent. That didn't happen, of course. To be frank, I didn't think I'd be so lucky. Anyway, Littleton had something up her sleeve. I don't know what it was, but if I hadn't moved the motion to a committee, she probably would have used it.

"The idea is simple, really. The Ministry has operated without an oversight body for months. Now that the oversight body is rebuilding itself, it's trying to re-establish its old level of control. If we left it to the general assembly, we would be seeing months of testimonies and possibly a few trials. By doing it in committee, we short circuit the general assembly and they will only know what the committee discovers if they read the final report, which almost never happens."

Harry shook his head. "This is too much for me, Nev. I don't know how I'm supposed to understand this stuff. What's worse is that I find myself resenting the time it consumes from my schedule. I don't know how you managed it, mate, but you impressed the hell out of me today."

Neville sat up a little straighter. He looked pleased, though he tried to shrug it off. "Mostly it's from Gran. She drummed this stuff into my head for years. She told me often enough that it would soon be my time to sit and represent our family."

Harry raised his glass in salute. "You did more than that today, mate. You represented all of us. And you did a bloody marvelous job of it, too."

Neville blushed and said nothing.

"So, how's Ginny taking her training?"

Neville frowned. "She got injured a few days back. She wouldn't tell me much about it except to say it was a girl problem. I don't like her getting hurt."

Harry's expression darkened. "I know. Hermione's brought home more than a few bruises. But what can we do? I tried to keep them out of the fighting and they all rebelled over it. They are out of PT and in unarmed combat now. You know what risks they run there. Hermione has no idea I broke four bones in training and I'll bet you a galleon that Ginny doesn't know about the eight you broke."

Neville looked around quickly to make sure they weren't being overheard. "Merlin, no! And I'm not about to tell her. I love her to death, Harry, but that girl has a wicked temper and she doesn't need a wand!"

Harry chuckled and shook his head. "You had to fall in love with a red head, didn't you? Even I wasn't that crazy. Mind you, Hermione can be downright scary at times."

Neville grinned. Both knew they wouldn't change a thing about their wives, even if they could.

Harry stood and stretched. "Well, time to get back to work. The girls aren't due back for another hour and I promised the twins I would visit them. Maybe I'll pickup a headache potion on the way out."

Neville waved and Harry nodded in reply before apparating to the kitchen to raid the potion pantry. Finding the potion he needed, he downed it quickly and apparated to the Operations Center.

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### **Padfoot Manor, Remus' office...**

Remus looked over the package that Hermione had put together and shook his head in admiration. In building Haven, he had contracted a magical construction company and given them a rough outline of what they needed. The construction company provided the architect and cleaned up Remus' outline, turning it into something more suitable.

Now he was looking at what would amount to a factory for Harry's portals. Hermione had outlined what the factory would require - foundries, stone carving rooms, ample supply of local stone and water, storage, wood carving rooms, offices and so on. He shook his head and marveled that she could organize it as well as she'd done.

This was a job beyond the ability of the house elves, who were capable of putting up housing and even adding on wings to the Hospital. The factory would require specialized skills not found in a house elf. Why, the foundries alone would take several enchanters and people specialized in transfiguration to install and get working.

He leafed through several more pages of the package and sighed. He'd need to talk to an industrial architect first. Hermione might be good at making lists and organizing, but she hadn't a clue about building a factory.

He grabbed a piece of parchment and quickly wrote a note. They required experts and he'd need to talk to them before going any further.

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### **Q Branch, Haven Operations Center...**

"Oy! Harry, mate! Come give us a hand, eh?" shouted Fred.

Harry blinked in shock and stared at the two Weasley twins, both of whom were locked in small cages barely five feet tall.

"What in the name of Merlin?" Harry exclaimed.

"Harry mate, old chum, our favorite investor. Be a pal and unlock these things for us?" pleaded George.

When the cages began to buzz menacingly, both men paled. A gout of flame three feet long and a putrid smell emanated from the rear of each red head. Both managed to look suitably embarrassed before whimpering from the burning sensation.

Harry took a step back and noticed that the Johansen twins were standing up in a corner, petrified. Literally. He scowled and flicked his wrist, instantly extracting his staff. He waved it towards the Johansen's, freeing them.

He walked to the two girls, looking at them anxiously. "Are you two alright?"

"OY! No chatting up our girls, Potter!" shouted one of the Weasleys.

"Right! You're a married bloke! Leave the free birds to us!" yelled the other.

"I think we're fine, Mr. Potter," Inga said with a hint of a blush.

"It's just Harry. I get enough of the formalities elsewhere," he replied with a lopsided grin.

"Oh, I'm going to kill you Potter!" growled Fred.

Harry threw him a grin, then turned back to Inga. "Do you have a camera?" he asked in a whisper.

Inga's eyes sparkled and she ran to a cabinet in the corner. "Movie, magical or still?" she called.

"Magical will do," Harry replied.

Both Weasley men looked at each other and groaned. This was blackmail material of unparalleled value.

Harry took the camera from Inga and proceeded to get a number of photos, including several spectacular eruptions, before he gave it back to Inga with instructions to send the film off for processing right away. Towards the end, the twins had taken to mugging for the camera, playing up their role as rocket propelled prisoners.

With the film on it's way out of the building, Harry released the two Weasley men and conjured chairs for everyone to sit on.

Fred and George eyed Harry and the chairs warily, but sat anyway.

"Alright boys, you asked me to come down here. I certainly didn't expect was to find you two locked up. Although, I must admit, the idea has appealed to me from time to time," Harry said.

"Really, Harry, that wasn't our idea. Our lab assistant, Amy, asked us to try out these new interrogation cages she was working on. Next thing we know, we're locked in and she's petrified the girls. Then she walked out, claiming she deserved a day or two off from working with lunatics like us," Fred explained.

"Can you imagine? Calling us lunatics?" asked George

"Unbelievable, really," replied Fred.

"So, anyway, Amy walked off, never noticing she's wearing one of our lab coats," George said seriously.

"Nasty piece of business, those coats," Fred commented.

"Quite. We charmed them to constrict anyone removing one from the lab," George said proudly.

"Right. The further she gets from the office, the worse it gets," added Fred.

"She can't take it off either," George threw in as an afterthought.

Fred turned to George. "Did we mention it also dissolves all clothing under the coat?"

"I don't think so," replied George. "But I doubt Harry's interested in that."

"Boys," chided Inga. "I don't think Mr. Potter wants to know all the details."

"True. He wouldn't be interested in the exploding dye pack sewn into the lining of the coat," Helga added.

"Or the container of fire ants that will break open once the coat constricts," Inga added, her eyes shinning with glee.

Harry looked skyward beseechingly for a moment, then he looked to the four of them. "Was there a reason why you asked me down? Or are you simply trying to prove Amy right?"

Helga smacked her head and looked at Harry seriously. "Oh, right! You're building a factory to make your portals!"

Harry blinked in surprise, then shook his head. "You know, I hadn't thought about it, but I suppose I am."

"We were hoping that we could use part of that facility to make the Masking Amulets," Inga said. "Right now we'd probably have to ask a company overseas to make them for us. It would be much more useful if we could make them ourselves. It would also increase security around them."

Harry nodded thoughtfully. "I don't know who's handling that. Can I use your floo to call over to the manor? Remus should know."

"Here, use this," Fred said, tossing him a small, oblong object.

Harry examined the miniaturized floo, admiring the detailed construction that went into the little device. Then he depressed the lever, which dropped powder into the small flame.

"Remus Lupin," he called.

"Harry?" came a tinny little voice.

"Right in one, Remus. Look, has Hermione talked to you about building a place to make the portals yet?"

"Yes. I'm looking over the information package she prepared right now, but I haven't done anything about it. This is going to require specialized construction crews to put together. I'm trying to get a hold of the same contractor we used to put up the main Haven complex, as well as the Granger Publications building," Remus replied.

"Excellent. When you arrange the meeting with the contractor, would you include either Inga or Helga from Q Branch?"

"I can do that, Harry. Can I ask why?"

"We're going to let them use part of the facility for mass production of some of their toys. Including someone from Q Branch in the meeting will save us having to build something later, don't you think?"

Even though Harry couldn't see Remus, in his mind he could see his friend mulling over his last statement and nodding to himself.

"Makes sense to me, Harry. I'll let Inga know when I have the meeting scheduled," Remus said.

"Thanks, Remus. I'll see you back at the manor in a while," Harry replied, then he closed the cap, shutting off the connection. He tried to give the miniature floo back to Fred, but he held up his hands, refusing to take it.

"Keep it, Harry. We're planning on issuing them to all field and unit level commanders next week anyway. You just got yours early."

Harry smiled and pocketed the floo, while marveling at the twins' ingenuity. Standing, he walked towards the door, waving as he exited Q Branch. He wanted to check in on several other things before heading back to the manor.

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### **Echo Six, over the North Sea (Oct 15th)...**

The EP-3E Aries banked and the radar operator had to hold onto his console for a moment while the plane bucked against the early morning turbulence. The Aries was a old plane design, with four large turbo-prop engines, but it continued to be one of the workhorses of the American Navy. The basic design allowed the plane to perform a variety of missions, from Anti-Surface warfare to Anti-Submarine warfare.

This particular variant, the EP-3E, was different. Old the plane might be, but inside it was filled with state of the art intelligence gathering hardware, radio receivers, radars, computers to process the information and code breaking equipment. It was a flying spy platform. With it, a properly trained crew could see what was happening on the ground for hundreds of miles.

The radar operator made a few adjustments to his display once the plane came out of its bank and steadied up on it's flight path. Then he noted movement on his console.

"Sir, I'm showing convoy movement, map reference P4, grid H5, just west of Elgin on A96. From the speed and size, I'd estimate a tracked convoy, possibly brigade strength," the operator said.

The commander nodded and reached for a microphone. A96 led directly into Inverness and they didn't want that city reinforced.

"Starbase, Starbase, Echo Six. We have movement, brigade strength. Map reference P4, grid H5. Target is west of Elgin, following A96, speed twenty. Standby for uplink of data."

A moment later a voice blared over a speaker, acknowledging the information and ordering Echo Six to maintain station. Within an hour, two different aircraft carriers were launching airstrikes. The allies of the British Government in Exile were finally committing themselves.

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### **Padfoot Manor...**

"...so the Wizengamot is basically on hold right now, Harry. Everything is going on behind the scenes in the committee. From what I understand, they're still trying to narrow down the rules of how the committee will operate. Coeur de Lion is pushing hard to be committee chairman, and Trenton Largo is pushing for the same thing for our side. But there are three neutral members who are making things interesting. From what Trenton tells me, I don't expect the committee to be functioning for at least another week, perhaps two," Amelia said smugly.

Harry nodded thoughtfully. Neville's idea had the unintended result of tying the Wizengamot up in knots while they argued over petty points of

procedure and who would be leading their committee. Both Harry and Neville had recused themselves from being nominated to the committee, citing their current duties at the Operations Center.

Harry looked at Michael O'Dalley, who had accompanied Amelia today. It bothered him. O'Dalley, as head of the town constables, was in charge of security for the town of Haven. If he was here, there was a problem.

"Thank you, Amelia. I must admit the Wizengamot session was... enlightening," Harry said, trying to be polite about it.

Those in the room snickered. His opinion of the Wizengamot had been heard quite loudly throughout the manor the night of the meeting.

"Harry, Michael does have something else to bring up with you. Right now it's early and we're not positive, but it's something you should know about," Amelia said uncomfortably.

Harry turned to Michael.

"My Lord, in the last week we've had several incidents, all aimed at either muggles or squibs. The worst of these was four days ago when Morgan Lachlan, the owner of Headlines and Beans, was seriously injured by a curse. He was a deliberate target and, as far as we can tell, the only reason for the attack was the fact that he's a squib, offering muggle newspapers for sale.

"Since then, there has been some vandalism of other muggle or squib owned businesses. A lot of sour rumors are going around about how the muggles and squibs are taking over Haven. Most folks are ignoring it, but you know as well as I do that not everyone will.

"We're working to try to find who injured Mr. Lochlan. We're also trying to find the source of the problem, but we're stretched thin at the moment. We've had to enlist the aid of Irish Aurors to investigate the attack..."

"How badly was he injured?" Harry asked, interrupting O'Dalley.

"He'll survive, my Lord, but the healers are doubtful that he'll ever walk again," O'Dalley said quietly.

Harry's expression hardened. "I know Morgan. He was one of the first Irish squibs to move here with his family to open that shop. It was his life long dream to stay in the Wizarding community and offer it a taste of the muggle world. What's happening with his family and his business?"

"From what I understand, his wife has taken over the business, but she can't keep it running the usual hours, what with her running back and forth between the business and the hospital. Their two children, Jeremy, age nine and Cynthia, age six, are still in school. Cynthia has tested positive for being a witch, by the way. The boy is definitely a squib. His wife is more than a little frantic."

Harry bowed his head a minute and he sighed heavily before looking up again. "Hermione, contact Mr. Lovegood and ask if he'd be interested in an interview for his paper. We can't allow this anti-muggle behavior to go unchecked. I'm afraid we're going to have to take an official stand."

Hermione looked up from the notes she was taking. "We?" she asked in surprise.

"Yes. Both of us. With our background, we need to come out openly against this sort of behavior. The Lachlan's have nearly lost their business and probably will if something isn't done about it. I'm going to open up an account for their family and put enough in it to see to their needs. We'll invite specialists from around the world to Haven, to see about helping Mr. Lachlan. Haven is more than just a town or a super refugee camp, it's supposed to be a family," he told her softly.

The others in the room looked at each other, abashed. They'd forgotten the purpose of Haven, and many a face burned with the shame of it.

Amelia removed her monocle and wiped her eyes with a handkerchief. "It's a good thing you're doing, Harry," she said.

"It's simple, Amelia. If we're going to build a world where muggle born are as accepted as any pure blood, we have to take a visible stand against the racism. What happened to Mr. Lachlan was wrong on so many levels I can't even begin to describe how I feel about it. And were it not for the fact that Hermione is receiving the same training as the Aurors are, I'd be reluctant to let her go into Haven without an escort. We make this public. The Ministry won't stand for this sort of racism anymore, nor will I."

Remus looked up from his notes. "How much do you want to put into that account, Harry?"

"Figure one hundred thousand, Remus, half for the family and half to cover the medical expenses, which have to be considerable," Harry said after some thought. "I'll talk to Healer August and ask her to warn me if the expenses exceed that amount."

He turned back to O'Dalley. "Michael, don't let this get out of hand. We have nearly one thousand muggles and squibs in town. If you need to, hire on more constables."

"Harry, it's not that simple anymore. There are members of the Wizengamot who are openly racist. It's encouraging some of the baser people in our town," Amelia protested.

Harry rubbed his temples with both hands, and closed his eyes. "Someone tell me again why it was a good idea to rescue the Wizengamot from Azkaban? Couldn't we have left them behind?"

Nearly everyone smiled.

"Harry, you know you wouldn't have left anyone in those cells," Remus chided him gently.

He smiled weakly. "No, but I can dream about it, can't I?" He looked around at those in the room, then sat up straighter. "Alright, the Ministry can't step on too many toes, but I think I may have a work around. It should also irk Mr. 'I-am-from-royalty-so-kiss-my-buttocks'. I'll just ask some of our Yank friends if they'd like a little extra training creeping around a town at night. They'd be sure to stop any illegal activity, and the Wizengamot can't do a thing except complain about the Yanks. After all, it *is* training."

Several people exchanged surprised looks. The fighters who had been sent over by the Americans had all started off as Aurors. Harry was going to ask them to police their own base, so to speak. It just might work!

"My Lord, I am going to suggest we hold off on that for a while. An independent body patrolling our streets smacks of vigilantism," O'Dalley said quietly.

Harry sighed. "Very well, Michael. But if it becomes necessary, talk to me and I'll set it up."

O'Dalley nodded and looked relieved.

Harry then turned to Group Captain Anderson, who had also accompanied Amelia to this meeting. "Group Captain, it's a pleasure to see you again. I take it you have some information you'd like to share with us today?"

Anderson nodded. "Yes, my lord, I do. Starting at oh four hundred this morning, the British Government, using NATO facilities on the continent, and it's Allies have begun their campaign against those forces in control in Britain. If I may, my lord?"

Anderson pointed to the large map on the wall. Harry nodded and silently wondered to himself if Anderson was one of those types who always needed to talk in front of a board or map or something.

"*Pay attention, my heart,*" Hermione sent him.

"*Sorry, got distracted for a moment,*" he replied sheepishly.

Anderson stood and walked to the map. He took out a pencil and circled several locations on the continent, then he turned back to Harry.

"We realize that not much can be done until we have the wizards out of the way, or at least distracted. His Majesty's Government, in agreement with our Allies, have opted to go for what is commonly called 'targets of opportunity'. It means that we'll attack any targets that present themselves, using allied air forces. The primary goal is to bring about a reduction of the mechanized forces of the rebel government."

Harry nodded. He had been reading the material Anderson had been sending over, which explained a lot about the muggle military and how it was set up.

Amelia looked puzzled by Anderson's comments.

Caleb saw her confusion. "If you'd like, Group Captain Anderson and I will prepare a special briefing to explain some of the terms we're using," he told her.

"Thank you, Caleb," she replied.

"My Lord," Caleb said as he turned back to Harry, "I think it's time we discuss what the elves have found. As you know, they have been searching Britain for the two camps used to house wizards and their families."

Harry motioned for Caleb to continue.

Caleb's expression turned grim. "We've found a number of muggle camps where people have been placed for the purposes of providing slave labor. The conditions in them are brutal to an extreme. It reminds me of some things I've read about under the Nazi regime of World War II. One Wizarding camp, a family camp, has been positively identified as being just outside Leeds. Another is south of Manchester, but we haven't positively identified that one yet. Our search is continuing, on the off chance that there may be others we don't know about.

"The number of camps and what is happening in them is disturbing. We cannot possibly attack each camp and rescue the prisoners. All we can do is train hard and wait until conditions are right for us to go back and take what was once ours."

Harry listened carefully. The camps were a touchy issue between them, but even Caleb was coming to realize that they couldn't rescue everyone.

"Mr. Newman?"

Caleb blinked and looked at Hermione. She rarely broke into these conversations.

"My lady?"

"Just what are they doing with the slave labor?" she asked in a small voice.

Caleb frowned and Harry leaned towards Hermione, placing a hand on her shoulder.

"Do you really want to know?" he asked her.

Hermione nodded jerkily.

Harry leaned back and motioned to Caleb to relax.

"Girls, ages thirteen to the late twenties, are used as sex slaves," Harry said in a dull tone. "They are bought, traded and given as rewards to whomever pleases the masters. People over sixty are usually killed outright. Young men and boys are sometimes used as sex slaves as well, but mostly the wizards use them to train other Death Eaters in mastering the Unforgivables.

"Middle aged women and men are put to work, cleaning up the burnt out streets. A few lucky ones are used as workers in factories that provide material for the army."

"This is what you've been hiding from me in your mind, isn't it?" Hermione asked. She shook her head. "I'm sorry I asked."

She looked pale. Harry sent her a mental caress and was surprised to find her holding onto it.

"Hermione?"

*"I'm sorry. It's just that it was so unreal until you started talking. I knew people were suffering, but here in Haven, it seems distant and abstract."*

*"I know. It's not something any of us wants to talk about. It makes us all feel guilty... or at least I do."*

He could feel the agreement bubbling over the link. Sometimes words, even mental ones, just weren't necessary.

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### **A96, west of Elgin, Scotland...**

The British Army under Lord Voldemort was a drastically changed organization. Once the bastion of professional soldiers with a proud history, it had sunk very far from its proud roots. Most of the Officer Corps had been replaced with men who had far less training and far fewer morals. Discipline in the army had become draconian, where even a small infraction resulted in severe corporal punishment, if not hanging.

Lucius had seen to the gutting of the army. It was part of his plan. He kept the command staffs intact, for the most part, so that he could take advantage of their superior military knowledge and tactics. But the unit commanders had all been replaced in favor of men easily controlled.

Colonel Masters was one such individual. Before Voldemort, he had been a petty enforcer for a local crime syndicate with a tendency to be too brutal. A wizard had found him not long after the fall of the government. He had already accumulated his own stable of girls, usually by killing their husbands or boyfriends. The wizard, recognizing talent, brought him to the attention of others, who then placed him in his current position, in charge of the First Mechanized Brigade.

Colonel Masters was incensed. Due to heavy insurgent activity they had been forced to travel up the coast roads, making the foraging for food and petrol difficult. Many of the small towns had been picked clean and few of the farms in the area were still producing anything. Passing through Elgin, one of his scouting parties had stumbled upon a fisherman coming in from the coast with a large load of fresh fish he hoped to barter in the bigger town.

Rather than just taking it like they should, his men had traded petrol, valuable batteries and bullets for the two hundred pounds of fish. They had then slowed the entire convoy down while the fish was transferred to a refrigerated truck.

Masters smirked and climbed back down the turret of his Saxon Armored Personnel Carrier. Inside the cramped space he had several of his 'girls' as he called them, plus the driver and two men for security.

"Well, I showed that idiot," Masters boasted, then he grabbed one of the weeping girls and fondled her roughly.

"That you did, Colonel. That you did. I've never seen a man's head run over by a APC before," said one of his security team.

Masters laughed and grabbed the bottle the man offered him.

Overhead, two flights of four Navy F18-E's roared up the road, barely nine hundred feet off the ground. They came up from behind the convoy and few had a chance to open up with anti-aircraft fire. Each F18's carried four cluster bombs. Each bomb fell a specified distance before splitting open and releasing two hundred and two bomblets each.

In a matter seconds, six thousand four hundred and sixty four mortar sized bombs were dropped. They fell among the convoy, piercing the weaker armor of the APCs. Some units were unlucky enough to have bombs fall into open hatches. The resulting explosions tore apart the interior of the APC's, shredding the men within. Fires started and spread quickly through the convoy. Many of the supply trucks, less protected than than the APC's, were engulfed in flames and their munitions cooked off, causing secondary explosions.

Thirty minutes later, when the smoke finally began to clear from the scene, the First Mechanized Brigade from Third Division had ceased to exist. Inverness would not be getting the reinforcements as promised. The small garrison would have to hold the city on their own for now.

Echo Six, still monitoring the convoy, reported that over eighty percent of the convoy vehicles had been destroyed and those vehicles still moving probably didn't have the supplies to go very far.

The two flights of F18-E's turned east to head out over the North Sea before turning south again. No one wanted to risk the possibility that someone in the British Army might still have a significant anti-air capability.

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## Haven Operations Center (October 20th)...

Caleb looked up when his door opened and he spotted Harry. "Come in, my Lord," he called, waving him in.

Harry walked in and sat down, watching Caleb expectantly.

The Deputy Minister of Defense stood and walked over to a large wall map that had two locations marked in a bright pulsating red. The map was dotted with other markings, but these were the most important, as far as he was concerned.

"Elf scouts have confirmed the locations of the Wizarding camps. The locations of the other camps has been passed to Group Captain Anderson so that the muggle governments can plan appropriately. Our concern is the camp at Leeds and the other in Wilmslow, south of Manchester. Both camps have a large Wizarding guard unit and a population of Dementors that we're estimating to be at least one hundred strong."

Harry frowned. They wouldn't have the help of the Angels for this operation. It had been confirmed that the Angels had made it to Britain and were spreading out, killing any Dementors they came across. But there wasn't any way to concentrate them and transport them to the camps.

"The planning is already in the works for the raid on these camps. What I'm going need you to do is take command of the units assaulting the Leeds camp. We're pushing Stanton, the Yank who did so well with Able company at Azkaban, to take command of the Wilmslow assault."

Caleb paused waiting for Harry to digest this.

"You'll have a total of five companies under your command. That's seven hundred men, including a certain set of recruits that you had us train."

Harry winced. He knew that sooner or later he'd be going back into battle, but now he had to figure out what to do with his wife and the others. It wasn't something he was looking forward to.

Nodding at Caleb, he pulled out a parchment and began to take notes while the Deputy Minister outlined the rough draft of the mission.

"We're going to need a lot of people capable of casting a Patronus," Harry finally said.

Caleb moved back to his chair and sat heavily. "Merlin knows we will. Stanton has an idea that a Dementor might be slowed down by ice, maybe even trapped if it were encased in it. But we have no way of testing that idea. Right now you need to concentrate on building your command staff and setting up training schedules. I don't like the idea of putting the raid off, but we are going to need at least a month to prepare for this," he said worriedly.

"I'll start looking over who I have and I'll set up a training schedule that will include a refresher on the Patronus," Harry said. Then he paused and frowned. "Caleb," he said slowly, "you haven't told me how many people are in these camps."

Caleb leaned forward on his chair, resting his arms on his desk. "The Leeds camp has close to two thousand, the other has a similar population."

Harry sucked in a breath and stared at the man in shock. Rescuing four thousand people? This was much higher than anticipated.

Caleb chuckled at his reaction. "Don't worry. Most of the prisoners will be going, via portkey, to the states. The Yanks have offered to set up an abandoned muggle army base to receive them. They're recruiting healers and volunteers to be ready at the drop of a hat to aid the refugees. At best we'll get five hundred here but, even then, there's no guarantee they'll stay here."

Harry nodded. "Very well. If there is nothing else, Caleb, I'd best be on my way. I have a lot of work to do."

Once Harry left the office, Caleb turned back to the piles of paperwork on his desk. How Miles ever managed to survive the tedium of it was a mystery to him.

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## Padfoot Manor, that evening...

Harry entered the sitting room, followed by Hermione. Arrayed inside the room was the entire Brotherhood. They had come together because Harry had asked for them to meet after dinner. Eocho floated in through the wall and took up a spot next to Harry.

"I won't waste any time with this, so I'll get right to the point. In a little over a month's time we will be assaulting the Wizard camp at Leeds. The assault on Leeds will be completed using five companies - that's seven hundred troops, including every Brotherhood member who has been trained to fight. We have two goals. First to rescue every prisoner in the camp. Second to kill as many Death Eaters as we can." he told them, then sat down as the news sank in.

"So... what will we be doing?" asked Ginny cautiously.

Harry smiled at the red head. "To be truthful, I'm not sure yet."

He waved off the scowls he received. "Now, before you all start thinking about burning me at the stake, let me explain that I need to figure out where you'll be most useful. Headquarters company and one other will handle perimeter security. Afterwards, we'll be setting up the traps once the camp is cleared."

He saw them exchange a grin among themselves and decided they needed a dose of reality. As Ginny had asked the question, he chose to address his comments to her.



Ginny, this isn't going to be a picnic trip we're going on. I've seen the photos the elves have taken. We're going to be seeing parents walking around in a daze, carrying their dead children in their arms. We're going to be dealing with people who have been brutalized and forced to live like animals. I've seen photos of mother's prostituting themselves for an extra sliver of meat for their children. People are going to die. Where I put you, I expect you to stay and follow the orders of your commanding officer. That means if you're under Draco, you do what he says. Same goes for me, or if you're under an officer you don't know," he said firmly.

Ginny frowned and looked around before turning back to Harry. "Do you really think we'd go against orders, Harry?"

"Honestly? I don't know. I know that Hermione would hex me if I gave her an order, and yet she's going to be in a position where I, or someone else, will be doing just that. I don't believe for an instant she'd have a problem with someone else giving her an order. But me? Look, I'm not trying to make anyone angry here, so let's just settle down," he said, noticing the glare he got from Hermione.

"Harry!"

*"Relax, love. I don't think you'll have a problem with this, but Ginny might. I didn't want to single her out, so I'm using all of you."*

"Alright. I'll let it slide for now."

"This will be a new situation and, fortunately, we have time to train for it. But Harry has a valid point. Once we're in the field, even if it's just training, you can't break discipline," Neville said quietly.

"Starting tomorrow we begin training from noon to six. Then we'll use the time turner and do it again. That's twelve hours, folks, We have ten days to get everyone in shape before we start training on full sized mock-ups of the camps," Harry told them commandingly.

Everyone groaned.

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### **Haven Operations Center (October 25th)...**

Harry walked onto the small stage and faced his friends. "All of you are capable of some wandless magic. What I'm about to show you now is something your hand to hand instructor didn't teach you, because he can't do wandless magic. Draco, if you would join me up here, please?"

Draco stood and stripped out of his shirt before joining him on the stage.

"Hand to hand combat is something that most of our troops learn because they'd be defenseless if they lost their wand in combat. Some people augment their fighting with knives and other weapons. I found myself at a disadvantage in most sparring matches because my leg is an obvious weak spot. Many of my sparring partners would take advantage of my reduced mobility or attack my leg, first."

Hermione frowned and crossed her arms. She hadn't known Harry was subjecting himself to partners who would go for a spot that caused him intense pain.

"We weren't far into the training when I did something by accident. Draco, if you will?" Harry asked before he turned his back on him.

Draco rushed Harry from behind and grabbed him around the neck. The two struggled for a moment, then Harry bent forwards and Draco went flying over him. It was a normal throw that they had all practiced, but rather than being thrown a few feet away, Draco was pitched high into the air.

He pivoted in the air and landed in a crouch, facing Harry.

They exchanged a feral grin, then Harry rushed him. Draco charged forward and the two collided. This time Draco slid in under Harry's grip and flipped him a good twelve feet into the air.

Hermione gasped and started to rise from her seat. Luna grabbed her by the arm and held her in place.

"Watch," she murmured, her eyes sparkling with excitement.

Harry righted himself at the top of his arc and he wandlessly slowed his fall. He landed on his good leg, dropped, and rolled right up to Draco, knocking him off his feet.

Harry stood up and offered a hand to Draco, who was still on the floor. When the blond grasped his hand, he pulled him to his feet.

"Thank you," Harry told him, patting him lightly on the back.

Draco nodded and returned to his seat next to Luna.

"I'm going to teach you three spells. Although there is no real incantation for these spells, they do work. What you need to learn to do is to cast these soundlessly and wandlessly.

We'll use Fulcio, or Strengthen, as an example. Think carefully of the muscles in your arm and cast Fulcio. If you've done it right, you'll experience a brief moment where your muscles become stronger for about three to five seconds. Trust me, you'll feel it.

"Each of these spells will do something to a group of muscles. Fulcio, Cito and Congelo, or strengthen, quicken and harden, allows you to increase your muscle speed, your strength and harden the bones and skin helping to prevent injuries.

For the next few hours we're going to practice casting these spells and using them in hand to hand combat. Then we'll break off with partners and spar with each other."

Harry stepped off the stage and walked over to Hermione, grinning. She stood and they both moved over to a punching bag anchored in one corner of the large room.

"Ready to try this, love?" he sent to her.

"I think so."

"Just hit the bag without the spells for a moment while I brace it."

Harry walked around to the opposite side of the bag and leaned into it. "Now try," he said.

Hermione hit the bag a few times and Harry waved her to stop. "Think about your arm. Think about the muscles, bone and sinews all being part of a greater whole. Picture that firmly in your mind, then cast your spell silently and hit the bag."

Harry leaned against the bag and watched her with his senses fully extended. He saw her aura spike as she cast the spell, then it begin to fade before she lashed out at the bag.

Hermione stopped and frowned.

"Do you know what you did wrong?" Harry sent her.

"I think so. I waited too long, right?"

"Right. You only have a few seconds. When you get used to this, you'll be casting these spells as you throw the punch, rather than casting and then punching."

He braced himself behind the bag and waited again. A moment later Hermione hit the bag and he was pushed back a few inches. She had managed to increase her punching power.

"Good. Keep going," he murmured.

Three hours later he called a break and everyone sat around on the mats, drinking and talking. Neville and Draco had spoken privately to Harry, telling him that their wives had picked up the technique. All that was left was to check on the progress of Remus and Tonks.

Harry stood and walked over to the same punching bag he and Hermione had been using. Once there, he called Tonks to join him.

The metamorph looked surprised for a moment before standing and trotting over to him.

"So, how are you doing?" he asked.

Tonks shrugged. "Most of this training is similar to what I'm used to. Your demonstration today was the first real new thing I've seen. I know that will change once we start working in units, but so far it's just be exercising and fighting. We've had a little dueling thrown into the mix, as well."

"Have you and Remus been able to master using the spells like I've shown you?"

Tonks nodded, grinning. "It's easier than what I used to do, using my metamorph abilities to help with my fighting. That took too long to get set up for."

Harry leaned into the punching bag. "Show me," he said.

He was surprised when Tonks started hitting the bag. She was pushing him much harder than Hermione did, and he knew Hermione was a stronger witch, magically. Opening up his senses, he looked carefully at what she was doing. Then he smiled and waved her to stop.

"If this were a match competition, I could say you were cheating, using both your metamorph abilities and the spells. But frankly, I'd rather have you alive than following rules. I take it Remus is also taking advantage of his wolf enhanced abilities?"

Tonks nodded, her eyes dancing. He laughed and waved her back to the others.

Harry sat down, leaning against the wall and mentally reviewed the reports from the instructors again. Some of the Brotherhood were vicious fighters. Ginny, for example, was agile, ruthless, and not afraid to use dirty tactics to win a fight. Her hand to hand combat instructor noted that she was especially enamored with crotch shots if she could get away with it. He shuddered and made a mental note to avoid sparring with her.

Tonks and Remus also received high marks from their instructors, but then Harry expected them to. Both were highly motivated and had lost people in the war. For them, it had become personal enough that they could fight - and kill - if need be.

Luna was an odd duck, he thought with a bit of a smile. He had a special fondness for her. He glanced over at his friends and was surprised to see Luna looking back at him with a small smile. According to her instructors, Luna was perhaps the most unpredictable one of the lot. She danced about the combat ring, seemingly oblivious to everything around her. Then she would strike suddenly, invariably dealing a blow requiring medical attention. Her instructor noted in her file that she was actually afraid of Luna.

Harry sighed when he came to the final person. She had trained well enough and was competent, but her instructor complained about her recurring lack of aggressiveness. He needed to find out if she was capable of fighting now, before he jeopardized others by putting her in a combat situation.

Standing, he walked back to the group.

"Alright, you lot. Let's team off for a little sparring for another hour, then we'll call it quits for the day," he said to the roaring approval of everyone there.

He led Hermione over to a combat ring where they could spar.

"Ready?"

"Let's do it," she called to him.

A bell rang and she immediately moved forward, in a defensive crouch. Harry side stepped her and jabbed, catching her in the side. She blinked and looked at him, her eyes narrowing.

"Come on, love. You can do better than this. If I were a Death Eater, I'd be casting away like crazy and you're still on the defensive," he called.

Hermione rushed him. Then, instead of grabbing him as he expected, she high kicked. Harry stepped back from the kick and dropped to the floor where he swept her legs, causing her to crash to the floor. A moment later he was up and bouncing around the ring, waiting for her.

"Come on, Hermione. You can do this. Where's the Gryffindor courage? Where's the girl that decked the ferret in our third year?"

Draco turned and scowled at Harry. Luna took advantage of his inattention and dropped him to the mat, moaning in pain.

"Pay attention Dray," she said sweetly, dancing around the mat.

Hermione growled, leapt to her feet and jabbed, catching Harry squarely in the nose. Her use of the spells knocked him into the ropes, where he tangled for a moment before sliding to the floor, bleeding heavily.

Hermione looked pleased with herself, until she realized what she'd done. Then she paled and rushed to his side.

Harry looked up at her. His eyes were already swelling and bruising.

Remus, from the nearby ring, saw Harry down and bleeding. "Medic!" he called, then pointed to Harry.

"I'm sorry, Harry," Hermione whispered, looking anguished.

"I dink... Blast.. Wif my doze broke..."

*"It's alright, my heart. I had to find out if you'd give it your all and you did."* he sent, then he turned to look at the Medic, who was climbing over the ropes to get to him.

Despite his reassurances, she continued to look upset while the Medic worked on fixing his nose.

"Harry?"

"Ouch! Yes?"

*"I want to be with you when you fight, but I have to be honest with you and myself. I don't think I'm cut out for this."*

The Medic rubbed some salve over the swelling and it immediately started to shrink as the color returned to normal. With a final deft wave of his wand, he stood and nodded to himself at a job well done.

Harry shot him a grateful glance, then turned his attention back to Hermione.

"I know, love..."

"You know? What do you mean, you know?" she sent back, her tone angry now.

*"Hermione, your instructors have evaluated all of you. Your combat instructor cannot fault you for your technique, or your willingness to learn. What she did fault you on, however, was your lack of aggressiveness. She recommended against placing you in a combat company..."*

There was a moment of defeated silence. Harry could see the impact of his words on his wife. She had never been given a bad grade or recommendation by a teacher in her life. Her shoulders slumped and she looked down at the mat, refusing to meet his eyes.

*"I guess this puts me back in a strictly research role and waiting idly by for you to come home?"*

Harry winced at the pain he could feel in her mental voice.

*"No, love. It doesn't have to be that way."*

*"We both know I'm rubbish at this. And don't fob me off with lame excuses about how important research is."*

*"I wouldn't. And what I have in mind means you won't have to stay behind."* At her incredulous look, he rolled his eyes. *"I'm serious. But there are a few conditions you have to agree to, or I promise, you will stay behind with your parents."*

*"What conditions?"* she sent warily as she crouched down to his level.

*"Everyone else in the Brotherhood will be going into a combat role, and so will you. However, your role as a combatant will be limited. Should you actually have to fight, I want you to promise me something. You will fight and hold nothing back. I mean it, Hermione. If you have to fight, I want you to fight as hard as you can. Your life, our life together, will depend upon it,"* he sent fiercely.

She placed a hand on his shoulder. She could feel him getting upset. *"Easy there. I'll fight, Harry. I may lose, but I promise I'll take down as many as I can before I do!"*

Harry stared into her eyes, searching them for an answer he couldn't get from mere words, or even their bond. Finally, he closed his eyes and nodded slowly, as if it pained him to do so.

*"Fine. I'm putting you in charge of the Unit Command Post. It will be your job to see that the CP is set up when we hit the ground. Then you'll need to see to the perimeter security. This isn't some fluff job, love. The security for the command post is critical. It's the same job I did at Azkaban. so you could end up in a fight. It also means you'll be my link between what the companies are doing and what's happening back here in Haven. It's an important job."*

Hermione sat on the floor next to him, saying nothing. Harry had led troops in combat during the Azkaban mission. However, before the replacements had come up from the docks, he'd been running the command post and making sure that information was flowing both ways.

It dawned on her that Harry was doing his best to keep his promise of letting her be with him when they fought. But he was also trying to balance what he wanted versus what he needed as a mission commander, responsible for all the lives on the mission.

He held his breath. He knew she was thinking hard about what he had said. He didn't want to intrude using the bond, so he waited for her to come to a decision.

*"I'll take the position, Commander,"* she said impishly.

Harry grinned at her. He still had to tell the others where and what they'd be doing, but the hardest one was done. He tentatively touched his nose, noting it was still a little sore. Then he stood, offering Hermione a hand up and squaring his shoulders.

It was time for him to talk to the others and outline where they would be and what they'd be doing in the upcoming battle.

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### **Luna Lends a Hand (October 28th)...**

Draco climbed into bed, exhausted and aching. They had started unit training and it was almost as grueling as their hand to hand training. His aches had aches. It didn't help his ego one bit when he discovered that it never seemed to bother Luna. He had overheard Harry talking about having to help Hermione with massages and hot soaks and he hoped he'd be able to do the same. But Luna never complained about any aches. She seemed her bouncy buoyant self, no matter how hard the training session had been.

He groaned and pulled the sheet up over his head. Luna was bouncing around the room. She had changed into a nightgown that should have been declared illegal.

*"Wakey, wakey,"* she sang to him, pulling off the sheet.

*"Luna, it's nearly midnight! Aren't you tired yet?"* he complained, pulling a pillow over his head.

*"Not yet, my love. We have something to do tonight, while there's still time! Come, get up and put on your robe and slippers. It's a little chilly outside."*

Draco peeked out from under his pillow. *"Outside? You want us to go outside at this time of night?"*

She laughed. *"Oh, don't be as stuffy as a herd of beach crawling Nickerers. They never have any fun either, Dray. Come on, this will be fun and educational."*

*"Fine,"* he muttered, throwing off the pillow and stepping into his slippers, before pulling on his robe.

Luna pulled on Draco's hand, leading him down the stairs and out of the mansion. He shivered slightly in the chill autumn air and wondered if Luna was as cold as he was.

Onward they walked, Luna occasionally tugging on him, guiding him towards the school.

Draco followed and wondered if this had to do with the Angels again. In the distance, he was sure he could hear them, their melodic voices carrying softly on the night wind. The Angels had settled down somewhat since Luna had helped them and they no longer kept the school from sleeping at night.

Once in a while the two Angels would float amidst the buildings of the school and start to sing. It wasn't a loud sound, but it was heard throughout the

campus. The two Angels would separate and start by calling to each other. Then their calls would intertwine, forming a gentle melody that could be heard by everyone. Not a single student or teacher reported any difficulty sleeping through these night time concerts.

Luna finally came to a stop in the large central courtyard of the school. It was, for the most part, just a big field, with the buildings running along the edges. House elves tended the grassy field so that students would be able to enjoy a nice comfortable place to sit and study in milder weather, and a place where plenty of snow would pile up for snowball fights in winter weather. Now, however, the courtyard was empty, except for two Angels gently floating on the nighttime breeze.

Spotting Luna, both Angels unfurled their wings and made their way to her. She reached up and they grabbed her hands. The glow around the beings increased for a moment before it returned to normal.

"I know how difficult it can be," she murmured to them. Then she turned and motioned for Draco to approach them.

"This is my Draco," she told them seriously. "He is my life mate, my love and my protector. Without him, I would be lost. There is nothing I would not do for him."

Draco looked at Luna, then up at the Angels in confusion. The smaller Angel broke from Luna's grasp and drifted over to him. He assumed the smaller Angel was the female.

"Luna, what's going on?" he asked nervously as he felt the Angel's warm, velvet-like hand gently grasp his.

"Don't be afraid, Dray. She won't hurt you. They need to see," She replied dreamily.

"See? See what?"

"How it's done."

He frowned. Sometimes getting information out of Luna was a most frustrating experience.

The Angel holding Draco's hand led him over to where his wife stood, still holding the hand of the larger Angel. Luna reached out and took his hand, while the angels also joined hands, forming a circle.

"Open your mind, Dray," Luna murmured softly. "Let them see what they must."

Draco blinked rapidly, unsure of what to do when, for no reason he could determine, his occlumency shield failed completely and he was suddenly bombarded by image after image of the most erotic nature. He saw in his mind the first time he and Luna made love, then many of the other encounters he and his wife had experienced together, all of them of an erotic, sexual nature. He also saw images flowing over his bond from Luna. And, much to his shame, some of his deepest fantasies that he hadn't shared with her flowed towards her.

Finally the images faded and he could sense his surroundings again.

The two Angels released themselves from the circle and spread their wings. The larger of the two rose high into the air, calling to his mate. She rose to his call and he swooped down next to her. She closed the final distance and wrapped her wings around him like a second set of arms. The male spread his wings wide, pumping furiously to keep both of them airborne. The two began to sing then, but this song was different from other songs they'd sung. It began with a low, slow tempo and slowly increased in speed and volume. As they sang, the light coming from them changed from white to a deep pink.

The male carried the both of them higher and higher.

Luna stood next to Draco, whose eyes were fixed on the flying Angels. He never felt her hand slipping into his. The Angels were surrounding by a deep pink aura and their unique brand of magic flowed off them in waves.

Draco trembled as each wave of magic washed over him, increasing his desire. It had been bad enough when it had been fueled by the images that had flooded their bond a few minutes ago. Now, with the magic flowing from the Angels, he wasn't sure he could control himself.

"Luna..." he breathed huskily.

She looked at him, noting his condition. She could feel the magic flowing from the Angels and it filled her with pride, as if her babies were growing up. But it obviously didn't affect her the way it was affecting him. She would have been surprised to know that Draco wasn't the only one affected. Several teachers and some students were busy finding hiding spots for their liaisons or casting privacy charms around their beds.

She placed a hand on his shoulder and the contact widened their bond. She reeled back from the overwhelming desire he was experiencing. He wanted her and her own body shuddered from the intensity of his emotions and physical reaction.

Luna glanced up at the Angels and noted that they no longer needed their help. With a quick tug on Draco's hand, she pulled him towards the edge of the apparation wards and home.

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### Near Sibiu, Romania (October 29th)...

*Nickolai had been true to his word*, Dumbledore thought. He had provided Dumbledore with a spacious castle in Transylvania where he could train Nickolai's men. There were more men than he had anticipated, but it wouldn't impact his plans too much.

The window showed snow capped mountains and lights lit up the valley below where villages and small farms dotted the countryside. Some parts of the castle were depressingly familiar, reminding him of his Hogwarts, now in the clutches of Voldemort.

He turned from the window and watched the two men dueling on the platform. "NO, NO, NO!" he shouted. "You must cast faster!"

He walked to the platform and dismissed the man on one end, taking his place. "Now watch! Engarde!" he called.

Both men brought their wands to the ready position and began. Dumbledore cast a disarming charm, which his opponent neatly side stepped. Then the man turned and cast a cutting hex.

"Protego!" Dumbledore called, catching the cutting hex and rebounding it towards his opponent.

The man dodged his own spell and turned to cast again when Dumbledore shot off two spells silently.

His eyes widened and he cast a shield. The first spell, a simple stunner, crashed into the shield, weakening it greatly. The second spell blew through the shield, hitting the man in the shoulder. He screamed in pain from the tightly focused *Reducto* r curse and fell to his knees, holding his broken shoulder, trying to stem the flow of blood.

Dumbledore smiled and walked to the center of the platform and faced the other men, who had been watching the duel.

"Learn to cast faster and silently. A simple combination of Stunner and *Reducto* r will take down all but the strongest of shields in the Protego family of spells," Dumbledore said, then he turned to the injured man. "Someone get him to a healer."

Albus giggled as he walked off the platform and over to a nearby chair. It was so nice to see how eager his students were. And vicious too!

"Next pair to the dueling platform," he called, relaxing back on his seat.

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## Halloween in Haven...

Harry and Hermione stepped from the small nondescript building that had become the headquarters of Haven's one and only newspaper.

When Bertrand Lovegood started his paper with the help of the Ministry, he was unsure what to call it. For several weeks the paper went through name changes almost on a daily basis as Bertrand struggled to come up with what he felt was a good name. There was the Haven Howler, then The British Runaways, which only lasted one issue. Next came the The Daily Debunker, The Magical Press, The Angel Times and The Haven Reporter.

The name of the paper soon became a running joke among the residents of Haven. People even sent in suggestions to the editor. What clinched the name for good was a simple case of Bertrand overhearing some of his neighbors talking about the paper in the town square. And thus, Haven's one and only newspaper was officially named 'The Paper'.

The day the name was announced in forty point font on the front page, it was universally acclaimed by all the residents of Haven. Bertrand, using knowledge drawn from his experience working on the Quibbler, quickly turned The Paper from a single sheet handout to a multi-page newspaper with international subscriptions. It was the newspaper of choice for British expatriates around the world.

Bertrand turned to Harry as he escorted him and his wife out of the newspaper office. "I want to thank you again for your time, Lord Potter," he said happily. In the last day he had interviewed the Minister of Magic and the Potters, getting their views of the anti-muggle sentiment slowly growing in the community.

"Not at all, Mr. Lovegood. I know you're as upset about this as we are. If coming out publicly against what's happening will help, then we're glad to do it," Harry replied.

The two thanked Bertrand again before he rushed back inside to start writing his story for tomorrow's edition.

Harry and Hermione had originally apparated to the front of the building before going inside. Now, standing outside and seeing the town square, they were surprised by the amount of decorations in celebration of the holiday.

The fountain in the center of the square was gaily painted black and orange. Even the dubious Merlin statue had been painted.

Hermione slipped her hand into Harry's. "Shall we take a look around? I didn't know the town would be holding this big a celebration," she said.

Harry nodded, his eyes alight with curiosity.

They paused before entering the large square. Several of the pubs had spilled out onto the sidewalks and people were walking around, greeting others merrily. Several large bands of children roamed the square in costume.

"What in the world?" Harry muttered.

"Oh, I know this! They're Trick or Treaters. My parents, being dentists, frowned on it. The children like to dress up in costume on Halloween," Hermione exclaimed.

"TRICK OR TREAT!" a group of kids yelled as they approached the couple.

Harry looked at Hermione in confusion. The kids were dressed in all kinds of costumes, from Merlin to Vampires, and he would have sworn there was one E.T. in the group.

"You're supposed to give them a candy, or show them a trick," she whispered to him, then she turned. Someone was tugging on her shirt. She looked down and spotted Dobby holding up a large bag filled with Chocolate Frogs.

"Thank you, Dobby," she said softly, then turned to look at Harry and gasped.

He was busy levitating a group of giggling children. Each was floating, trying to reach a small glowing bubble. Hermione cast a quick spell and laughed when the kids grabbed at the bubble and it broke, revealing a Chocolate Frog. Once they caught their frogs, they gently floated to the ground.

Harry looked at her questioningly, then he spotted the bag she held.

"Dobby," she said, answering his unasked question.

He laughed. The little elf always seemed to know when they needed something. He looked around the square again and shook his head. This was something new, in their experience. Halloween at Hogwarts had always been a festive occasion, but growing up as muggles had never exposed them to what really happened when the Wizarding community celebrated.

They walked across the square, getting accosted several times by groups of children. Harry was certain that at least one group snuck back in for a repeat visit, but he really couldn't blame them. The company that made Chocolate Frogs had vanished when Britain fell, so the candy was very rare, and popular with the kids.

"Look! It's Harry!" shouted a small voice.

Harry turned and frowned. A small lad of no more than five or six led a large group of similarly aged children and one very frazzled looking adult towards him.

"Harry! I knew it was you!" said the lad happily.

Harry looked again, then he recognized the boy. It was Robert, one of the orphans adopted by the Johansens. He grinned then, thinking it was time to start handing out frogs again. Robert's hair had been charmed black and he wore a pair of fake eyeglasses. On his forehead was a lightning shaped line done with a marker, faking Harry's famous scar.

"Harry, you'll come to the pageant won't you? Oh, please say you'll come!" begged Robert.

*"You have a fan, my love. He's got good taste, if you ask me."*

*"Very funny. What's this pageant he's asking about?"*

*"I don't know. But what can it hurt?"* she sent back, her tone mirthful.

"Robert Johansen! I think that is enough! I'm sure your friend here has far more important things to do than attend a first graders pageant," said the frazzled adult.

"No, really. I think we'd be honored to attend your pageant. Right, love?" Harry said, turning to Hermione.

She nodded with a smile and Robert began to jump up and down in glee. Soon, the whole class was jumping up and down and the adult looked more and more frazzled.

"I'm sorry, but usually the pageant's are reserved for family only..."

"You can't keep him out, Miss Finch," Robert shouted. "He's Harry Potter!"

Hermione grabbed onto Harry's shoulder and bit her lip trying to stifle her laughter as twenty first graders and one first grade teacher suddenly turned as one to look at Harry in absolute awe.

*"Oh, this is priceless. If only I had a camera! Where is Colin Creevey when you need him?"* Her laughter bubbled over the bond and washed over him.

*"Oy! Shut it!"* he sent back.

Robert reached up and shyly took Harry's hand. "You must come see our pageant. We're on the way back to school now to get ready for it."

Miss Finch, it seemed, had slipped into a state of shock, allowing Robert to lead the class, and Harry Potter, back to Haven's Primary School. She stumbled along behind.

Inside the school auditorium they were set upon by Olga Johansen, who had been busy setting up a long table with cakes and candies and drinks.

"Mr. Potter, and his lovely bride! I never expected to see you here," Olga said, then she handed Harry a large pie and directed him to place it down at the other end of the table.

“Isn't this wonderful, my dear? None of our schools celebrated Halloween like they do here,” she told to Hermione, while a teacher roped a bemused Harry into setting up some more chairs.

“It is surprising, Mrs. Johansen,” Hermione replied. “I grew up among muggles and they didn't celebrate Halloween with pageants and such. I know Harry never experienced it. But it's good to see all the children and they seem so happy and excited.”

Olga glanced around the auditorium. There were dozens of children running around, making happy noises. She smiled, seeing Harry bend over to listen to her Robert, who was explaining something to him in a very serious manner.

“Yes, it does us all good to see the children happy. This war, it is not a good thing for our children, hmm? So many are affected by it. So many nightmares,” Olga replied with a sad sigh.

Hermione's eyes widened for a moment. “Mrs. Johansen...”

“Please, call me Olga.”

Hermione nodded. “Olga, are your children having problems with nightmares?” she asked in a quiet tone.

“It's getting better. But you know they saw some very ugly things before they were brought here. And one of their own died before the rescue,” she replied sadly. “Then they come here and people have started to whisper. They may be my babies, but they hear the whispers and are frightened.”

Hermione started to move closer to Olga when a man rudely pushed between them to get at the table.

“I beg your pardon!” Hermione exclaimed angrily.

The man turned to look at the two women. He glanced at Olga and immediately dismissed her as a muggle. Then he glanced at Hermione.

“Well, either you're a muggle trying to pass as one of us or you're a muggle lover. Which one of these powerless brats are yours,” he sneered.

Olga's eyes flared at his dismissal and his rudeness to Hermione.

Hermione stepped forward, her expression disdainful.

Harry could feel her anger spilling through their bond and he moved to make his way through the crowd.

“And you're a worthless blood lover, just like most Death Eaters,” Hermione said scathingly. She watched the man carefully. She knew this was a dangerous encounter. Her instructors had taught her well, but the information they'd imparted didn't really click in, until now. She widened her stance and her body become loose, ready to move, ready to fight.

The man tensed suddenly, seeing someone approaching.

An older woman angrily moved in between the man and Hermione. “Mr. Amos! I've warned you about your views before. I won't warn you again!”

“I don't like teaching mudbloods!” Amos spat, pointing at Hermione and Olga.

“Mr. Amos, you're fired!” said the woman. A shocked hush fell over the crowd and they stepped back in surprise.

Amos looked at the woman, shocked. Then he faced Hermione again. “YOU! This is your fault!” he snarled.

Olga started to move forward, but a sudden grip on her shoulder stopped her. “Just watch,” Harry whispered to her.

The man reached for his wand, his face twisted in anger.

Hermione stepped forward and grabbed his wrist. She pivoted on one foot while exerting a downward force. A loud, sharp crack was heard throughout the now silent hall.

The man wailed and fell to his knees, cradling his broken wrist in his good hand. Hermione looked up from the now blubbering man to see many shocked faces staring at her.

Harry, however, looked on with an expression of pride and love. He knew she wouldn't allow a duel to occur in a room full of children, so she had done the logical thing. She had disarmed him as quickly and as efficiently as she could.

*“Excellently done, my love. You disarmed him with a minimum of fuss.”*

*“I... I... I just couldn't let him start casting in a room full of children.”*

*“I know. You did what you had to do and that's all that matters. You have nothing to be ashamed about.”*

Harry felt nothing over his bond, then slowly, grudging acceptance.

“Someone call the constables. I want to press charges,” moaned the man.

Harry stepped forward and crouched down on his knees so he could see eye to eye with the man.



Hi there. I'm Harry Potter. As for the two women you insulted, the older one is my friend, Olga, the younger one who broke your wrist is Hermione, my wife. The only reason why I didn't get directly involved is because I knew my wife could handle a bigot like you. Now, the really smart thing for you to do at this point is to start running. You see, while she dislikes bigots, I hate them with a passion," he said, conversationally.

Several people laughed loudly.

The man cringed away from Harry and looked around wildly. Seeing no supporters in the crowd around him, he surged to his feet and bolted for the door.

"Wait! I want to talk to you some more after the show!" Harry called. When the man didn't stop, he turned back to the crowd and shrugged, causing people to laugh harder.

The elderly woman approached Olga and Hermione. "Oh, dear. Now I need to find a new fourth grade teacher," she murmured, then she turned to Olga and Hermione. "Are you two alright?"

"It was a nasty scene, yes? But we're fine," Olga said, unconsciously patting Hermione's shoulder. Whether she was trying to comfort the younger woman or comfort herself with the action, no one was sure, but they were too polite to ask.

"I'm sorry about that. I had talked to Mr. Amos several times about his beliefs. Several of the Wizarding students had picked up his attitude and we can't have that," replied the woman.

"If he's teaching that garbage to children he doesn't deserve his job," Harry growled then moved to stand next to Hermione.

Olga glanced between the three of them. "Oh, my. Introductions! Where are my manners these days, hmm? Principal Sophie Grimlock, may I introduce you to Mr. Harry Potter and his wife, Hermione?" she said in a rush.

Principal Grimlock smiled widely. "Welcome to our school, Lord and Lady Potter. We're honored to have you visit."

When Harry grimaced, Hermione laughed. "Just Mr. And Mrs. Potter if you want to be formal, Principal Grimlock. Otherwise, Harry and Hermione would suit us just fine. Harry dislikes all the fancy names and titles, and I can't say I disagree with him about it."

Principal Grimlock blushed a bit. "I er.. see. Just the same, we're pleased you could make it for our pageant. It's about to start."

"It wasn't originally our plan, Principal Grimlock, but one of your first graders invited us to visit and see the pageant. Since we were both raised among muggles, we find ourselves woefully ignorant of our own traditions and customs on occasion," Harry said softly.

"Well, you're more than welcome. Come, let me show you to your seats," Grimlock said, becoming more business-like.

Harry and Hermione very quickly found themselves sitting in the front row next to Olga and several teachers. Someone dimmed the lights in the auditorium and many parents rushed to their seats. The lights dimmed a bit further and then a single spotlight came on, centering on the stage. The curtain was closed and Harry heard hushed whispers coming from behind it. Hermione slipped her hand into his and they both waited for something to happen.

A moment later, Principal Grimlock walked out onto the stage and stood in the spotlight.

"Parents, students, teachers and honored guests, I would like to welcome you all to our Halloween Pageant. As you all know, Halloween is one of our most sacred holidays, a day when the barrier between this life and the next is at its weakest. It's also the time to celebrate the changing of the seasons. Each country has their own rich traditions concerning the holiday, but all share a common story based around the Halloween Pageant, a day which united the Wizarding world.

"We are especially pleased to welcome among us tonight, Harry Potter and his lovely wife, Hermione, who are here at the invitation of Miss Finch's first grade class," said Principal Grimlock as she smiled down at the pair.

"*This is one of those occasions, Harry. Stand up, smile and wave at the people,*" Hermione sent him while everyone applauded. When he didn't move, she jabbed him in the ribs, smiling all the while.

Harry sent her a quick glare, then stood, blushing and waving at the crowd. He sat down quickly and refused to look anywhere but at the stage.

"And now, to start out tonight's show, I give you Miss Finch's first grade class and 'The Great Unification'," said the principal. Then she walked off the stage.

The curtain pulled back and a small girl walked onto the stage and into the spotlight, wearing the traditional witches costume, including the pointy hat. Several parents snapped photos and Hermione practically cooed, to Harry's great amusement.

"In the beginning, the world was at war!" the little girl intoned. "The dark creatures roamed the earth, attacking wizards and witches and eating them!"

The lights slowly came up on stage and Harry could see several ominous looking shapes moving around. As the lighting improved, the shapes resolved into Dragons and Manticores and other dark creatures.

"All the evil creatures were controlled by the Evil Toad King and his minions!" the girl said. On stage a dragon ate a wizard in a gory display of bad acting.

The monsters moved off to one side of the stage and wizards and witches moved to the clear side. They seemed to be attempting to grow something to eat in the poor dirt.

"Life was hard for wizards and witches. But a Seer saw an end to the war and a pair of heroes to save the wizards!"

The children playing wizards and witches suddenly looked very very happy, while another girl, dressed in a white robe, walked among them, smiling. Harry assumed she was the Seer.

"*This is so cute!*" Hermione sent, her thoughts bubbling.

"*Yeah and their parents are taking blackmail photos for when these kids bring home their first date,*" he replied dryly.

"*Oh, hush you. My parents never.... WHAT?*"

Harry winced at her shout. "*Ask your dad about the naked bath shots,*" he replied. Then he turned his attention back to the stage where the heroes, a man and a woman, were fighting the Toad King and his minions. The heroes had amassed a large army to kill the evil creatures.

He watched with interest as cardboard swords flashed in the lights and Toads, Dragons and good guys keeled over on the battlefield. Some of the good guys keeled over before they'd started to fight, so Harry assumed they died of magic.

"And the battle raged on with many dead peoples," said the little narrator.

Suddenly there was a bright flash of light and all the evil creatures and the evil Toad King fell to the ground. The wizard warriors raised their swords and cheered in victory.

"Evil was overcome! The wizards realized that they were stronger together as a people than apart. But the victory was not without cost. Our heroes had fallen, never to walk this earth again."

Suddenly, a bird hanging from a wire flew across the battlefield, singing a song. Harry thought it looked sort of like a Phoenix, with Eagle and Vulture thrown in for good measure. The bird sang a song and the battlefield filled with a thick smoke. When the smoke cleared, the battlefield had been altered, changed into a huge pumpkin patch.

"*Hermione, have you ever heard of this story?*" Harry asked.

"The mighty Phoenix gave homage to the fallen and changed their bodies into pumpkins..."

"*Pumpkins? Why is this sounding familiar now?*" Hermione sent back in amusement.

"*And why pumpkins? Isn't that rather ignominious? Die a hero, be resurrected as a pumpkin? And probably just in time for some kid to carve you to pieces,*" he said, clearly puzzled.

"*We better not tell Neville about the evil Toad King. He's liable to strangle Trevor!*"

Harry, trying to stifle his laughter, nearly choked.

The little witch walked into the center of the pumpkin patch. Behind her rose a huge pumpkin with a smiley face painted on it. It quickly became obvious that the children had made it. Meant to look reverent and proud, the pumpkin hovered in the air looking menacing and rather lopsided instead.

"Each year, on Halloween, the Great Pumpkin arises from his pumpkin patch in honor of our brave heroes who defeated the Toad King. The Great Pumpkin travels the world delivering candy and presents to all the good little witches and wizards..."

"*Hermione!*"

"*I don't believe it! It can't be.*"

"*But Hermione! It is!*"

"*No way, Harry. This has got to be some sort of joke the Americans pulled on the world.*"

"*Could it be real? Neither of us grew up with these legends,*" he replied.

"*Harry, if the Great Pumpkin was real, why didn't we get any presents or candy when we were growing up?*" she asked him. She was firmly against the idea and intended to use every shred of logic she could.

"*Did you ever trick or treat?*" he asked.

"*Of course not! Hello? Dentists for parents here, remember? Besides, what happened to your candy then?*" As soon as she thought it, she cringed and could have kicked herself. "*I'm sorry. I didn't mean...*" She sighed, heavily.

He reached out for her hand and gave it a small squeeze. "*No, it's alright. I wouldn't have known if I had gotten anything. The Dursleys would have seen to that. Still, it would have been nice,*" he replied wistfully

The pair clapped when the class lined up and bowed, but their minds were clearly elsewhere.

“Hermione?”

“Yes?” she replied, somewhat distracted.

“If this is real, could some of the other legends be real?”

“I don't know,” she said, a bit worriedly. She suddenly had a image in her mind of a jolly old fat man in a red suit and she shivered. *He can't be real, can he?* She asked herself.

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### Author's Notes:

“Awww do we have to?” asked Bob in a whiny tone.

“Yes dear, it's time for the Author's Notes,” replied Alyx patiently. She knew talking to Bob required a lot of patience. She shook her head and wondered why she bothered keeping him around any longer. But then, he did this thing with his tongue... no, we can't go there.

“Hi! It's time for the AUTHOR'S NOTES!” shouted Bob.

Alyx pressed the button marked “PLAY OMINOUS MUSIC”

The Wizengamot holds power over the ministry. No matter where it might be.

Please don't blame us for the incorrect spelling of obscure Romanian dishes. We stole the name from a website. Blame them instead.

Will we clean up the Dumbledore issue before the final battle? I don't know, I guess you'll read to find out.

Where do we get our inspiration? Well I have this old high school gym sock that has never been washed. It's nearly thirty years old at this point. Sniffing the sock induces a hypnotic state from which all things are possible. Next question.

No Fawkes will not be making an appearance in this tale. The Phoenix bit is so cliché at this point. Fawkes was working at the Disney World Tiki hut, but he was later captured by agents of Colonel Saunders. We don't know what happened afterwards, but I hear the BBQ was spectacular.

The other intelligent species in the forbidden forest were left to fend for themselves. Harry's big lesson from Sunset was that he couldn't save everyone. Nuf said!

AK, you're right Moose bites are dangerous. Especially when they are in heat. But I don't think we'll go there.

Unfortunately our budget didn't allow for the technicolor penguins.

We honestly don't know why people thought the last chapter was a cliffy, but we're happy it annoyed so many people. And for those that thought we'd send Harry and Crookshanks to Diagon Alley... HAHAAHAHAHAHAHA! FOOL ON YOU! All the clues were in that last section saying exactly where he'd go.

Tina, a boffin is what an English friend of mine used to call the people in the research division. Also from what I understand a boffin is a sixteen legged arachnoid like creature native to Tau Epsilon five. It's bite is poisonous and should be avoided in the mating season.

For those complaining that we didn't put Jeconais' This Means War on our updateless list, let me explain why we didn't.

Jeconais owns this webserver. If I make him mad he may beat me up.

He has been updating other things, so he's really not eligible for the list.

And finally enough people have complained apparently because I've heard from an inside source that he is considering an update.

The Wizengamot is going to be a running plot for quite a number of chapters to come. It's integral to the overall plot line so get used to seeing it. There will come a confrontation with the Wizengamot and Harry, but not until they've pushed him to the limit.

BREATHE ROBERT! BREATHE!

Apr911 you'll get your wish with this chapter.

The King is Charles. Camilla was accidentally mistaken for a horse and shot for food two months after the fall of Britain.

Dumbledore getting double crossed? Nah.... we aren't going to say. That particular thread is still playing out.

*Bobmin*  
*FanficAuthors.net*

# Sunrise Over Britain

## Chapter 18 - Whispers in the dark

### Standard Disclaimer:

Fred and George stepped out onto the stage and approached the podium.

“Ladies and gentleman, presenting the Amazing Weasley Brothers!” said a typical TV narrator's voice.

The two men looked out at the packed audience in confusion. Behind them a line of dancing technicolor penguins wearing tutus, high kicked their way onto the stage carrying hockey sticks.

Fred looked at the teleprompter, then elbowed George, who had been staring at the penguins in shock.

“Oh, right. The award for the best standard disclaimer is given annually to the fan fiction author or authors who manage to convey the idea that they are not JK Rowlings, and that they don't own Harry Potter or the rights to the Harry Potter universe,” George said.

Behind him the penguins were dancing in a frenzy.

“That's not what you told that girl last night, George,” quipped Fred.

“OY! Shut it, you. We're live!” muttered George angrily. “Just read the nominees, will you?”

“I can't. The envelope won't open,” Fred shot back.

“Well, you're a wizard, aren't you? Use your wand!” George said, then he smiled nervously for the camera. The number of penguins behind them had tripled in only a few short moments and he was getting worried.

Fred waved his wand at the envelope and it transformed into a huge fish. The twins stared at it in confusion for a moment.

The sound of dancing birds stopped for a moment, then was replaced by a rumbling sound.

“PENGUINS!!!” shouted Fred as the hockey stick carrying penguins clubbed him to the ground, trying to get to the fish.

Behind the stage curtain, Amy giggled insanely, never noticing the penguins sneaking up behind her.

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### Sunrise Over Britain

#### Chapter 18

#### Padfoot Manor (November 1st)...

Harry and Draco helped Neville into his bedroom and onto the bed. Behind them walked a silent Ginny, whose eye was just beginning to darken and swell. Neville rolled on the mattress and groaned. They'd been sparring and Neville had landed a good shot, resulting in Ginny's black eye. According to the rules, they were supposed to back off and see that a medic looked over the eye. But something had gone wrong. Neville had relaxed and started to back away when Ginny retaliated with a kick to his groin. That kick, well, his scream really, had alerted the medic.

To their joint dismay, Harry allowed the medic to look both of them over, but wouldn't allow the medic to heal either of them. He had been watching the two of them spar and he was angry at what he saw.

Ginny walked over to the bed, looking suitably contrite. She moved to help Neville when Harry stopped her.

“I want to know exactly what went on out there today,” he said. His expression was thunderous, his body tense and his eyes shined with suppressed magic. He was angry and it was clearly obvious.

Neville sat up painfully on the bed and Harry shot him a concerned glance but said nothing.

“Harry... I...”

“No, Nev. It was my fault, really,” whispered Ginny, her eyes glistening with tears. “I suppose we shouldn't have been sparring today. We were fighting while we were mad at each other.”

“I wasn't mad, Ginny. I was just frustrated by your refusal,” Neville shot back a bit forcefully, then he looked ashamed with himself.

“*Now we're starting to get somewhere,*” Hermione sent him.

“*Indeed.*”

“Refusal? So you two were fighting and you decided to take it to the sparring mat? Neville...”

Neville winced hearing the reproach in Harry's voice.

Ginny's eyes flashed angrily. "Don't you blame it all on Neville..."

"I don't," Harry said icily. His glare froze her in place for a moment before she shrank away, unsure of herself.

"We're preparing for a mission where thousands of lives are depending on us and you two are having a marital spat on the training floor? I have half a mind to cut you both and send you back to basic for refresher training," he told them scathingly. Facing Ginny once more, he pointed to the bed. "Sit!"

Ginny scrambled onto the bed next to Neville. The two looked up at him uncertainly. Despite the pain he was in, Neville put a protective arm around her.

"I want to know what was so important that you'd tried to cripple your husband, Ginny."

Ginny shrunk back.

"Harry, mate, that's not entirely fair," protested Neville.

"No it isn't! You're trained better than she is. You of all people should have known better! Now, obviously this little fight was important enough to both of you that you let it affect your work. Therefore, I think I have a right to know what it's all about."

Neville looked at Ginny. When she nodded at him, he turned to look at Harry. "She felt something, mate. I've been trying to get her to talk to you about it. That was why we were fighting."

"You felt something?" Harry asked her, a bit confused. "What kind of something?"

"Something bad has come into Haven. It's almost like when the sun goes behind a cloud, leaving an area in shadow. It's something really bad, but I can't locate it and it's frustrating! I didn't want to tell you about it because I can't give you any real information," Ginny said with a sob.

Harry exchanged a glance with the others, then conjured a few chairs and motioned for everyone to sit.

"Ginny, your gift... your ability to sense dark magic is vital to us. Maybe you can't tell us what and where, but even a bit of a warning is better than none at all," Harry said.

"It's true, Ginny. I can start my people and O'Dalley's looking for changes over the last few days, maybe see if we can pin something down," Draco commented.

"Ginny? Is it a person or an object? Can you tell that much?" Harry asked, pressing her.

Ginny closed her eyes and concentrated on the feeling. "It feels evil. I don't think it's alive, but there is a consciousness about it, twisted, malignant and evil." She shivered and opened her eyes.

"It's a start," murmured Draco as he stood. "I had better get over to the Ministry and talk with O'Dalley. The only recent change I'm aware of is when they broke ground for your factory, Harry. Maybe it came in then."

Harry nodded and watched him leave the room, then he looked back at Ginny and Neville, frowning.

"I'm not happy about you holding back like this, Ginny. You need to learn to trust your feelings. We'll run with the information you've given us and see what happens," he said, then he stood and banished his chair.

Reaching into his pockets he pulled out two small pots. He handed one to Ginny and one to Neville.

"The salve in the pots will heal your injuries. Ginny's salve will heal Neville and Neville's will heal Ginny. It's only fitting that since you caused the injuries, you should each heal the other. I'd suggest doing Ginny first, Nev," he said, unable to suppress a smirk.

Harry turned to Hermione and offered her an hand up. She took his hand and they walked from the room.

"*You know what Ginny applying the salve to Neville's injury will result in, don't you?*" she sent.

"*Yes, I know. It's called make-up-sex. Besides, it will stop their fighting, at least for a little while.*"

"*When did you get so wise?*"

"*It's not wisdom,*" he sent back to her with a laugh. "*If we'd been fighting, I'd want to end it by making wild passionate love to you, too.*"

Hermione laughed and gently hugged his arm before leaving him standing in the hallway.

"I meant it," he called after her. Then he shrugged his shoulders and apparated to his office.

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**Johansen's Farmhouse...**

Olga had just closed the door to the toddlers bedroom room when she heard the knock at the front door. With a frown, she rushed to answer it, hoping it didn't wake the little ones. They'd had problems sleeping the last several days due to the talk of the older children, and she was at a loss as to how to sooth their fears.

Pulling the door open, her frown became a smile. "Melinda! Come in, my dear girl," she invited, stepping back from the door and waving the younger woman in.

"Good afternoon, Olga. I hope I didn't catch you at a bad time," Melinda said as she entered the house and closed the door behind her.

"Oh, no. I just put the younger children down for a nap. Little Linda is having such a terrible time sleeping. All the younger children have been. But come. We can talk in the kitchen, hmm?"

Leading the way, Olga soon had her guest seated and served tea and cake. Sitting back on her chair, she smiled. "What brings you by today?"

"The children, actually," Melinda told her as she put her cup down on the table. "The older children have had their inoculations, what with school starting and all. But the younger children still need theirs."

Olga grimaced. "Oh, they won't like that. I wish I had known you were stopping by today. I would have held off on their naps for awhile."

"It's alright. I have time. You said something about the children having a hard time sleeping? I thought the nightmares were getting better?" Melinda asked, concerned.

"They were. But these are new, and not the same thing. The older children, they carry tales, you see? They hear things in the village, then come home and tell the young ones what was said. The old nightmares, I was able to reassure, to sooth, yes? But this new situation? I find myself lost and unsure how to help them. How can I, when I don't understand myself?"

"What situation? Olga, what are the older children saying?"

"Oh, they come home from school with all sorts of stories. Usually the young ones are entertained. But lately, these new stories are different, and a bit frightening, even for the children telling the tales. Oh, I am rambling, yes? I am sorry, Melinda, but this is all very confusing and alarming."

"Take your time," Melinda told her gently.

"Yes, well. Mark came home from school several weeks ago and told everyone that he'd learned that living among 'muggles' would drain his magic from him. Sven and I were able to wave that away by pointing out our son, Johan, who is even now going to the Haven School as a wizard. Mark was relieved to hear it. But since then, the stories he and the other children have come home with have gotten worse."

"Worse?"

"Yes. Someone is telling our children loathsome things, Melinda. Things no child should have to hear. They are being told that Sven and I will hurt them, that we hate them and are jealous of their power, and that..." She trailed off, to choked up to speak.

Melinda stood up and rushed around the table to Olga. Kneeling down, she reached for the older woman's hands, offering comfort.

Olga squeezed Melinda's hands, then looked into her eyes. "The children are being told that we hurt their real parents, that we took them because we want their magic. They've been told that if they don't protect themselves from us, we will make them disappear, like we did their real parents. Oh, I don't know what to do!"

Melinda wrapped her in a hug and scowled. Who would say such things to children? *But then, it's not just the children being hurt by this*, she thought.

"I know where we can start," Melinda told her as she leaned away and look at the tearful woman. Rummaging through her pockets, she pulled out a handkerchief and offered it to Olga.

While the woman dried her tears, Melinda stood up. "Dilly?" she called.

A small elf appeared with a quiet pop, and smiled. "You did call for me, Miss? What can Dilly be doing for you?"

"Would you bring Arthur Weasley here for me? He should be at the Ministry building."

"Oh, I don't think we should be bothering him," Olga protested.

"Hush now," Melinda told her. "He'll want to know about this." She turned back to the elf, who was bouncing from foot to foot.

"Dilly will be bringing him, Miss. And Dilly will be quick, too!"

She vanished before Melinda could thank her.

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### Department of Magical Relations, Deputy Minister's office...

Arthur looked up when he heard a small popping sound. Glancing around, he saw nothing and shrugged in annoyance. He had stacks of paperwork to get through and did not wish to be disturbed.

"Mister Minister must come with Dilly now," a little voice piped up.

Startled, Arthur looked up once more, but saw no one. "What the devil?" he muttered, tossing down his quill. "Dilly?" He stood up and saw the elf.

"Yes, Mister Minister. You must be coming with Dilly now," the little elf said as she walked around his desk.

"Dilly, I'm very busy at the moment. What is this about?" he demanded. Sitting down once more, he scowled at the creature.

She frowned back at him. "Miss says you must come. Miss sent Dilly to fetch you, so Dilly is here."

"Miss? Do you mean Melinda?"

"Yes, Dilly's Miss is known by that name."

"Is there something wrong? Is she hurt?" he asked, alarmed.

"No, Miss is not hurt. But she did tell Dilly that Dilly must bring Mister Minister to her," the elf told him, now shifting from foot to foot.

He thought she was nervous.

She thought he was wasting time.

"Alright, Dilly. Tell Melinda I'll stop by after work."

"No! Miss did tell Dilly to bring Mister Minister to her. Dilly likes Miss and will do as Miss said!" Then, reaching out her hand, she grabbed Arthur's arm and disappeared, dragging him along for the ride.

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### **Johansen's Farm House, moments later...**

The small popping sound of Dilly's arrival was nearly drowned out by the shout that came with it. Dilly appeared with Arthur, her hand still wrapped around his arm. Unfortunately for Arthur, he had been seated when Dilly had grabbed him, but she hadn't taken his chair with them.

Landing on his ass in the middle of Olga Johansen's kitchen, he looked around and spotted Melinda. "What the hell is going on here?" he growled, then turned to glare at the elf responsible for his current undignified position.

The elf in question stomped her foot in annoyance. "Dilly *told* you! Miss wanted you to come here, and told Dilly to fetch you."

"Melinda?" he asked, swiveling his head around to look at her. "What is this all about?"

Melinda bit her lip. "Oh, dear. I did tell her to bring you here, Arthur. I'm afraid she took me quite literally. I should have told her to ask you to come here. I'll remember that in the future."

"I should think so!" he exclaimed.

Another popping sound was heard in the kitchen, and Dobby appeared. He scowled furiously at Dilly. "You do be knowing better than to drag a wizard away from his work!" he told her angrily.

"Miss did tell Dilly to get him," Dilly protested, yanking on her ears in frustration. "Dilly do be a good elf. Dilly does what Dilly is told!"

"Dilly does not be bonded to Miss," Dobby said. "Dilly shoulds be knowing better." He trotted to Arthur and tried to help him to his feet.

Olga sat at the table, mesmerized. She'd had little experience with house elves, and found the whole situation disturbing, yet rather comical.

"Dobby," Melinda cut in, "she was doing me a favor. Dilly is my friend. It was my fault, not hers. I should have worded my request differently."

Dobby's eyes widened and he let go of Arthur's arm, sending the man crashing back to the floor with a curse.

Dilly turned to Melinda, her eyes tearing. "Miss be Dilly's friend?"

Melinda rushed to her side and knelt down. "Of course I am. How could you doubt it?" She turned to Dobby then. "Please don't be angry with her. This was all my fault, really."

Dilly looked at Dobby. "Now does Dobby be understanding? Dilly did say that Miss was like Dobby's Harry Potter."

At Dobby's stunned nod, she turned back to Melinda. Placing her small hand under Melinda's chin, she raised her head up so she could meet the woman's eyes.

"Oh, Merlin's balls!" Arthur laughed when he realized what was happening.

Melinda's eyes widened as she felt the subtle connection being made. "Dilly, what..."

Dilly clapped her hands joyously, then launched herself at Melinda, wrapping her arms around the witch's neck and hugging her. "Dilly did be



thinking that Mistress had a kind heart! Now Dilly does be knowing. Dilly can feel it!" She pulled away then, and beamed. "Dilly will be going home to make dinner for Mistress to take to work so that Mistress need not eat nasty, vile slop at hospital."

She rushed over and hugged Dobby, then danced away. Laughing musically, she disappeared with a small pop.

"Oh, bullocks," Melinda murmured, a bit dazed. "What just happened, Arthur? For Merlin's sake, stop laughing."

"Dilly be bound to yous now, Miss," Dobby told her over Arthur's laughter. "Dilly dids say that she likes Miss and thought Miss be kind."

"Bound? Wait, are you saying Dilly's *my* house elf now?" she asked, shocked.

"Yes, Miss. Yous did say Dilly was yous friend," the elf reminded her.

Arthur laughed harder and pointed a finger at Melinda. "I t-t-told you," he sputtered.

Fists on her hips, she glared down at him. "Told me what?" she demanded.

"About the hope that the elves would take a more aggressive role in the bonding," he chuckled, pushing himself up straighter. "You've just experienced it, first hand."

"Yes, but I didn't ask her to bond with me!" she told him in frustration.

"But yous did!" Dobby protested, looking agitated. "Yous told Dilly that yous was her friend."

Melinda whirled to face him, then frowned in thought. "Well, yes, I did. But how does one go from being a friend to being a a... 'Mistress'?"

"All elves be knowing it be better to bond to a friend," Dobby told her. His expression said this should have been obvious.

She closed her eyes, grit her teeth and took a deep breath. "Yes, I can see that. Thank you for correcting me, Dobby." Opening her eyes, she glared at Arthur. "Oh, do stop laughing! And get up off the floor, you lazy man," she muttered.

When Dobby rushed over and helped Arthur to his feet, Olga shook her head and stood up.

"This is all very confusing, yes?" she asked her guests. "Sit, sir. Sit down. I'll get you a cup of tea."

"I's be going back to the manor now," Dobby told them. When they nodded, he frowned one more time at Melinda, then popped away.

"Merlin! I just wanted to be her friend," Melinda said as she fell back into her chair. "I didn't want her to bond with me."

"You can free her," Arthur told her as he sat down. He smiled at Olga when she placed a cup of tea in front of him. "But you'll break her heart if you do."

"I don't want to hurt her. And I do appreciate her help at home. It's just..." She shrugged helplessly. "I never thought I'd have an elf."

"They are useful creatures," Olga commented as she sat back down. "And they seem to enjoy their work."

"Most elves do," Arthur said, "if they like those they serve. If they truly care, however, the relationship can be quite extraordinary. Just look at Dobby and Harry, for example."

Olga, who didn't know Dobby very well, sipped her tea and remained quiet. Melinda nodded. She understood what Arthur was saying.

"Now, ladies, unless you wanted me here to witness Melinda's bonding, what can I do for you?" Arthur asked, looking between the women.

"I am sorry about that, Arthur, but this is something you need to know about," Melinda said, then went on to repeat Olga's tale.

When she was through, Arthur turned to Olga and frowned. "How long has this been going on?"

"A few weeks. But the stories the children are bringing home are getting worse. Sven and I have told the older children not to tell such tales to the youngsters, but I think they believe we are trying to hide the truth. They tell the babies anyway and their nightmares are getting worse. Sven and I do not know how to combat such things. We don't know where these things are coming from or how to fight such loathsome tales!" Olga began to weep then. Her children meant everything to her, but she didn't know how to protect them from this.

"This is the first I've heard of it," Arthur said, scowling. "There's always been a muggle bias among some elements of wizarding society, but I'd hoped it had been pushed aside in the face of a common enemy. Naive of me, I realize now."

"Something must be done, Arthur," Melinda said quietly. "The children are having nightmares about this and have become afraid of their own parents."

"Something will be done," he replied firmly. "I'll speak to the Minister and O'Dalley, as I'm sure they're unaware of the situation. In the meantime," he said, turning back to Olga, "I want you to call on me if anything else happens. We'll figure this out, Olga. I promise."

## Wizengamot Building, Office of Amhar Coeur de Lion...

"Councilor," Amhar said icily, staring at the woman standing in the doorway.

"Councilor," replied Agatha Umbridge in an equally icy tone.

"So, what can I do for you? I am, after all, a busy man," Amhar said pompously.

"I'm here bearing a message Councilor," Agatha said. Her tone was both soothing and slightly chiding.

"Oh? What might that be?"

"We are aware that you have spoken with Mr. Amos about his recent firing and the incident involving Lady Potter. It would be against your interests to follow up on the matter," Agatha told him smoothly.

"Do not presume to threaten me, Councilor. That mudblood injured a respected member of the community!" Amhar exclaimed, standing from his chair and leaning over his desk.

"That respected member was fired with cause, Councilor, by his own immediate superior. Then he attempted to draw a wand in a room full of school children. We have the statements of fifteen sets of parents, as well as offers of their Pensieve memories of the event. Further, I will remind you that we are not on our home soil. What happened took place on land owned by Lord Potter and is covered under the laws of our host, the Irish Ministry of Magic, who have already investigated the matter and consider it closed."

"That mudblood insulted a respected pureblood!"

"That mudblood, as you call her, happens to be married to the man who pays your salary! Now, unless you want Lord Potter to call in his marker and bankrupt the Wizengamot, you'll let this pass!"

Amhar growled and sat back heavily on his chair, staring at Agatha. She had a point he couldn't argue against. In his deal to fund the Wizengamot, Potter had set up the money under the control of a trust fund with himself as chief trustee. He personally authorized the monthly salary payments from the fund and it was within his rights as the chief trustee to withhold funds if he deemed it necessary.

"Councilor, the Ministry is aware of your dislike for Lord Potter, but like it or not, he has personally built Haven from his own funds, and on his own lands. We are guests here. This is not Britain. This is not Diagon Alley, nor your estates in Essex. We are on foreign soil and most of us are trying to help the Ministry so we can go home. Your actions might, in some circles, seem treasonous," Agatha told him quietly, her eyes narrowed.

Amhar's fists clenched in anger. He knew this warning wasn't coming directly from the Potters, and that angered him even further. If there was one thing he couldn't stand, it was to be ignored, and Harry Potter continued to ignore him as if he were a non-entity, unworthy of notice. That the warning had to come from the Ministry rankled him. He'd find a way for both the Ministry and Potter to pay for this further insult.

He took a few calming breaths. It was too soon, too early for revenge, and he couldn't do anything until there were more sympathetic members of the Wizengamot.

"Very well, Councilor, I will overlook this matter. After all, it is rather trivial. Who among us really cares about the job of a school teacher? Besides, I have committee business to occupy me as you are aware," Amhar said in a smooth voice.

"Yes, I am and believe me, I do understand," Agatha said, her eyes widening. Amhar's offer was a subtle one. He'd back off on Hermione if they'd stop fighting him over the chair for the committee. She didn't want to give up the chair to him. However, aggravating Harry by bringing charges against his wife would surely bode ill for everyone.

Amhar smiled and Agatha felt the need to bathe. His smile seemed tainted, his casual discarding of Amos, slimy. Here was a man who would allow nothing to stand in the way of his climb to power.

The two councilors talked for a few more minutes before Agatha made her excuses. Frankly, she couldn't really blame Lady Potter, although she was surprised that someone as intelligent as Hermione could resort to violence so easily. The simple fact was, Lady Potter had prevented what could have been a disaster. Her actions were legal, but only barely. And because of that, Amhar was able to blackmail a position of authority for himself. He could have tied the Potters up for months in judicial hearings.

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## Hogwarts Castle...

"Master, Lucius is here to see you," uttered a Death Eater.

"I will see him immediately," Voldemort hissed.

Despite his scarring, Lucius Malfoy walked proudly into the Great Hall. He was one of a handful of wizards who had the ear of Voldemort. One of the few wizards whom the Dark Lord trusted, as much as he trusted any wizard.

He walked up to Voldemort's throne and bowed deeply. "Thank you for seeing me, Master," Lucius said.

"Well? What news have you for me?"

"Several items of interest, my Lord. First, we have developed a source of information inside the British Ministry of Magic in Ireland. It seems that a

child of one of your servants is now working as a student volunteer inside the Ministry," Lucius paused to glance at Voldemort.

"Those fools will trust anyone! Tell me, what has this child discovered?"

"She has managed to pass us some interesting information. According to her, the Saudi Arabian and the Egyptian Ministries have sent Aurors to aid the British Ministry."

"WHAT?" roared Voldemort. He pounded his fist against his throne. "I thought the Blood Jihad was supposed to be keeping the Mid-East from aiding Britain?"

Lucius looked down at his feet for a moment. "Yes, well, it seems that the Blood Jihad was doing more than that, my Lord. We had turned down their last request for funding. As a result, they concocted a wild scheme to raise money by robbing the Library at Alexandria. Their plot was discovered, their top leaders captured and most of their membership scattered."

"So how many Middle Eastern countries have offered aid to the British?" Voldemort asked in a deceptively calm tone.

"I am aware of Egypt and Saudi Arabia, my lord. However, there are rumors of offers of aid and monies from four other countries," Lucius reported. He knew he was on thin ice and that Voldemort's temper could explode at any minute. He was grateful that the Dark Lord didn't ask how the Blood Jihad's plot was foiled. The last thing he needed to hear was that his allies had been destroyed by Harry Potter, again.

"What of the continent?" snapped Voldemort.

Lucius smiled. This was a different matter entirely. "Ah, things on the continent are going better than anticipated. The French are not actively cooperating with the British. One could say that France is ambivalent to Britain's plight. According to my sources, the French would have been a bit more active against Britain, but the Americans stepped on them quite firmly. Several Ministries have sent token forces of less than a hundred Aurors. I think most are keeping their forces for when we break out of Britain."

"You sound very sure of yourself, Lucius."

Lucius bowed deeply. "Not of myself, my Lord, but I am sure of you. Potter's ward will not hold you forever."

Voldemort smiled briefly. "So what do you think of your new source of information?"

"I am inclined to trust it for the moment, my Lord. We have verified what she is telling us via other sources. That implies she has access to good information. My primary concern is that she is just a child," replied Lucius.

"Yes, there is that." Voldemort eyes narrowed in thought for a moment. "Send word to her that we are pleased, but that she should do nothing that will endanger her position. I do not want her caught due to some teenage fit of recklessness. She will be amply rewarded for her loyalty when the time comes. Remind her that she is not alone. She is not the only source I have in Haven."

Lucius was surprised, though he did his best not to show it. Voldemort admitting he had someone, perhaps more than one person, working for him inside Haven?

"What else does our little spy have to say about Haven?"

"She reports that the Wizengamot has reconvened and is giving the Ministry considerable difficulty. The opposition to the war is centering around several of the pure blooded members who refused to join our side and were sent to Azkaban for their impertinence. She doesn't go into a lot of detail because the Council is barely operating."

Voldemort rubbed his hands together. "Excellent. Perhaps it might be to our advantage to get a hold of some of our Irish friends and see if they can help the opposition in some way."

"I will see to it, my Lord. Our control of the continental drug cartel is solid. We can afford to throw some galleons at them," Lucius replied.

"What other news have you for me?"

"My lord, I am hesitant to bring this issue up, but Mulciber has drained me of my Wizarding forces. I now have barely enough men to control the muggle army. As a result of this action on his part, I have lost the large force of muggles I had sent north to reinforce Inverness. I am unable to send a Wizarding force, as I lack any to send. Any additional muggle forces I send would be attacked by the Muggle navies now blockading our country."

Lucius cringed and waited for Voldemort to explode, but it never came.

"Send for Mulciber," he said. One of the Death Eaters standing nearby ran from the room.

Lucius moved to one side to await the arrival of his rival. Voldemort sat quietly, contemplating the situation and caressing Nagini, who lay next to his throne.

Mulciber hurriedly entered the Great Hall. He paled when he saw Lucius' smirk and increased his pace to Voldemort. He had been ignoring Lucius' demands that he return his men to him and Lucius had apparently done the unthinkable and taken the problem to the Dark Lord!

Mulciber bowed deeply. "You sent for me, my Lord?"

"Ah, Mulciber. Why have you taken most of Lucius' wizards?" Voldemort asked in deceptively mild tone.

"Training, my Lord. After Azkaban I decided our forces needed to know how to fight better," Mulciber replied.

"And are they now trained?"

"Mostly, my Lord. Lucius has not seen fit to send me the rest of his forces. He has refused outright," he said, glaring at Lucius.

"I see," the Dark Lord replied. As Mulciber's eyes lit with triumph, Voldemort pointed his wand at the man. "*Crucio*," he said softly.

Mulciber collapsed on the floor, writhing and screaming in agony. Voldemort stood and walked around the man who shrieked and flailed about on the floor, keeping the curse on him.

"Do not presume to second guess me or my designs, Mulciber. I gave Lucius those men to help him maintain control over the muggles and you have seriously weakened that control. Because of you and your jealousy, he now struggles to hold that which he won in my name," the Dark Lord thundered. He then lifted the curse and watched as the man continued to spasm and twitch.

"You should have come to me to approve any training, Mulciber. You should not have weakened Lucius' position. I expect you to return the bulk of his men to him by tonight. And Lucius? Training is a good idea. When you receive your men back, release those who have not undergone the training to Mulciber. He will return them to you when he has finished with them."

Lucius bowed. "It will be as you command, my Lord."

Lucius smiled to himself, having escaped the Great Hall in one piece. Mulciber, on the other hand, would require several days to fully recover from the day's audience.

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### South of Inverness Scotland (Nov 2nd)...

McHardy collapsed the portable antenna and stowed it in the carrying case. *The radio's what they described as man portable, meaning it takes one man most of his strength to lug it around*, he thought wryly.

Since the tenth of last month his outfit had been steadily resupplied as they hid out in this location. While still a fraction of it's normal strength, the unit was now two hundred strong, having absorbed the Royal Marines who had been air dropped, as well as several other remnant units that had gone covert when the government fell.

"Well, Laddie, do you believe me now?" asked Moody.

McHardy eyed the strange, peg legged man who seemed to have capabilities beyond his understanding and nodded. Moody had single handedly delivered tons of weapons, food and other equipment until the underground storage rooms were overflowing with needed supplies.

"I reckon I'll have to believe you, Mr. Moody. Now, if I understand you properly, these twenty men you're going to bring with you will have the same abilities as those black robed men helping the rebel government," McHardy said warily. This was something he didn't understand, but he was told quite firmly by his own command not to question these men too deeply.

"That's true, lad, but don't be frightened of them. They are like you and I, citizens of the United Kingdom," Moody replied, then glanced over his shoulder towards the tree-line.

He sat with McHardy in the middle of a field. Nearby, four of McHardy's men lay in the autumn grass, their weapons pointed outwards. They were guarding their commander and the entrance to the abandoned underground base they had taken over.

The base, an old RAF station left over from World War II, had a large underground storage facility. The runways had long since been torn up and the underground bunkers emptied, but an access point to the underground bunkers remained, and that was what they were guarding.

Moody signaled and the twenty men left the tree-line, causing the men on guard to tense.

The nineteen Aurors and one Healer had been men Moody had found hiding in southern England. Each had been sent to Ireland and asked if they would volunteer to come back and help to spread the underground movement. Each man had lost family to Voldemort and had readily volunteered.

"At ease," hissed McHardy. "They're on our side."

Moody nodded satisfactorily at the men who cautiously made their way to him.

"Colonel McHardy, meet Mathias Thrawkmort, commander of your 'helpers'," Moody said.

McHardy nodded briefly to Thrawkmort. The man wore a strange combat uniform with the Union Jack on one arm and a patch with a crossed wand and sword overlaid atop a Celtic cross on the other. There was no rank insignia anywhere on his uniform or on the uniforms of his men.

Moody decided to take pity on McHardy. "Laddie, it's real easy. Before you plan any raids or attacks, just ask Thrawkmort what they can do to help. Then you'll be able to plan accordingly."

McHardy nodded. Moody had helped him and his men a great deal. He didn't understand the man or his abilities, but he trusted him implicitly.

Moody clapped him on his shoulder. "Good lad! Well, times a wasting and I need to be going. I'll see you again in a week. Keep to your contact

schedule. Times are changing, lad, and we're the ones doing the changing."

McHardy smiled and turned to give the order to open the entrance to the base. When he turned back, Moody was gone.

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### **Hogwarts Castle, Snape's Potion Lab...**

As the young girl's screams rose in pitch, Snape smiled darkly. He'd known twenty minutes ago that this wouldn't work. The test subject showed all the same signs as the failures who came before her. But there was no reason he should not get pleasure out of the experience, and her screams were, after all, quite exquisite.

"Girl! Get in here!" he yelled to his slave.

An obviously emaciated young woman scurried into the dungeon and flinched at the sight before her. Another young woman from the slave pens was being tested, and the result looked to be as horrific as the first.

"Yes, sir? What can this girl do for you?" she asked as she dropped to her knees in front of Snape, doing her best to ignore the screeching from the test subject.

Snape backhanded her, hard. He nodded in satisfaction when she simply sat back up and watched him carefully.

She didn't bother to wipe away the blood that now trickled from her split lip. She'd learned her lesson well.

He looked away from her and smiled darkly when the test subject, bound in chains and suspended from the ceiling, began to thrash about wildly. "The end is near. You know your duty," he commanded the kneeling woman.

Trying very hard not to grimace, she reached out, unzipped his pants and murmured, "Yes, sir."

Five minutes later, as the test subject screamed in horror and felt her soul dissolve from her body as it was forcefully ejected, Snape groaned in pleasure. After one final thrust, he pushed the girl at his feet way and tucked himself back into his pants.

"Adequate," he murmured, his eyes still on the now dead woman. "I would have thought you'd be better at this by now." He looked down at her then, and smiled when he saw the shame bloom in her eyes.

"Clean up this mess," he ordered, waving at the test subject, "before the stench becomes unbearable." Then he strode from the room, muttering to himself about his research.

The woman turned then, still on her knees, and studied the woman hanging from the ceiling. It was becoming harder for her to recognize the test subjects as individual women, as there had been so many sacrificed in such a way.

Oh, he didn't think she knew what he was doing, but he was wrong. She knew he was trying to find a way around the limitations that monstrous ritual imposed. He tested his theories on the woman of the slave pens, leaving her to clean up his failures. As if that weren't enough, he took pleasure in their horror, their pain, and he took his pleasure with her.

She spit on the floor then, trying to remove his foul taste from her mouth. Standing, she thrust her shoulders back and marched towards the dead woman.

Everyone had a breaking point, and when hers came, he would pay. They would all pay!

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### **Haven Operations Center Briefing Theater...**

"ATTENSHUN!"

Caleb shook his head and walked out onto the stage to the small podium. "Sit," he said, as he looked up at the men and women crowded into the darkened theater. Over seven hundred people were jammed into the little theater. Many were standing in the back, as there weren't enough seats.

He gestured with his wand and an aerial photograph appeared behind him on the wall. "I will try to keep this brief so the folks in the back don't have to stand too long. Your unit commanders will provide more detailed briefs as the training progresses.

"Behind me is an aerial shot of Leeds, one of two principle camps maintained by Voldemort and used exclusively for housing Wizards. Leeds is also a family camp. You will find men, women and children in these camps. And make no mistake, ladies and gentlemen, the conditions in these camps are even more brutal than those we found at Azkaban.

"We have three primary objectives. First, to hit the camp and overwhelm the guard force stationed around it. Second, to evacuate all civilians from the camp, by force if necessary. And finally, to hold the camp and bloody the noses of any reinforcing wizards who might arrive to help fight us off. After we've bloodied their noses, we'll give them back their precious camp, empty of prisoners."

Caleb looked up when he heard the mass rustling of the crowd. He gestured again with his wand and the image changed. The photo became greatly enlarged and specific areas were now labeled.

"The camp is surrounded by a concrete wall twelve feet high with concertina wire embedded in the top. There are four guard towers, usually

manned by four wizards. Each tower is at a corner of the camp. Notice there are two entrances, the northern most entrance and an eastern one..."

Caleb paused and his expression darkened. "The eastern entrance leads to a mass grave before hitting the main road leading into Leeds.

"The two large buildings just outside of the northern gates are guard barracks. We estimate a force in excess of two hundred guards for this camp. Elf scouts report there are usually as many as fifty guards inside the camp at any given point in time. Add to that a group of Dementors housed in this building here," he said, pointing to a building inside the camp.

"Inside the camp there are four rows of five blockhouses each. If our scouts are right, we could be seeing at least eighty people per blockhouse. That's a total of two thousand prisoners in this camp.

"The camp is warded against portkeys and apparation. We will have to come in away from the camps and their wards and assault them from the outside.

"At the same time this attack is occurring, another will take place at the camp in Wilmslow. The nearest large British Army presence capable of interfering is in Manchester. The muggles have promised that they will handle the British Army."

Caleb waited while copies of the photos were handed out to everyone, along with parchments outlining the mission in greater detail.

"Your unit commanders will give you more detailed briefings as we approach the time of the attack. In the meantime, we'll start training on a full sized mock-up of the camp. All unit commanders are to take a complete inventory of your equipment and draw from supply, if needed."

Caleb nodded to the sergeant, then he turned and walked off the stage.

"BRIGADE! ATTUNSHUN!"

Harry waited until Caleb had left the room before turning to Hermione. "Have the company commanders report to my office at twelve hundred tomorrow to begin fleshing this out," he told her quietly.

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### **Padfoot Manor (Nov 3rd)...**

Hermione reached out and found she was alone. It took her a moment to transition from sleep to being awake. Harry had left the bed. She glanced at the clock and grimaced.

"Harry?"

"*I'm in the study, love. Go back to sleep,*" he sent back.

"*What are you doing? It's two in the morning!*"

"*I'm going over these reports on the Leeds camp again.*"

Hermione sighed and threw on her robe and slippers. She walked quietly from their bedroom to Harry's study. He stood staring at a model of the camp on a table behind his desk. He reached absently and Dobby appeared, placing a cup of hot tea in his hand.

Dobby sent her a pleading looking, hoping she could get him into bed. Even house elves needed sleep!

Hermione paused in the doorway. "You know, you're going to be real impressive meeting your company commanders tomorrow. I can see it now. They wait with bated breath for words of wisdom from the mighty Harry Potter himself, only to see him drooling on his mission notes and snoring loud enough to rattle windows."

He shot her a sour look. "I need to flesh out a plan before we meet. We got lucky at Azkaban. I don't think we will be so lucky this time around," he told her.

"What do you mean?"

"Think about it. Azkaban was on a narrow island and the only source of reinforcements were blocked from entering the camp. The camp itself was lightly guarded compared to this place. And we don't have any Angels to support us this time..."

As Harry spoke, he stared down at his model. Hermione came up behind him and wrapped both arms around him.

"Have you worked out your plan?" she asked.

"Pretty much," he replied, laying his arms over hers.

"Then come back to bed, my heart. You need your sleep and staring at that model of yours isn't doing you any good," she cajoled.

Harry sighed and turned in her embrace. He tilted her chin up and leaned down to kiss her. It wasn't a passion filled kiss, and yet he poured all of his love into it. When he finally pulled back, he smiled as Hermione flushed and swayed a little in his arms.

"What was that for?"

Do I need a reason to kiss my wife?" he answered with a lopsided grin.

"When you kiss me like that, leaving me breathless and weak in the knees, I would say yes!"

He laughed and apparated them back to their bedroom. He scooped her up in his arms and gently laid her in the bed, then he crawled over her to get to his side. Hermione rolled over and propped her head up on her hand.

"Well, aren't you going to answer me?"

He leaned over and kissed the very tip of her nose. "Nope," he replied as he rolled over on his back.

"Oh, you... you man!" she huffed at him.

*"And you love it don't you."*

*"Not when you tease me like this!"* she sent back indignantly.

She gripped her pillow and was about to smother him with it because of the laughter she sensed over the bond.

*"I kissed you like that because I wanted to. I love you, you know."*

Hermione rolled onto her back and huffed to herself. She hated it when he got the last word, even if it was a mental word. Then she brightened. He may have had the last word, but she'd gotten him to answer her, hadn't she?

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### **Miss Finch's Class (Nov 5th)...**

Miss Finch stood at the front of the room and smiled at her students. "Today, class, were going to try something new. Robert? Joey? Would you both come stand up here with me?"

The two boys, both very similar in appearance, looked at each other. Each was wondering what they'd done wrong. Standing, they moved rather slowly to the front of the room, dragging their feet and keeping their eyes downcast.

Miss Finch smiled at the boys, then turned them around to face the other students. "Now, class, I want you to look at both boys, and tell me how they are different."

Robert and Joey looked at each other again, then Joey shrugged. "Maybe it's a new game," he whispered to Robert.

"At least she didn't find out about the mouse we put in her desk," Robert whispered back.

As the class continued, students called out visible differences between the two students. Wasn't Joey taller? And didn't Robert have darker hair?

"Excellent work, all of you," Miss Finch told the class. "Now, in what ways are Joey and Robert the same?"

As the students began to call out similarities, the boys began to grow impatient. They shifted from foot to foot. Robert crossed his eyes and grimaced hideously, while Joey stuck his tongue out at the class.

Sensing the trouble brewing, Miss Finch stepped in. "Nicely done, class! Just a few more minutes, then we'll let these fine fellows sit back down," she told the students as she placed a hand on the shoulder of each boy, reminding them to behave. "Now, there was one thing each of you missed when pointing out the differences between Robert and Joey. It's not an important difference, really, but it is a difference. Shall I give you a hint?"

While the class nodded eagerly, Robert and Joey looked at each other, trying to spot the difference.

"One of these boys is a muggle, the other is a wizard. Can you tell who's who?" Miss Finch asked her students.

The children looked at the two boys carefully, but none volunteered an answer.

"No one?" Miss Finch prompted her class.

"Miss Finch?" A small, blond girl called as she waved her hand energetically.

"Yes, Sara?"

"What difference does it make?" she asked, her west Texas accent thick. "They both have cooties!"

The girls in the class all squealed in horrified delight, while the boys scowled.

Miss Finch shook her head and smiled. "They don't have cooties, Sara," she said with a laugh. "But you're right. Muggle or wizard, it doesn't make a difference. We are all part of the same community, and we take care of each other."

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### **Wizengamot Investigative Committee (Nov 7th)...**

"Mr. Weasley, you used to be the manager of the Department of Misuse of Muggle Artifacts prior to the evacuation of the Government, did you not?" asked Amhar Coeur de Lion.

"Yes, Mr. Chairman, that is correct," Arthur said, then he glanced around at the other committee members. The five person committee consisted of mostly neutral Councilors, with only one person actively supporting the Ministry.

"Why don't you tell us about the days following the evacuation, Mr. Weasley. Enlighten us," suggested Amhar.

Arthur leaned forward on his chair. "There isn't much to tell, Mr. Chairman. Our principle goal at the time was to safeguard the students of Hogwarts and their families. There was considerable confusion following the fall of Britain, both here and abroad.

"Lord Potter was the first one to suggest reforming the Ministry around Madam Bones, and the Irish were quick to formally recognize it. It gave them a place to focus their efforts, and it provided us with a means of directing ours."

"Tell me, Deputy Minister, when the Ministry was reformed, why wasn't Azkaban attacked then? Why were so many forced to wait?"

"With all due respect, Mr. Chairman, military matters are not my area of expertise. I was not involved with the planning of, nor the attack on the island," Arthur replied politely.

Amhar scowled and made a note on the parchment in front of him.

"Deputy Minister, I'm curious as to why the Minister of Magic would assign you such an exalted rank when, only a few months prior, you were under investigation for illegal activities according to the Department of Magical Law Enforcement."

"Mr. Chairman, I must protest this line of questioning and ask it be stricken from the record. We have no purview or authority to investigate matters prior to the Ministry's evacuation of Britain," said Trenton Largo.

Amhar frowned and waved a hand dismissively. "I believe the information is relevant," he replied condescendingly. "Now, answer my question, Mr. Weasley."

"I'm sorry, Mr. Chairman, but I'm afraid I must agree with Councilor Largo. This line of questioning is beyond the scope of our charter," said Lillias McFerron, one of the neutrals on the committee.

"Oh, very well. Court reporter, strike that last question. The witness does not have to answer," he snapped.

Amhar shuffled his notes, cleared his throat and looked at Arthur once more. "Mr. Weasley, as Deputy Minister of Magical Relations, it is your job to oversee our diplomatic efforts, is it not?" he asked.

"That is correct, Mr. Chairman."

"Then kindly explain how our first contact with the Irish was managed and maintained by a known dark creature," Amhar said in a triumphant voice.

"Dark creature? Oh, you must mean Lupin. Mr. Remus John Lupin was a lycanthrope until recently. He made first contact with the Irish when they started asking what Lord Potter was doing by buying up the land around the manor and building so many housing units.

"Mr. Lupin was one of the people instrumental in setting up Haven as we now see it. And while Mr. Lupin's input and assistance was invaluable to the Ministry, our office quickly relieved him of his burden.

"Finally, for the record, Mr. Lupin is not a dark creature any longer. His Lycanthropy was cured shortly after our arrival in Haven."

"Are you suggesting that Mr. Lupin has been cured somehow? All the world knows that there is no cure for Lycanthropy," said Andrew Korwin, another of the neutrals on the committee.

"With all due respect, Councilor, I am suggesting nothing. Healer August has studied Mr. Lupin's case thoroughly and has stated, for the record, that there are no signs of his disease remaining. Mr. Lupin has not told anyone how he was cured and, to be honest, it's none of my business. Healer August's word is good enough for me and, I might add, is a matter of public record, available to anyone interested," Arthur replied.

Korwin nodded and added a note to the paperwork in front of him.

"Yes, well, while Mr. Lupin might be a special case, isn't it true that you argued to relax the Ministry hiring rules to allow for the hiring of dark creatures like Mr. Lupin?" asked Amhar, trying to recover from his blunder. He should have researched the werewolf!

"Councilor, might I remind you that we are guests here in Ireland? Our Ministry's hiring rules must conform to Irish law until such time as we return to Britain. The Irish have no such reprehensible laws against these people.

"There are a total of eight known lycanthropes in Haven. All are gainfully employed in meaningful jobs and all receive their Wolfsbane potion. Why persecute people because they are afflicted with a terrible disease? It wasn't something they chose for themselves. So yes, I pushed to overturn the hiring rules. Had we conformed to them, the current Ministry would only have a handful of people working for it and we might have alienated the Irish," Arthur said. He tried to tell himself to relax, but some of the questions were becoming downright unsettling.

"Tell me, Mr. Weasley, were you involved in bringing Egypt and Saudi Arabia over to our side?" asked Amhar.

Arthur frowned. This line of questioning was making him look like an idiot. "No, Mr. Chairman. The Egyptians came to favor our side as a result of



the actions of Lord Potter," he replied.

"Forgive me for saying this, Deputy Minister, but isn't that your responsibility?" Amhar asked with a slight sneer in his voice.

"Ordinarily you'd be right, Mr. Chairman, but I've discovered that Lord Potter is a force unto himself. However, in regard to the Middle East, we did have people trying to work on the problem. My department is still quite small. I have less than twenty people working for me and less than half of them have diplomatic experience.

"Lord Potter stumbled onto a plot to destroy one of the Egyptian national treasures and foiled it. In the process he was badly wounded. His actions impressed the Egyptian Ministry, which led to their offer of aid."

"So, let me see if I have this straight, Mr. Weasley. We had a dark creature make the first friendly moves to our host government, and then we let a seventeen year old boy sway the entire middle east to come to our aid. Excuse me for asking, but what exactly do you do around here?"

"I'd like to remind my esteemed colleague that Mr. Weasley is not on trial here," Largo said angrily.

"Of course, Trenton. We are all aware of that," Amhar replied soothingly, smiling at his fellow Councilor. Turning back to face Arthur, his eyes hardened. "However, we are still awaiting your answer, Mr. Weasley."

"Mr. Chairman, thanks to my efforts we have accepted help from nearly forty nations. Some countries, like the United States and Canada, have bent over backwards offering us aid. There are now nearly six thousand people in Haven, many of whom have come here through the auspices of the Department of Magical Relations.

"My office might not be as fully staffed as previous administrations, but we're doing the best we can under difficult circumstances. And our efforts are ongoing. In order to support the upcoming operation..."

Arthur trailed off and kicked himself mentally. He should not have mentioned anything about future operations!

Amhar leaned forward. "Yes, Mr. Weasley? Do continue."

"No, thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm finished," Arthur replied, then he shot an appealing glance at Largo for support.

"I'm afraid I must insist, Mr. Weasley. You were obviously about to say something," purred Amhar. He could almost smell the blood in the water.

"Mr. Weasley, would it be wrong for me to assume that what you were about to say might be covered under the Official Secrets Act?" asked Largo, interrupting Amhar.

Arthur nodded weakly. "Yes, Councilor. That would be correct."

Largo nodded then turned towards Amhar. "Mr. Chairman, Mr. Weasley is bound by the Official Secrets Act. He does not have to answer any further questions on this topic."

Amhar shot Largo a look of loathing. "Very well then, Mr. Weasley. Let us turn our attention to the role your department has played in enlisting aid among our European Allies. The French, for example, seem most reluctant to aid us in our plight."

Arthur opened the folder in front of him and pulled out his notes. *This is going to be a very long day*, he thought.

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## Hogwarts Castle (Nov 10th)...

Ernst Blofeld was a minor Death Eater, a wizard of mediocre talent and had an over inflated opinion of his own value. He had arrived at Hogwarts from Germany, where he had been a minor enforcer for one of the German pure blood societies.

Blofeld had arrived in Britain with fifty other 'volunteers' willing to accept the mark in order to stamp out the stain of mixed blood and muggle born from society. The initiation process had been brutal and he had loved every minute of it. As a final test, he'd had to kill a muggle. The zeal, inventiveness and sheer brutality he had displayed in completing the final test had brought him to the attention of Horatio Mulciber, who had placed him in charge of a Death Squad.

Blofeld stood on the Astronomy tower and looked out over the landscape in the direction of the abandoned town of Hogsmeade. The burned out skeleton of the rail station was clearly visible, as was what remained of the Hogwarts Express.

The Engineer had tried to use the train to escape Hogsmeade when the final attack came. The engine had been destroyed by the combined efforts of multiple wizards and several of the cars had been derailed. The Death Eaters involved in the destruction had been laughing over the wreckage when the 5:05 commuter rail train plowed into what remained of the Express.

The resulting explosion killed most of the Death Eaters who had been crawling over corpse of the Express and the carnage was visible everywhere he looked.

Blofeld shook his head and smiled. He remembered picking over the wreckage for souvenirs before coming up to the castle.

He turned then and looked towards the area where Quidditch pitch used to be.

Rather than green grass, he saw mud. The pitch now contained a large, open air cage in which the pleasure girls who serviced those in the castle

were kept. They were muddy and befouled by their own waste, but that mattered little, as each was hosed off before being used.

Each of the three hoops at the ends of the pitch contained the corpse of a girl, strung up spread eagle. Their rotting bodies were a warning to the slaves below – resist your masters at your own peril.

*What a waste*, he thought as he stared at the dead women. *Letting them die of exposure, rather than enjoying the pleasure of killing them?* He let the fantasies of wrapping his hands around a tender young throat and of plunging a dagger between a woman's legs as she screamed in agony, play through his mind.

As he reached into his pants to stroke himself, he staggered suddenly, then screamed when his other hand whipped up and smacked him in the face.

He yanked his hand out of his pants and grabbed the railing to steady himself as he looked around wildly. Seeing nothing, he tried to back away from the edge of the tower, but his feet refused to move. When his hands rose on their own, he trembled and strained, attempting to prevent their movement. He watched in horror as one hand held up his wand and the other grasped the tip. Despite his efforts, his muscles bunched slightly and he snapped his own wand in half.

Blofeld stared at the broken pieces of his wand, his eyes wide in shock and fear.

“Mien Gott!” he muttered. Then his jaw snapped shut, biting off a chunk of his tongue. He moaned as his mouth began to fill with blood and his feet moved, shuffling towards the edge of the tower. As the railing dug into his stomach and he felt his feet begin to leave the ground, his eyes bulged. He tried to scream as he pitched forward, but his body was no longer his to command. While his three hundred foot plunge to the ground was silent, his landing was not. He hit the grass below the tower with a meaty sounding thump, then bounced once.

A diaphanous shape appeared on the tower where Blofeld had stood.

“Excellently done, my dear,” boomed the Baron as he joined the figure.

The ghost of Penelope Clearwater smiled shyly and she bobbed a curtsy to the Baron.

“Let us return to the crystal and talk about what to do next while you recover your strength,” the Baron told her.

As the two ghosts faded from sight, a crowd began to grow at the base of the tower, surrounding the body of the Death Eater.

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### **Padfoot Manor (Nov 14th)...**

Harry shuffled into his office and sat down heavily on his chair. Hermione passed him a packet of letters that needed his attention while they waited for everyone to arrive for the morning briefing.

She watched him worriedly. He was tired. The training schedule included using a time turner to get extra training in each day and it was taking a heavy toll on him. Hermione knew his leg was bothering him more than usual and he wasn't sleeping well. He often got up in the middle of the night to look over his plans for the attack on Leeds.

Harry perked up slightly when people began to arrive, but they knew better. For all his smiles, he couldn't hide the dark circles under his eyes.

“Harry, are you getting enough sleep?” Amelia asked worriedly.

“I'm fi...”

“No, he isn't,” interrupted Hermione. “But he isn't the only one, is he?” she asked, her gimlet eyes on Caleb.

“What's this?” Amelia asked, alarmed when she saw Caleb flinch back from Hermione.

Harry wiped his face tiredly. “I'm afraid my wife thinks our schedule is too ambitious. We've been arguing about it for the last two days. I'm beginning to think she's right, however.”

Caleb nodded in grudging agreement, then sat down tiredly. “Stanton told me the same thing two days ago.”

Amelia arched an eyebrow at him, then turned back to Harry. “How many hours sleep are you getting a night, Harry?”

“Four,” he replied.

“Three,” Hermione corrected. “Sometimes even less.” Her voice lacked any emotion and her words were very precise.

“Caleb, would it hurt if we pushed the date back by two weeks?” Amelia asked.

Caleb shook his head. “No, it wouldn't hurt. I'm afraid this is really my fault, Minister. I wanted to get the attack in before December, but the training schedule is too much. I did a little checking after I spoke with Stanton and I've discovered that we're currently seeing a thirty percent absenteeism due to exhaustion. I'll order the units to stand down for a three day rest and we'll push the attack back by two weeks.”

Draco, who was sitting next to Caleb, closed his eyes in relief. The training schedule had been brutal. As much as he hated to admit it, he, too, had suffered from it.

Amelia looked at the others in the room. Remus looked fine, but then his werewolf form gave him endurance that exceeded that of normal humans. Harry and Caleb were obviously exhausted and Draco was slumped on his chair, looking tired, rumpled and unkempt. Even Hermione had the beginnings of dark circles forming under her eyes.

Amelia stood. "I think it would be best if we cancel this mornings briefing. Mr. Newman, I expect to see an updated attack order on my desk before noon today. Deliver it personally, Mr. Newman. You and I have some things to discuss," she said sternly.

"I'll be there, Minister," Caleb said with a wince.

Hermione watched everyone file out of the office. She should have felt happy about the canceled meeting, but she was nearly as tired as Harry was and couldn't work up the energy. She stood and took Harry's hand. "Come on. Let's go back to sleep for a few more hours."

Harry nodded and let her lead him back to their bedroom. Once there, he quickly stripped down to his boxers and climbed into bed. Hermione joined him a moment later and was pleased when he wrapped an arm around her and pulled her close.

Within minutes, both were asleep.

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## Outside Remus' Office...

Remus winced with remembered pain as he watched Harry and Hermione walk up the stairs to their bedroom. He remembered a time when an exhausted James and Lily had done almost the same thing. It had been right before they moved into the house at Godric Hollow and the two of them had been working like demons at their jobs. Once home, they'd had to deal with a cranky baby Harry, who'd seemed to pick up on his parents unease.

It had been a very stressful time for everyone. James and Lily knew that someone close to them had betrayed them, but they didn't know who. It had put a tremendous pressure on their friendships. James had wondered if Remus had betrayed them, while Lily suspected Peter. As neither had any proof, there was nothing that could be done.

Remus paused just outside the door to his office and closed his eyes. "James, Lily, you'd be so proud of him right now. He's grown into a wonderful man," he said softly.

"I agree," said a voice behind him.

Remus turned and smiled at his wife. When he pulled a handkerchief out of his pocket and wiped his eyes, she frowned.

"Hey... are you alright, Remy?" she asked, reaching for him.

He nodded and let her pull him into her embrace. "I'm fine, really. It was just a painful memory. Even after all these years, it still hurts sometimes," he whispered.

Tonks held him tightly and her hair cycling slowly through a multitude of colors. When she stepped back, she looked at him closely. "So, is it true? We're on a five day stand down?"

"Five day? It was supposed to be three!" Remus exclaimed.

"Yeah, but three days would take us into the weekend, so it's really five days," she said. "So, what are we going to do with all this free time?" She grinned impishly and her shirt began to stretch as her breasts grew large enough to strain the buttons. When she was through, she raised an eyebrow at him and waited.

Remus stared at her chest. "Ummm... Well, I was going to walk over to check out how things were going at the construction site for Harry's Portals. After that, I am your willing servant, my dear." When she began to chuckle, his eyes flicked up to hers. It took a moment, but he blushed brightly when he finally realized he's been addressing her breasts.

She wrapped an arm around his arm, deliberately brushing her chest against his arm. "Well, lets go look over Harry's factory. Then we'll see how well the old wolf is up to serving."

Remus smiled inwardly and led Tonks out of the manor and in the direction of the new construction. She had a way of turning his moods around in a flash and her overt teasing both embarrassed him and left him stunned that such a wonderful woman would be interested in him.

Reaching the construction site, they walked around the outside of the building before entering. Tonks kept up a steady stream of sexually laced teasing and he kept blushing and trying to change the topic.

"Behave yourself," he hissed at her as the chief engineer approached them. Tonks snickered and leaned against him, making sure her breasts brushed his arm again.

"Mr. Lupin! Come out to inspect the site?" asked the approaching man.

"Er.. Yes! Mr. Stiles, meet my wife, Nymphadora," Remus said, then grinned when she glared at him for using her first name.

Stiles shook Tonks' hand, then turned to face the building. "We're actually a little a head of schedule, Mr. Lupin. The foundries were fired up for the first time yesterday for testing. We still need to do a little tweaking on them, but I don't anticipate any problems."

Stiles led them into the building where dozens of wizards were transfiguring, levitating and generally transforming the interior into a working factory.

"You know, a muggle factory of this size would take months to build, and it wouldn't include most of the needed equipment," Stiles said conversationally.

"When do you expect it to be completed?" asked Remus.

Stiles paused for a moment in thought. "Oh, I'd say we'll be done in another twelve days, thirteen tops. Then we'll be ready to turn it over to your staff."

Remus looked pained. "Yes, well, that's something I still need to do."

Stiles looked at him knowingly. "You haven't had time to hire on staff?"

"No, not yet. I've had other concerns of late," Remus replied evenly. He wasn't about to explain how training and the war effort had eaten up most of his time.

Stiles nodded. "You could hire yourself a manager and let him handle the little details like staffing the plant. But that's not really my area, is it? I just build buildings," he said, looking around proudly.

Remus smiled. Stiles had just inadvertently solved his problem and he had a perfect candidate in mind for the position! Thanking Stiles for his time, Remus led Tonks back towards the manor.

Tonks had been impressed with the specialized spell-work involved in building the factory. After all, it wasn't something one saw on a daily basis. Not in the wizarding world, in any case.

Tonks watched Remus carefully on the walk back. He didn't speak and his thoughts were obviously elsewhere. As she had plans for him, she felt it was time to bring him back to the present.

"So, what will it be, Remy?" she asked as she morphed into a buxom blond. "Blond and busty?" she purred, "or something a little more athletic?" She morphed again, this time into a slim, black haired, dark eyed seductress.

Remus turned to face her. He was frowning and his eyes were serious. "How many times since we've been together have we ever used a different body shape, Nymph?"

"I don't know. Not many," she replied, shrugging.

"Right. And do you know why I insist on it being you?" he asked intently.

Tonks sighed. "I know we've talked about it before, Remy, but I still don't understand..."

"That's right. You don't understand. You can be any woman I desire and every night you offer me just that, even when we both know we're just going to sleep. Strangely enough, you offer me any woman I want, except the one I want the most. Nymph, don't you see? All the women you've offered to be only make me feel as though I'm cheating. I don't want them. I want you."

"It's just a game, Remus," she said, a bit defensive. "Sex is supposed to be fun."

"A game is a feather duster and a rubber chicken!" he exclaimed, drawing his wand and conjuring both items in frustration. "A game is not a different woman in my bed every night."

"They're all me, Remy, not different women! But that's fine. You want mousy old Tonks? Here you go!" She morphed quickly into her natural appearance.

Remus smiled and reached out, touching her face. "You're natural form is all I've ever wanted, Nymph, and more than I ever expected to have." He stepped closer and leaned down. "You're beautiful," he murmured as he bushed his lips against hers.

"And when you say things like that, it makes it difficult for me to stay mad at you," she said, jutting out her lower lip in a mock pout.

"I know," he whispered, then bit her lip gently. When she groaned, he smiled. "Now, why don't we go back to the manor and I'll show you just how much I love you when you're au naturel?"

As he began to lead her back to the manor, she glanced back for a moment. Seeing the items he'd conjured laying on the ground, she shook head and grinned. "Ah, Remy? What was that about a feather duster and a rubber chicken?"

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## The Town of Haven (Evening of November 15th)...

It was late and the magical gas lamps that lined the town square of Haven threw dancing shadows against the buildings. The pubs were closed and most of their patrons had gone to bed, hoping to sleep off their overindulgence. With few exceptions, the people of Haven was asleep. A few lights burned in the Ministry building as the night staff manned certain departments.

Conall Brennen stumbled and landed on all fours. He laughed to himself and ruefully admitted he'd had too much to drink. *Miriam is going to kill*

*me, coming in so drunk, he thought. But a man only receives a bonus like this a few times in his life. A little celebrating is expected, isn't it?*

Conall worked at Granger Publications. He was the sales director for the Americas and had just signed a contract to supply the Magical Education system there with first through seventh year spell books based on Dan Granger's original design. The three year contract was worth twenty five million galleons a year.

Mr. Gallagher, the general manager of Granger publications, had been suitably pleased and gave Conall a ten thousand galleon bonus for his hard work and that was worth celebrating. The money would pay for their son to attend Haven's school, so he could grow up to be the wizard his squib father always wanted to be.

Conall staggered to his feet. He laughed to himself and moved unsteadily towards the next street lamp. He'd almost reached the dark point between the two lamps when an arm wrapped around his neck from behind.

"Muggle filth," a voice hissed in his ear.

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### **Padfoot Manor...**

Ginny twisted on the bed and whimpered loud enough to wake up Neville. He reached for her, pulling her close to him. She trembled in his arms, but never woke from her sleep.

With one last whimper, her body relaxed against him. He was asleep a moment later. He'd not been awake enough to wonder what had disturbed his wife.

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### **The Town of Haven...**

Conall's eyes widened and his chest exploded in pain. He tried to scream, but the arm around his neck was holding him too tight. The pain intensified and he tried to shrug off his attacker. He felt something slide from between his ribs and then the world went black.

Conall's body slumped to the ground. A figure stood over him for a moment, then reached down and wiped a long blade on Conall's cloak, removing the blood. Straightening, the figure looked around furtively, then moved away from the body, heading towards the school.

An hour later, Michael O'Dalley woke up when someone called his name.

He shook his head groggily and stared at this wife. "What are you doing, woman? It's late. Go back to bed!"

"One of your men is here; he says it's important."

"It had better be," he replied, sitting up and throwing on his robe.

He walked out of the bedroom and didn't return for nearly twenty minutes. When he did, it was only to dress.

"Michael?"

"Go back to sleep, darling. I have to go out," he replied tersely.

"But it's late!" she protested.

"I know. I'll be back as soon as I can," he told her.

She sat down on the bed and watched him, noting that he unlocked the small box on his dresser. When he pulled out the shoulder holster and pistol, she twisted her nightgown between her fingers, but remained silent. It was something he had worn occasionally during his days as an Auror for the Irish Ministry. She never thought she'd see him wear it in Haven.

Less than an hour after being awoken by his wife, Michael O'Dalley inspected the crime scene. The body was cordoned off by a visible triggering ward. Anyone crossing the light beam would trigger an alarm.

"Have the Irish been called yet?" asked O'Dalley.

"No, not yet, sir."

"What do we know at this point?"

"The victim is one Conall Brennen; he works for Granger Publications. He's an Irish national and a squib with two magical children. We haven't had a forensic healer look at the body yet, but I'm guessing the cause of death was a knife wound to the heart."

O'Dalley closed his eyes. A squib! He had resisted Lord Potter's suggestion to use some of the Aurors to patrol the town, but if things like this continued, he'd have no choice. As it stood, the Irish Ministry was expressing deep concern about the level of anti-muggle violence rising in Haven.

He opened his eyes and looked at his subordinate. "Barney, let's get a photographer here. Have him document the scene thoroughly. Once he's finished, call the hospital and have them wake up the forensic healer, then contact the Irish. I'll be in my office."

Aye, Michael, I'll get right on it," replied Barney.

O'Dalley nodded and apparated to the front of the Ministry building. *This is going to be a long night*, he thought.

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## Padfoot Manor (Nov 16th)...

Harry leaned back on his chair and sipped his tea. While he hadn't been exactly working these past few days, he had been keeping an eye on the sick reports. The number of exhaustion cases was down and he was content that the unit would be ready to restart training in a few more days. For now, he was going to enjoy breakfast with his wife while they watched a house elf outside getting mobbed by squirrels looking for peanuts.

"You know that's not good for them, Harry. I won't even go into the fact that peanuts aren't native to Ireland," Hermione said primly.

"I know, but it's only a few handfuls," he said in protest.

"Still, it's not part of their normal diet," she said, chiding him gently while looking out the window. "Is that a new elf?"

"Yes. Dobby told me he used to work for a Wizarding zoo, feeding the animals. Poor thing ended up with the name of Feeder, if you can believe it," he said, frowning. Down on the lawn, Feeder was being chased by a mob of squirrels. The little elf was screaming and waving his hands over his head, one of which happened to contain the bag of peanuts.

Hermione craned her neck and watched for a moment, then she leaned back on her chair and shook her head. "I don't think too much of Dobby's recommendation."

The squirrels swarmed over Feeder, pulling him down and pouncing on the bag of nuts.

"Hey, it wasn't a bad first attempt. He'll get better. Besides, he's used to feeding magical animals, not vicious normal creatures like dangerous squirrels."

Hermione sipped her tea and looked at him over her cup. "Right," she said, drawing the word out.

Harry was about to retort when Dobby appeared and handed him a note. He unfolded the parchment and read it.

"Well? What is it?" Hermione asked.

He glanced at her, then back to the elf standing beside him. "Dobby, bring him up here, please," he requested. With a nod, Dobby vanished.

Harry put the note on the table. "It's from Michael O'Dalley. He's asking to speak with both of us as soon as possible."

She started to stand up, but he motioned for her to remain seated. "Dobby will bring him up here. We're both dressed and Winky has already made the bed. It's not like we have smelly socks or your knickers lying on the floor," he said teasingly.

"Harumph! I'll have you know, *my lord*, that I have never left my knickers on the floor. On the other hand, someone's socks are frequently left lying about," she replied.

Fortunately for Harry, O'Dalley chose that moment to enter the room, saving the Boy-Who-Lived from digging a deeper hole for himself.

"Michael, please pull up a chair and sit. Can we get you something? Coffee? Tea?" Harry offered.

Refusing the offered chair, O'Dalley shook his head. "No, my lord. I'm here on official business. Sometime after midnight last night, Haven experienced its first murder. The victim was a squib employee of Lady Potter's parents."

Hermione gasped and went rigid.

Harry glanced at her before turning back to O'Dalley. "Michael," he said a bit hesitantly, "this is out of my realm of experience. If you have suggestions about what to do, I'd like to know them. We certainly can't protect all the muggles and squibs in Haven individually. That's nearly fifteen hundred men, women and children."

"My Lord, a constabulary is accustomed to handling local matters such as domestic violence, public drunkenness, even disturbing the peace. But in a matter like this we call in the government, in this case the Irish Ministry, and ask for assistance. I have already taken that step, as we lack the necessary investigative unit to investigate this crime.

"That is about all the constabulary can do for now. However I am going to talk with the Block Wardens about organizing a neighborhood crime watch. Many of the foreign nationals started out as Aurors before switching to the military. I didn't want to go this route; it's basically an admission that I've failed in my duties..."

"Nonsense, Michael!" protested Harry, scowling.

"I agree with Harry, Michael. You haven't failed in your duties. But I do think it's time we beef up the constabulary. We tend to forget we're at war, here in Haven," Hermione added.

Harry glanced at Hermione and nodded; her comments were valid.

“Michael, why don't you put together a plan for upgrading our force? Maybe we can hire some of Brogan's Aurors away from him. Once you have it planned out, I'll help you pitch it to Amelia,” Harry offered.

“Yes, my lord,” O'Dalley said with a satisfied look. Nodding to Hermione, he then turned on his heel and walked from the room, leaving Harry and Hermione to ponder this latest change to their lives.

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### **Wizengamot Building, Office of Amhar Coeur de Lion...**

Amhar looked up and scowled at the woman bringing him his mail. *Incompetent woman*, he thought. *I should never have hired this colonial slut. She is totally useless and has the gall to reject my advances!*

He would have been shocked to the core to know that Stephanie, his secretary, hated him nearly as much as he hated her. She was the wife of a Canadian Auror who had brought his family with him when he had been sent to Haven. It had taken a lot of fast talking and a great deal of persuasion to convince Jacques, her husband, not to kill Coeur de Lion the first time she'd told of his advances. She wasn't so sure she'd try talking him out of it a second time.

Stephanie laid the morning mail on his desk and walked out without a word. She had made up her mind; she would quit as soon as she found another job.

Amhar flipped through his mail, noting that most of it was junk. One envelope caught his attention, however. It was heavier than the others. He opened it and a shiny golden key fell out and onto his desk. Surprised, he opened the enclosed letter.

*Dear Councilor Coeur de Lion,*

*We were extraordinarily pleased to discover you had survived your little stay at the English resort and even more pleased to hear about your efforts to bring the British Government back to where it belongs.*

*As much as we'd like to meet with you personally, such a meeting would perhaps be inappropriate at this time. For now, please accept, with our gratitude, this little token of our esteem. I'm sure you will find good use for it in the weeks ahead.*

*Yours,*

*Marne Murphy*

Amhar stared hard at the letter and key. Marne Murphy was the witch who controlled the local drug trade in Ireland, and she was reputed to be a supporter of Voldemort.

He glanced at the key and waved his wand over it. A second later, glowing number appeared and he gasped. Twenty thousand! What he could do with access to twenty thousand galleons!

Amhar reached for the key, then paused. *What am I doing?* he asked himself. *If I accept the money, I'll be guilty of treason! I should call what's his name, that Irish fellow, O'Dalley, and turn this over to him. On the other hand, I'm sure Murphy made the money and the account untraceable.*

Amhar wavered for a long moment, weighing the pros and cons before he finally snapped up the key and placed it in his pocket. The first thing he was going to do with the money was go out and celebrate. He stood and walked from the room, wondering where he could find a polyjuiced prostitute.

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### **Padfoot Manor...**

“Again! Only this time, do it right!”

Harry grimaced and looked across the room at Eocho. Suddenly multiple opponents appeared between them. At some unseen signal, the opponents started to attack, using both knives and spells. Harry conjured a wall to shield from the knives, then he put up another shield behind the wall. The pattern repeated itself several times, each time getting faster and faster.

Eventually, one spell came at him from an odd angle and he was forced to tuck and roll away from it, causing his shield to falter and bringing him under heavier spell fire. The tip of his staff began to glow and he spun it in his hands. He used the staff to bat away spell fire, while he dodged the knives coming his way.

He batted one spell blast back to the caster, who exploded. He ducked a thrown knife that nicked his shoulder, mostly cutting fabric. Slowly he killed off his opponents until only a few remained.

Harry stepped inside a thrown knife and reached out with his free hand, gesturing at his opponent. The figure crumpled to the ground soundlessly.

“NO! NO! NO!” Eocho shouted and the opponents vanished.

Harry conjured a towel and wiped his sweaty face before he looked at Eocho.

“What are you doing wrong?”

“I gestured again,” he replied with a sigh.

“Exactly! Maglios, you must learn to do away with the need for gestures and words. These are crutches for your real magic. Learn to focus your

mind and your enemies will have no clue you're even casting a spell until it is too late.”

“It's a hard habit to break, Honored Teacher,” Harry told him, a bit sheepishly.

“And break it you must, Maglios. You must learn to cast without giving away your actions,” Eocho replied.

Harry hung his head. “I understand that, but it's like a block. I can't see to get past it.”

Eocho looked at him for a moment. “Then we must devise a way of breaking that block.”

Harry nodded and walked back towards the bench.

“How fairs your planning for the attack?” Eocho said, drifting along beside of him.

“Good, Honored Teacher, but I am concerned about the casualties.”

Eocho nodded. “Such concerns are what makes the role of Maglios different from the other Warrior Kings in my time. Always our Brotherhood looked to winning without staining the land with blood. You are in good company, although I daresay it gives you little comfort.”

Harry sat and looked up at his spectral mentor. “It is scant comfort, Honored Teacher. I know I can't prevent the casualties; all I can try to do is minimize them. We'll have to deal with Dementors on this mission and that worries me. We won't have Angels along with us this time.”

“One cannot always count on allies, Maglios. To do so would be to risk becoming complacent. The Angels are a wondrous thing, but they are creatures of thought such as you or I. It would not be good to force them into our fight. We did it once and then let them go their own way. For good or ill, the Angels have played their role, for now. What the future holds for them none can say.”

Eocho was right, the Angels were pretty much on their own now. As much as he'd like their help, he had no right to demand it of them. Besides, if Luna was to be believed, the Angels had paired up and were breeding. Harry didn't want to do anything that would interfere with that.

“You're right, of course, and all I can do is try to minimize the casualties as best as I can.”

“And what of your mate and the other Brethren? Will they not also be exposed to battle?”

“Yes, but there is little I can do to change that fact. I must rely on their training to see them through unscathed. I have seven hundred people who will look to me for guidance. I cannot abandon them for the sake of a few, even if those few are my brethren.”

Eocho nodded approvingly. “Now you are coming to understand the role of Maglios. Far too often people envy the role of leader, not realizing there is little to envy.”

Harry nodded and stood. His training with Eocho was done for the day. With a slight bow to the ancient spirit, he turned and walked from the room.

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### **Dalcross/Inverness Airport, east of Inverness, Scotland...**

One of McHardy's men pointed a strange looking device at a structure in the distance. The device was small and rifle like, with a telescopic sight. He depressed a trigger-like button and gave the man behind him a thumbs up.

The second man turned to Colonel McHardy. “Sir, target is acquired,” he said.

“Very good. Send the signal and keep sending until acknowledged,” McHardy replied tensely. He didn't like the fact that they were sitting in high weeds less than a mile from the airport.

Command hadn't told him why they had to do what they were doing. But like any soldier, he also knew not to ask. It was the type of mission where a smart man kept his mouth shut and did as he was told. And that was why he and his ten men were up here. He had sent teams of men all along the coast with express orders. Most of the teams were sent out on sabotage missions; a few were out to gather intelligence.

McHardy looked at his radio operator as the man sent the signal.

“Red rock one, Scots one six. Target is painted. Repeat, target is painted,” the operator sent. He repeated the signal several times before a reply was received.

“Scots one six, Red rock one. Acknowledge, package is away.”

McHardy held his breath, his ears straining. When the siren began to wail at the airport, he lifted a pair of binoculars to his eyes and scanned the area. “Shit! There's a Rapier at the end of the runway!” he hissed under his breath.

The Rapier was a semiautomatic anti-aircraft missile platform and was bad news for any aircraft in the area. McHardy reached for his radio operator, gripping his shoulder tightly. “Send an anti-air warning, now!”

The man nodded and reached for his handset just as two missiles fired off at the end of the runway.

“Fuck!” cursed McHardy as the missiles passed through the cloud cover and vanished.



High above he heard a boom, then came another, much closer explosion. He blinked and looked at the air field. The control tower was engulfed in flame. The tower, with its radar dome, tilted crazily and came crashing down.

"Sir, I think he's in range," said one of McHardy's men.

McHardy glanced at the man, noting his MILAN anti-tank missile launcher. "Good man, Johnny! Send him a message he won't forget," he replied savagely.

The man quickly unpacked his launcher and set it up, fiddling with the controls for a moment. With a sudden gout of flame, the missile was away. Ten seconds later, the Rapier exploded, scattering the men on the runway.

"Time to go, people! I want us ready to move out in three minutes," McHardy said, as he began to pack his gear.

The war was definitely heating up.

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### **Padfoot Manor, (Nov 17th)...**

"You wanted to see me, Remus?" said a hesitant voice from the doorway.

Remus looked up to see Charlie Weasley poking his head in. He'd only been to the manor once, after the incident with Albus Dumbledore. He had jumped at the job Harry had given him. He'd thrown himself into organizing the block wardens and completed it in record time.

"Yes, Charlie. Come in and take a seat."

Charlie sat down and glanced around nervously. He was still worried that he'd blown his chance to stay and help with the war effort.

Remus appraised the man sitting before him. He was nervous, though much changed from the arrogant berk he'd been before the start of the summer. "How much has your family spoken about what's going on with the war effort?" he asked.

"Not much, Remus," he replied. "It will be a while before they trust me again, I think."

Remus nodded. "Perhaps, but I think they'll come around. For what it's worth, we know of your performance in setting up the block wardens and getting the shelters built. Harry thinks you did a wonderful job. That is why I've asked you to come here today."

"Sir?" Charlie asked, a bit bewildered.

"Harry was impressed with your performance and your ability to manage a difficult task. With that task completed, you're basically twiddling your thumbs. We want to change that by giving you something challenging to do."

Charlie sat up straighter, looking attentively at Remus. It was not what he had expected to hear, but it was very welcome!

"Harry has developed a device similar in nature to a portkey, in that it allows you to move people and material from one point to another. The large building under construction near Granger Publications will be the factory to build the devices on a large scale. This is a joint business venture with Gringotts. It will give them exclusive rights to the portals for freight shipping, while Potter's Portals will retain the rights for residential use, like a floo network.

"That's a very brief overview of what the Portals will be used for, of course, but we'll also be using them in the war effort.

"The remaining twenty percent of the factory's industrial capacity will be reserved for war projects by Q Branch."

Charlie nodded and absently sipped a cup of tea. He had been so engrossed in what Remus was saying, he'd never noticed the elf placing the cup in his hands!

"We, that is Harry and myself, think you would be a perfect candidate to manage the factory. It would be your job to hire on people and oversee production."

"But I've never done anything like this!" protested Charlie.

"True, but you oversaw the construction of four new shelters, and managed to redesign the community kitchen in such a way that it can be used as an overflow shelter, if necessary. You also organized over forty block wardens, set up evacuation routes and even ran drills. We now know that, should we be attacked again, we stand a very good chance of minimizing our injuries because of your work. And you did it all from a manager's perspective, Charlie. You jumped in, selected people, told them what to do and they did it. Both Harry and I feel you'll be able to handle this, and you'll be taking an active role in the war if you do."

Charlie ran his hand through his hair nervously. He needed to think. What would his family say? Was this his path to being accepted fully again?

"Take the job, Charlie," whispered a familiar voice.

Both Charlie and Remus leapt to their feet, looking around wildly. From one corner came a giggle, then a whispered counter to a disillusionment charm.

"Ginny!" exclaimed Remus, shakily putting away his wand.

"I'm sorry, Remus, but when I saw Charlie enter the manor I followed him to see what was going on," she replied, then turned to her brother. "Take the job, Charlie. This isn't about paying for your sins or about redemption, it's about feeling good about yourself again. Ever since Dumbledore you've felt uncomfortable around us. I'm so familiar with the feeling. I felt that way for nearly two years after the Chamber. If you feel good about yourself, everything else will click into place."

Charlie reached out and took his little sister's hand. He searched her face for a moment, then he turned back to Remus. "I'll do it," he said quietly.

Ginny squealed happily and grabbed her brother with both arms. He looked down at her fondly before glancing back at Remus, who was smiling at the pair.

"Excellent! I'll go gather up the information I have and we'll start going through it," Remus said before turning to one of his filing cabinets.

Ginny walked from Remus' office with a spring in her step. Charlie had been lost for a long time and was now on his way back to them. *I'll have to think of something nice I can do for Harry to thank him, she thought. Or maybe I'll just ask Hermione to do that for me. I wouldn't want to send the wrong message.*

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### **Wizengamot Investigative Committee (Nov 18th)...**

"I do hope that you now have the time to talk to us, Madam Minister?" asked Amhar superciliously.

"Mr. Chairman, as I explained in my letter to the committee, I meant no disrespect. The duties of my office prevented me from meeting with your group any sooner than today," Amelia replied calmly.

Amhar looked unconvinced, but let the matter drop.

"Now, Madam Minister, am I correct in the belief that Lord Potter suggested that you become Minister of Magic? And that he then asked if the Irish Ministry would be willing to recognize a Ministry in Exile?" asked Amhar.

"You are correct, Mr. Chairman. Politically, it was a sound move since it would make it that much more difficult for Voldemort to claim a legal government." Amelia paused and suppressed a smirk while the committee members shuddered at the mention of the name.

"But why you, Minister?" asked one of the neutrals.

"I would ask you to consider our circumstances, Ms. McFerron. By the end of April we had just over three thousand people in Haven and nearly half were children. I was the senior surviving member of the old Ministry and I had contacts among the muggle government. While I was surprised when Lord Potter suggested the position, in hindsight I have to admit I was the only possible choice."

"I still fail to see why Potter's suggestion would hold so much weight with anyone," protested Amhar.

Amelia eyed him stonily. "Mr Chairman, there isn't one nail, one plank, not one drop of water or glass of pumpkin juice, not a single thing in this town that isn't here because Lord Potter put them here. He was building Haven and making plans for us before the government fell. Most of us feel we owe him a life debt that can never be repaid."

"If he knew the government was going to fall, then he could have prevented it!" snapped Amhar.

"No, sir, he could not!" Amelia replied heatedly, losing her cool for a moment. She leaned back on her chair and took a deep, calming breath. Losing her temper would only hurt her case.

"Councilors," she said more calmly, "Lord Potter was constrained by the bounds of prophecy, which prevented him from stopping what was to happen. I will also remind my fellow Councilors that it was we in the Wizengamot who allowed for this situation to arise in the first place. We blindly allowed Fudge to continue with his head-in-the-sand policies. We had warnings years in advance that Voldemort would return and we ignored them. Now we have to pay the piper, much to the woe of our fellow countrymen.

"No, sir, you cannot lay the fall of the government at the feet of Harry Potter. He knew only a few short months in advance and did everything in his power to make sure we had a place to escape to. While Lord Potter was spending millions of galleons to build Haven, we elected Richfield, a Death Eater, as the new Minister of Magic! The government was lost from that moment."

Amhar cringed back from Amelia and her impassioned speech.

Trenton Largo, one of the Ministry's staunch supporters, smiled with glee and leaned over his desk. "Minister, how would you describe Lord Potter's relationship with the Ministry?"

"Until recently, Lord Potter has tried to stay out of politics. He despises his fame and wants nothing more than to be allowed to do what prophesy says he must; fight, and hopefully kill, Voldemort. Every time he has had to deal with our host government in an official capacity, he's taken great pains to ensure that either I or my Deputy is present and taking a major role in those proceedings.

"It wasn't until his honeymoon, and his subsequent actions in Egypt that led to his bringing the middle eastern ministry's over to our side, that I realized we were ignoring a valuable resource and made him an Ambassador at Large. It wasn't a role he wanted. It took a considerable amount of persuasion by not only myself but several others to get him to agree. He does not want to be involved in politics, but his role in the war demands it.

"Lord Potter's role is unique. He is an anachronism; the very ideal of what we want our heroes to be; modest, humble and noble. Yet he hates his

name and his titles. He wants nothing more than to be just Harry Potter.”

“And yet it’s a known fact that every morning you attend a briefing at his manor!” Amhar snarled.

Amelia blinked and adjusted her monocle. “Yes, that’s quite true. I do attend a meeting every morning at the manor. However, you are mistaken if you think I take orders from Lord Potter. If anything, those meetings are more like meetings of a town council. The range of topics discussed cover not only the war and political matters, but also things like building another primary school and opening a center for advanced studies and apprenticeships for the Haven School of Witchcraft and Wizardry.

“Since Lord Potter is the largest land owner and landlord for most of Haven, his presence is only right at these meetings. His efforts have brought us a Gringotts branch, Granger Publications, which employees several hundred of our citizens, Marjorie’s Herbs, also a large employer, and several other companies.”

“So these meetings are more like a town council? Then why aren’t they held in open session like a regular town council?” Amhar asked snidely.

“Because, Mr. Chairman, there are occasions, depending on who happens to be present, when we discuss items covered under the Official Secrets Act,” Amelia replied firmly.

“Is it true that Lady Potter stands in as the recorder for these meetings?” Andrew Korwin, one of the neutrals asked.

Amelia frowned at the man. “Yes, it’s true. She acts as Lord Potter’s personal secretary, as well as official recorder.”

“And Remus Lupin often attends, as well?” asked Korwin.

“Yes. Mr Lupin is Lord Potter’s seneschal, his chief of staff.”

“And a member of Potter’s brotherhood?”

Amelia stiffened. “Mr. Korwin, I’m afraid I can’t answer that question as it is protected by the Official Secrets Act.”

Korwin frowned and glanced at Amhar before leaning back on his chair. “Very well. How did Lady Potter, a mudblood, get clearance for Official Secrets?”

Amelia’s expression darkened. “Mr. Korwin, in committee you might be immune from prosecution, but should I ever hear you use that term outside of these four walls I will see you fined under the Muggle Protection Act.”

Korwin bounced back against his chair as if he had been slapped.

“For the record,” Amelia said frostily, addressing everyone, “Lord Potter, his wife and his chief of staff, as well as a number of other individuals, have been granted full security clearance by His Majesty’s government. I do not think it necessary to remind everyone present, especially you Mr. Chairman, that His Majesty’s government has always taken the leading role when it comes to matters of national security and integrity. Nor do I need to remind anyone that the Ministry has traditionally acknowledged the wishes of His Majesty’s government when it comes to matters of state secrecy. Or do I?” She raised an eyebrow and stared at Coeur de Lion.

Amhar looked as if he’d just swallowed something very sour. Because of his lineage, he made much of the royal prerogative. He couldn’t go against His Majesty’s wishes without appearing to be a hypocrite. It’s time to switch tracks, he thought.

“Madam Minister, I am curious as to what brought about the reasoning to remove the Ministry’s hiring restrictions. Need I remind you that those practices had been in-place for nearly eighty years?” Amhar asked, sounding nothing more than slightly curious.

Amelia removed her monocle and absently cleaned it for a moment before putting it back on. “Mr. Chairman, discounting the fact that those same hiring practices were grossly unfair to muggle born and others, at the time we were reforming the government, we were dealing with a much reduced labor pool and the candidates available simply would not have been acceptable under the old hiring standards.

“Now, in retrospect, it becomes obvious that we have prospered by discarding those old standards. We have a Ministry that is a fifth of its former size and nearly three times as efficient. We have employees who are happily doing their jobs and who want to work for the good of our people, rather than to line their pockets or to mark time until retirement.”

Korwin looked sourly at Amelia, but he refrained from commenting.

“When the Ministry returns to Britain do you expect to resume its hiring standards?” asked Amhar.

“No, Mr. Chairman, I do not,” she replied firmly.

“Why ever not?” blurted Korwin.

“Because it’s not good for the Ministry or our people, Councilor,” Amelia added smoothly.

Korwin sat back, crossed his arms and scowled at her.

Hmmm, Korwin, Amhar thought. He looks ready to come over to our way of thinking. Perhaps I should arrange a nice meal for him, maybe a few benefits. It shouldn’t cost too much to bring him over to our side.

Madam Minister, let us now turn to the Ministry census figures for Haven and talk about the muggle to magical ratio..."

Amelia rooted through the papers in front of her and sighed. She was beginning to regret her suggestion that Harry fund the Wizengamot.

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### **Padfoot Manor, (Evening of Nov 19th)...**

Harry spotted the couple from the window and smiled. "Hermione, come here for a moment," he called softly.

Hermione marked her place in her book, stood up and walked to the window where he stood.

"What's the matter, Harry? Oh!" she gasped.

Harry smiled and Hermione laughed softly.

"They look so cute, don't they?" she whispered.

He nodded. "So what do we do?" he asked.

"What do you mean?"

"You know that, despite what we've told them, they'll think they need our permission. I wish we could get them past that point, but we seem to be stuck," he said, turning to look at the couple holding hands in the moonlight.

He smiled as Dobby leaned down and kissed Winky.

Hermione's expression darkened. "You don't think they're hiding this from us, do you? Afraid that we might say no?"

Harry scowled. "Merlin, I hope not. Shall I call them in here and we can talk to them?"

"I don't know. Should we disturb them? I mean, look at them."

"I know, I hate to interrupt. But look at it this way. Considering how our schedule's been lately, when will we get the chance again?"

She nodded reluctantly and moved to sit at the breakfast table. He conjured two elf size chairs before sitting down next to her.

"Dobby? Winky? Can we speak with you for a moment?" Harry called.

The two elves appeared nearly instantly in response to his call. And while he wasn't sure an elf could blush, he was sure the darkening around their ears was the elf equivalent.

"Please, sit down," Harry said with a smile.

Dobby nodded and sat down quickly. He was often invited to sit with Harry and no longer found it uncomfortable.

Winky, however, looked at the chair uneasily and hesitated.

"It's alright, Winky," Hermione said. "Nothing bad is going to happen."

"Dobby, Hermione and I have noticed that you and Winky have grown... close," Harry said, only to frown as the eyes of the elves filled with unshed tears.

"Please, Master Harry! Don't takes away my Winky!" Dobby wailed as he jumped off his chair.

Harry leaned forward and placed both hands on Dobby's shoulders, stopping the little elf from dancing around.

Dobby looked up at Harry, his eyes huge and worried.

"Dobby, neither Hermione nor I would ever do that to you. We're asking because we wanted you to know that if you were thinking of having a relationship with Winky, we'd approve whole heartedly. You're members of our family, and your happiness is important to us," Harry said gently.

Winky stopped yanking on her ears and looked to her mistress for confirmation.

Hermione nodded, then grinned when the elf began to dance with joy.

"I only asked, Dobby, because I don't know elf traditions. Do you get married? What's involved?" Harry asked.

Dobby jumped back onto his chair and bobbed his head. They'd had many serious conversations like this. Harry was woefully ignorant of the life of a regular house elf and Dobby had helped fill in the blanks for him.

"Elves don't gets married like Masters do. All we needs is permission from Master to court. Then later, Master gives permission for us to have little ones," Dobby said seriously.

"That's barbaric!" protested Hermione.

Harry shot her a quelling glance.

She knew they couldn't change the life of the house elves overnight. They had to work within the framework of existing traditions to fix things.

"Dobby, you and Winky will never need our permission to get married or to have babies," Harry said softly.

When Winky looked at her mistress questioningly, Hermione nodded emphatically. "We like the idea that you two want to be with each other," she said quietly, looking first at Winky, then at Dobby.

Winky slid onto her chair and the Potters couldn't help but smile when she reached for Dobby's hand.

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### **Author's Notes:**

"Hey cue the ominous music! It's time for the Author's notes!" Bob hissed at Alyx.

She nodded and turned away for a moment.

Bob strode purposefully towards the podium and faced the packed crowd. Behind him, Alyx began to hum, badly, using a kazoo.

Bob blinked and looked at her in shock. "That's ominous music? What happened to our ominous music maker?"

"We couldn't afford to keep leasing it. We spent our budget on the technicolor penguins," Alyx replied calmly.

"But they were in black and white!" protested Bob.

"Yes, but they were a very colorful black and white," she told him firmly.

"You're killing me here," Bob whined. "How can I do Author's notes with no ominous music?"

Alyx took pity on him. "Oh, don't worry. I've arranged additional funding from the National Science Foundation. We now have a grant to see how long it takes to drive a Fan Fiction author insane by dropping ping pong balls on his or her head."

Bob eyed her evilly for a moment, then shook his head against the idea. As annoying as she could be with her kazoo, she was too appealing to share a bed with. Besides, she already had a fascination with sharp objects. What would she do when she was insane?

"So, who's our victim?" he asked.

"Oh, Viridianprime or Musings\_of\_Apathy will work for me," she replied.

"Cool! Now, can I do the author's notes?"

"I suppose," she replied in a long suffering voice.

He stepped back to the podium and grinned as ominous music started to play. He glared at Alyx and she quickly hid her kazoo from sight.

We have a request to include akmusique32 in our author's notes. So here she is. She has a little brother named Eli who is for sale on Ebay and she has interesting career goals. AK, if you reach those goals, we want pictures... or video.

Jamie: Switch the meds, man (or is it woman?). You're seeing things that aren't there.

Colin Creevey is now a sixth year student at the Haven School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. He is also president of the photography club and owner of the peep hole system into the girls' locker room. One five minute look for a galleon, see Dennis for details.

The Great Pumpkin thing was a little fluff to lighten up the chapter. We try to keep the chapters from getting overly dark, although it's not always possible. Don't read too much into the symbolism of the legend. Personally, Alyx and I thought it was funny, and it was a great way of showing Halloween outside what we've seen in Hogwarts.

MarinePotterfan; I will bow to your experience and hurl my Crucios at the federation of American Scientists who published on their website this information:

CBU-87 contains 202 bomblets and a single munition covers an area 200 yards by 400 yards.

Bad FAS Bad! Die! Crucio!

A lot of people are asking questions about Dumbledore. So, let me put that issue to bed once and for all time. Yes, yes, yes, maybe, no, yes, sometimes, and only on Fridays in a hot tub with two guys named Bruce.

Ahem... Snoopy is not an animagus. Woodstock is. Nuf said.

Like it or not, folks, the Wizengamot is here to stay and will continue to be a monkey wrench in the mix. See my post in our Yahoo group for more information on this Wizengamot.

No, Robert, I never kid anyone with such a cool name. (Bob)

ES, how can one soundtrack possibly fit? I actually envision multiple tracks, like the theme song from Mission Impossible for whenever the twins are playing a prank, and the Addams Family theme for Amy. The brotherhood? Easy, Queen's We are the Champions. Grin...

Musings, to a large extent the muggle governments are unwilling to directly attack the wizards in Britain. They are afraid that such an attack might ignite anti muggle sentiments elsewhere, which explains why they are sticking to strictly muggle targets and letting Harry handle the wizards.

Sean, thank you for your comments. You have no idea how tickled that made us. I consider This Means War to be one of the best pieces of fan fiction out there and to be compared to it made our day. Thanks!

**Coming next chapter...**

Words! Sentences and (gasp!) paragraphs. Same bat time, same bat channel!

*Bobmin*  
*FanficAuthors.net*

# Sunrise Over Britain

## Chapter 19 - Difficult Times for all

### Standard Disclaimer:

"Oh, God! Now what's the problem," Alyx muttered as she stared at her husband.

Bob peeked over the edge of his desk and looked at her fearfully. "We can't use Snape. They don't like us using Amy. In fact, they're screaming for Dumbledore and Amhar to be in the opening disclaimer," he moaned fearfully.

"Who's screaming?" Alyx asked, looking around in confusion.

"THEM!!!" Bob shouted, pointing at his monitor.

Alyx leaned forward, staring at Bob's monitor. Suddenly she reeled back in shock. "Eyes! They're looking at me!"

"They're our readers," whispered Bob. "Greedy, evil, hungry readers. Demanding, pushing, prodding and poking. More, more, more! There's no satisfying them!"

Alyx backed up and whimpered in terror, then tried to hide behind the filing cabinet. Her hair stood...

[BREAK]

A man wearing a badge walked out onto the stage and faced the thousands of Internet readers.

"We interrupt this disclaimer to announce that the authors, once they've been given sufficient drugs, will be calm enough to continue. In the meantime, we, the official Fan Fiction Author's Association, would like to apologize for their breakdown. As required by law, we must tell you that the authors of this story do not, in any way, own Harry Potter, or the Potter Universe. JK Rowling owns it all. The authors are merely playing with these characters," he said.

There was a sudden rumbling sound and a horn blared. The man looked up in fear as the 5:15 freight train zoomed in from off stage, crushing him.  
[END BREAK]

Alyx opened the filing cabinet drawer and peeked out. "Did it work?"

"Yep!" Bob said happily. "I knew if we refused to do it, the folks from FFAA would do it for us."

"And the train?"

"It was cheaper than those blasted penguins," he said with a shrug. "Now, on with the story!"

Alyx grabbed a bag of popcorn and a Diet Pepsi (we don't own them, either). She sat down and leaned back. "Oh good! I do love stories."

Bob rolled his eyes at her, then cued the story to start.

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### Sunrise over Britain

#### Chapter 19

#### Stonewall Lane, Dublin, Ireland (Nov 20th)...

Amhar leaned back on his chair and wiped his mouth with a napkin. Across the table from him sat Andrew Korwin, one of the neutral members of the committee. Amhar had arranged for Korwin to join him tonight at an exclusive restaurant on Stonewall Lane. It had been an excellent meal, the first part of the evenings entertainment.

"I couldn't help but notice you were quite upset about Lady Potter's security clearance, Andrew," Amhar said quietly.

The two men paused when a waiter appeared to refill their wine glasses.

Once the waiter had left, Korwin frowned and sipped his wine. "It struck me as odd, Amhar. Getting security clearance is a laborious process, normally taking months to accomplish. Now out of the blue we have Merlin knows how many people who suddenly have high access? And then there is the dubious issue of Lady Potter's parentage.

"As you may recall, I'm known for being an expert in familial histories. I've checked and there are no records of any Grangers on the formal roles of wizards. That makes her a muggle born, and yet both parents are not only wizards, they are currently undergoing instruction by several of the professors from the school!"

Amhar looked surprised. He hadn't been aware of this information about Lady Potter. "Could it be a case of her parents having been refused the chance to go to Hogwarts when they turned eleven?"

Korwin shook his head. "I don't think so. Something doesn't add up, Amhar. Lady Potter attended Hogwarts; that's where she met Lord Potter. But



her parents? From what I have learned, they only came into their powers within the past year.”

Amhar scowled. “But how is that possible? You can't turn a muggle into a Wizard.”

“I don't know and that bothers me. I can't see a way to make it happen without someone using some sort of dark arts,” Korwin said with a nervous laugh. “I'm no expert on dark arts mind you, but this doesn't make any sense to me.”

Amhar blinked and slowly smiled. This could be useful. The evening was turning out to be even more eventful than he imagined.

Korwin studied Amhar for a moment, then he decided to push things along. “So, Amhar, neither of us are children. We've both been members of the Wizengamot for twenty years or more. What's your real purpose in inviting me out this evening?”

Amhar smiled thinly. “Blunt and to the point as usual, Andrew. Very well, then. To business, I suppose.” He paused for a moment and sipped his wine while he ordered his thoughts.

“I couldn't help but notice your reaction to certain comments made by some of the people giving testimonies. While you and your family have tended to be more neutral in the past, I have to wonder if that has changed?”

Korwin frowned at the mention of family. Most of them were still missing in Britain. His youngest son, Oscar, was safely attending the Salem Institute and his daughter was in Beauxbatons, but his wife and mother had not made it out of the country before the fall. He had no idea where they were.

“Let's just say I am not pleased that so many people seem content to allow a seventeen year old to be leading the effort. I also don't like the idea that so many non-government people have been given access to official secrets,” Korwin replied stiffly.

Amhar nodded knowingly. “I, too, am troubled by Potter and the hold he seems to have on our Minister.”

Korwin leaned back on his chair and sipped some of the expensive wine Amhar was paying for. “Why don't we cut to the chase? I know you detest Potter because he refuses to fall for your royalty act. You want to ruin him. Personally, I don't have your dislike for the man, but then I don't have to pretend to be related to royalty. Any genealogist worth their weight would tell you in ten minutes that you come from an unacknowledged bastard line of the family.”

When Amhar scowled angrily, Korwin smiled and leaned forward, placing his elbows on the table. “You want to take Potter down and you want my help to do it. Now, what are you offering?”

Amhar leaned forward, matching Korwin's posture. “I'm offering a few additional benefits for your help. Let's say an extra two hundred and fifty galleons a month? And if I see you helping my cause, I'll increase that to five hundred galleons. There will be some additional benefits from time to time. Tonight is an example; fine dining and a little entertainment afterwards.”

Korwin leaned back and nodded. The salary paid to Wizengamot members was barely adequate when one considered he had to pay his staff from that money. He nodded and sipped his wine, silently toasting his host.

Amhar relaxed now that the deal was done. The enjoyable part of the evening was yet to come. He signaled to the waiter, who nodded and pulled a curtain aside so the entertainment could join them.

As four polyjuice prostitutes entered the private dining room, Korwin laughed. “You do know how to top off a fine meal, Amhar,” he commented, reaching for the closest woman and pulling her into his lap.

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## **The Town of Haven (Evening of Nov 20th)...**

Alissa Quinn trudged tiredly up the street. She had just come off her shift at the Ministry building and she was exhausted. She worked the diplomatic desk as the night manager, despite being a squib. Her background in international politics had made her a shoe in for the job when the Ministry reformed under Amelia Bones.

Alissa entered a small alleyway between two buildings. It would put her behind most of the buildings and allow her to cut straight across the field towards her house. She had just cleared the back of the alleyway when she fell, taken from behind with a petrifying spell.

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## **Padfoot Manor...**

Ginny bolted upright on the bed, screaming. Neville rolled from his side of the bed and grabbed for his wand. He was covering Ginny and scanning the room for signs of danger almost before he realized he was awake.

Seeing nothing threatening, he dropped his wand and grabbed the still screaming Ginny. As he gathered her into his arms she fought like wildcat, scratching and tearing at him.

The door burst open and Harry stormed in, his staff glowing in the dim light. Behind him followed the entire Brotherhood.

“Ginny, wake up!” Neville shouted loudly, still struggling with the glassy eyed witch. She was locked in some terrifying vision that only she could see.

A moment later, Narcissa pushed her way into the room and rushed towards the bed. She placed her wand at the back of Ginny's head, then slid it down to the base of her skull and whispered something. The screaming stopped, and the red head slumped against Neville.

"What did you do to her?" he asked angrily, now holding Ginny protectively in his arms.

"She'll be fine in a moment, Neville. It's a very low powered *Stupefy* the healers use to calm distraught patients. She'll wake up in less than a minute and I'll have a calming draught ready for her to drink when she does," Narcissa replied.

True to her word, less than a minute later Ginny began to come around. Narcissa produced a small vial of potion and coaxed the girl to drink it.

After emptying the vial, she slumped against Neville. Her eyes were closed and she wept quietly. Her husband stroked her hair and was whispering to her, trying to calm her.

"Neville?" Harry said softly.

The young man looked up at him.

"We need to find out what's going on, but I don't want to push her," Harry said.

Neville tightened his grip on her. "Give me a few minutes alright?"

Harry nodded and motioned for everyone to move away from the bed.

"I think this is a result of her talent," Harry said. "But it's the first time I've ever known her to become hysterical and wake up the whole household."

"She did that a few times in her second year. McGonagall taught her a silencing charm to keep her from waking up everyone in the dorm," Hermione replied seriously. "We all assumed it was because of her experience in the Chamber."

Harry hadn't know, and his eyes widened as he stared at his wife.

The group conversed quietly for about ten minutes before Neville called them over. He still held Ginny protectively, but the calming draught was working.

"Ginny, are you alright?" Harry asked the pale young woman.

She nodded jerkily and looked at Neville.

"She said she was dreaming when she felt an intense burst of evil, goading someone on to cause pain," Neville replied for his wife. "The evil seemed to want to feed off the pain. It stopped suddenly and she was terrified. The evil reminded her of Tom's diary a little, but it was different, simpler. Tom wanted control, this wanted to cause pain and death."

Harry searched Ginny's face for a moment; her eyes looked haunted. He reached out and touched her on the shoulder and she flinched slightly before relaxing again. "Would you like us to stay close tonight, Ginny?" he asked gently.

Ginny looked at him, then back at Neville. "N-N-No. I'm safe with Neville here, but thank you for asking, Harry."

He smiled down at the pair. "Good enough. Just to be safe, I'll pop on over to Constable Headquarters and see if anything is going on."

"Is that really necessary?" asked Hermione, coming up behind him.

He turned to look at her. "I think so. Ginny needs to know and it might help boost her confidence in her abilities. Besides, something might be going on."

When Hermione nodded, Harry transfigured his robe and boxers into something more suitable before he apparated from the manor.

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### **Ministry of Magic, Constable Headquarters...**

Michael O'Dalley blinked, and like so many others, he reached for his wand when Harry appeared in the room with no warning.

Harry grinned and held up his hands, showing he was unarmed.

"My lord, I didn't expect..."

"It's alright, Michael. We had a bit of excitement up at the manor and I decided to pop over and see if there was a problem," Harry replied.

"Excitement, my lord?" asked Michael in confusion.

"Yes. Ginny, that is Mrs. Longbottom, woke up tonight in terror. She has a unique talent for detecting dark and evil magic and I thought something might have set it off," he replied.

O'Dalley's eyes glinted with interest and he motioned Harry into a small office where the two men could speak privately.

Harry was surprised when O'Dalley closed the door behind them and cast several charms on it to prevent eavesdropping.

"Michael?"

My lord, we had another murder tonight. One of my men nearly caught the murderer but he or she managed to give him the slip. My man spotted the suspect stab someone at the end of an alley and he shouted before giving chase. Something was definitely strange about the scene. I was only there for a few minutes before I came back here to organize our constables for a Haven wide search. I left two men and our forensic healer on site to examine the body before the Irish investigators arrive, but I don't like this, sir. Something doesn't add up. The victim was dead, but I don't know what killed her."

Harry leaned against a desk, thinking. "I know I've offered this before, but say the word and I'll have fifty ex-Aurors patrolling the streets from dusk to dawn," he offered quietly.

O'Dalley looked pained. "I don't know, my lord. My concern about possible vigilantism is still valid."

Harry shrugged. "So deputize them, Michael."

O'Dalley's head whipped up and he stared at Harry in shock. "Merlin, why didn't I think of that? It might just work!"

Harry clapped him on the back. "Because you were busy doing your job. No one liked the idea of vigilantes. Deputizing them as volunteers means that the Wizengamot can't complain about over spending your budget, and you can brag about using local resources that already have law enforcement training to safeguard our town."

O'Dalley grinned appreciatively.

"I better get back to the Manor. People are still a bit jumpy and they'll want to know what has happened. Keep me in the loop on this, please?" he asked.

O'Dalley nodded. When Harry vanished from the room, it shook slightly as he passed through the anti-apparation wards. O'Dalley shook his head in wonder, then rubbed his hands together. There was much to be done.

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### **Padfoot Manor...**

Hermione sat in bed trying to read her book, waiting for Harry to return. The manor had settled into an uneasy silence and she wondered if any of them would get back to sleep.

"I'm back," Harry said quietly.

Hermione yelped and dove for her wand before pulling up short.

"Don't do that! Will you make a noise or something when you apparate?" she scolded her smiling husband.

He chuckled to himself and transfigured his clothing back into his robe and boxers. Turning to climb into bed, he was surprised to see Hermione clutching his pillow.

"Well? You vanish into the night and expect to waltz back into my bed without any explanations?" she asked archly.

"You knew where I was going," he replied mildly.

She rolled her eyes. "Of course, I knew where you were going. I want to know what you found out!"

Harry sat on the edge of the bed and sighed. "There was another murder tonight. It seemed to happen just around the time Ginny woke us all up. They nearly caught the killer, but the constable didn't get that lucky. O'Dalley is confused by the murder and happy that I gave him a way of bringing in the Yanks without resorting to vigilantism."

Hermione was silent for a moment, her mood somber. "Why is Michael confused?"

"He said that one of his men saw the victim get stabbed, but he doesn't know if that's what killed her," he replied. "Now, can I have my pillow back?"

Hermione replaced his pillow and flipped the covers back so he could crawl under them. Once he was in place, she rolled, snuggling up in the hollow of his arm as he wrapped it around her protectively.

Harry shut off the lights with a wave of his hand and she shivered. Their Irish home didn't seem to be the safe haven it had once been.

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### **Haven School of Witchcraft and Wizardry (Nov 21st)...**

A very harried McGonagall looked up from her desk when someone knocked at her door. The constables had chased someone in this direction the night before and they were currently checking the school to make sure someone wasn't hiding in a classroom or closet. Students had been sent back to their dormitories under constable escort and the school was in a bit of a panic.

"Come in!" she shouted.

The door opened and Professor Flitwick entered, followed by Emma Granger.

"I'm sorry, Minerva. Have we come at a bad time?" asked Emma.

Minerva smiled. Emma and her husband were pupils of hers, but of a different sort. Harry had activated their magic only a few months ago and she tutored them once a week, mainly guiding them on a course of self study. It was possible for Minerva to see qualities of Hermione in both of her students. Her mother was studious and wanted to understand the theory behind everything. Her father was more like Harry; hard working, but interested in doing the magic, not understanding it. In Hermione, the two qualities made for a powerful combination.

"No, not at all Emma, Filius. Do come in. I can use a break from the madhouse that the constables created," Minerva replied, waving them to chairs.

Several of the headmaster portraits huffed loudly at her friendly style. The elves had set up the Head office in a manner that was similar to Dumbledore's, including the portraits. The former headmasters were most upset about being taken from Hogwarts, but they understood the necessity of it.

"Minerva, has Harry spoken to you recently about what is happening to Hogwarts? Or, for that matter, what he wants to do with Hogwarts following the war?" asked Flitwick.

"He's spoken a few times about this school, but I haven't spoken to him recently about Hogwarts," Minerva replied, a little confused by the topic.

"Harry slipped into Hogwarts a while back and was surprised to find the school's magic was draining away. He's afraid that it will be permeated with Voldemort's foulness by the time we get back. I asked Filius to help me research ways to cleanse such magic from a building or area," Emma explained.

Minerva looked interested. Although not specifically her field, it was something interesting and different.

"And? What did you find?"

"Well, we found one ritual we could use, but it would have to be done by the faculty. There are others, but frankly I don't think sacrificing Unicorns and Griffins would be acceptable to anyone," Filius murmured.

"The problem is the ritual will cleanse the school of the magic, but there is no guarantee the school will go back to it's old self with moving staircases, relocating classrooms and such," Emma said sadly. "Dan and I never attended Hogwarts, except vicariously through Hermione's letters, but even we feel an attachment to it."

Minerva turned to Flitwick. "Have you documented everything we need to cleanse the school? There isn't much we can do at the moment other than be ready when the time comes."

"I've doubled checked our research, Minerva. We'll need six faculty members to perform the ritual of cleansing. It's a tedious and very stressful ritual, but we'll manage, I think," replied the little professor.

"Excellent!" she replied, then turned to Emma. "How are Harry and Hermione? I've not spoken with them for quite some time now."

Emma sighed. "They, like the rest of the younger members of the Brotherhood, are training for a big mission. Hermione comes home every night exhausted, and Harry isn't much better off. He has days where he uses his staff all day long as a cane. I know this war is important, but it's hard to see your children suffering from it."

Emma shook her head, trying to break the somber mood. "But enough of my bad thoughts. How do you like your new school now that it's up and running fully?"

Minerva leaned back on her chair and smiled. "I always enjoyed Hogwarts, but Haven is so well thought out. There are sections of the school like the practice rooms which didn't exist at all in Hogwarts. I have to admit to having reservations when I first saw it, but then we need to remember that Hogwarts was built to be a castle, a fortress at a time when muggles were persecuting our kind. Haven was built in a more enlightened and, hopefully, gentler era."

Everyone turned when her door opened and a constable poked his head in. "Headmistress, we're done here, and we apologize for the disruption."

Minerva smiled. Now she could get the school back in order again! "Thank you, Constable. We're happy to have been able to help you."

The constable nodded and closed the door.

Minerva turned in her chair and conjured several cups and a tea service. "Tea anyone?" she asked.

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### **Ministry Building, Office of Chief Constable...**

"Mr. Stanton is here to see you, sir."

"Right, send him in," O'Dalley called, then stood and walked around his desk.

Charles Stanton was the senior American Auror and commander of the American forces in Haven. O'Dalley hadn't wanted to use them, but last night Lord Potter had given him an idea he had not thought of.

Michael smiled when Stanton walked in and offered his hand. He wasn't an impressive looking man, but he was greatly respected, and not just by his own troops. He wasn't arrogant, loud or heavy handed, choosing instead to command with confidence and a quiet authority few men would question. O'Dalley was all the more impressed with him because of it.

"Commander Stanton, welcome. Please, won't you take a seat?" O'Dalley said, gesturing to a chair across from his desk.

Stanton sat and looked at O'Dalley for a moment. "I have to admit I find myself curious as to why the head of the Haven police force is interested in talking to me. Which one of my men has done something wrong? And what kind of damages are we talking about?"

O'Dalley blinked in surprise, then started to laugh. "No, sir, none of your men are guilty of anything that I'm aware of. I asked you here because I find myself in the unenviable position of needing help desperately. And you, sir, might be able to provide it."

Stanton frowned and motioned for O'Dalley to continue.

"In the past months there has been a rise in crimes against muggles and squibs. I know of several incidents in which your men intervened on behalf of a muggle or squib, protecting them..."

"Yes, well, we don't raise our children with the nonsensical bigotry like they do over here," Stanton said, interrupting him. He didn't understand this blood business; it was an alien concept to him. Fortunately, most of the Brits he worked with seemed to be against the idea, as well.

"I agree with you, Commander. But my personal views aren't really the issue. My hands are tied by a limited budget, and now that the Wizengamot is operating, they will do everything in their power to see that the Ministry doesn't expand its efforts to stamp out the blood bigotry. That leaves me in somewhat of a bind and is the reason you are here today."

Stanton blinked and smiled thinly. He'd heard a bit about the Wizengamot.

"Last night, Haven experienced its second murder in less than a month. Both victims were stabbed to death and both victims were not magical," O'Dalley said, then he paused and rifled through the parchments on his desk. Finding the one he was looking for, he waved it at Stanton.

"This is the report from our forensic healer who says the second victim did not have an immediately fatal wound! He says, and I quote, 'The knife wound is narrow and sharpened on both edges, suggesting a dagger of some sort. Less than seven inches in length, the blade penetrated the victim's lower abdominal area, nicking the lower intestines, but otherwise missing most organs. Considering the wound, this victim should have survived many hours without healer assistance. The amount of blood loss was minimal, suggesting the time of death was very close to when she was stabbed. However, the body was similar in condition to those who die shortly after having been kissed by a Dementor. The cause of death at this time cannot be determined, but the knife wound has been ruled out.'"

O'Dalley threw the report on his desk.

"The wound is identical to the first victim, Commander. I have a serial murderer loose in Haven and not enough people to protect the community," he concluded quietly, the frustration clear in his voice.

Stanton leaned forward on his chair. "What do you want us to do, Chief Constable?" His gaze was direct and the quiet anger burning in his eyes was obvious.

"Most of your men started out as Aurors, upholding the law. I was thinking that perhaps some of your men might be willing to volunteer for a deputy constable position? And perhaps others might consider sharpening their commando skills by training in Haven at night," O'Dalley suggested.

A slow grin appeared on Stanton's face. "I'll have fifty men report for duty tonight, Chief. And I think you're right. Perhaps it might be interesting to test out commando training in town at night."

Michael O'Dalley smiled. For the first time in several days he breathed a little easier. Haven would get the protection they needed.

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## Haven Operations Center...

Harry looked up as his company commanders entered his office.

"I wanted to go over the operational plan one last time. We're still at least fifteen days from making the assault, but in a week's time we'll stand down for most of a week to allow everyone a chance to decompress and relax," he said.

He stood then and walked over to a large photograph of the Leeds camp hanging on one wall.

"Able, Baker and Charlie companies will assault the barracks at the northern entrance, while Delta and Echo companies will force the eastern entrance. Delta and Echo will fight their way through the camp, killing the guard force. Echo will provide backup for Delta, but when the Dementors come boiling out of the hole, I expect you to push them back into their building and pen them up there.

"Commander Stanton seems to think we can pen the Dementors in and I think he might be right. They are not incorporeal creatures, so Q Branch is working on a way of encasing their building in ice, locking them in. If that doesn't work, we'll have to drive them off using every Patronus we can muster.

"Hopefully, Delta will be able to link up with the rest of the brigade, opening the northern gate if we haven't done so by the time you arrive.

"Once the guard force has been neutralized, we evacuate the camp. I don't care what you have to do to get them moving; stun people if necessary and slap a portkey on them. We have almost no time to waste here and a lot of people to move.

"Delta, Echo and Charlie companies will sweep the camp, portkeying anyone they find. Meanwhile, Able and Baker will set up a defensive

perimeter around the camp. We'll also tear down their anti-portkey, anti-apparation wards and erect our own in their place.

"With the camp clear, all companies will police the area one final time, send out our wounded and turn out to join Able and Baker on the perimeter. We'll hold the perimeter for a while, then fall back into the camp, leaving traps and mines behind. Once inside the camp, we'll evacuate to Haven."

Harry turned back to his commanders, some of whom were more than fifteen years older than he was. He felt uncomfortable in this role, but even the oldest of his commanders acknowledged him and the Brotherhood's special place in the war.

"Questions?"

"With the wards in place, we'll need to arrive close to the camp so we can surprise them. But I'm concerned about Delta and Echo; they must hit the eastern entrance at the same time that we hit the northern one," Draco said. He was the only other member of the Brotherhood at the meeting. He had been training with Harry and Neville and was assigned the position of Commander of Echo company.

"We've taken that into account, Draco. Delta and Echo will leave exactly fifteen minutes before the other companies, since they will have a longer distance to travel. The nearest large open space close to the eastern entrance is nearly three kilometers away. But don't forget, you will be able to contact us on your floo, so we should still be able to coordinate our movements," Harry replied. "Any other questions?"

He looked around, noting the grim expressions. He knew each one was wondering how many men they would lose in the battle.

"Right. A few days before the attack we'll be checking everything in our inventory. I understand we're going to get some rather interesting and very lethal toys from Q Branch, so warn your men. Don't play with anything until after we get the lectures on how to use them."

Several men grinned. Q Branch was turning out to be a godsend for the troops, and a nightmare for command since they insisted on turning out as many non-lethal weapons as they did lethal. The non-lethal devices were turning up everywhere as practical jokes.

Harry sat back on his chair. "Dismissed," he said, then watched the men file out.

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### **Ministry Building, Office of the Minister of Magic...**

Amelia smiled when Harry entered the office. She was sitting across from a stately looking gentleman with a bushy mustache.

She stood and waved at Harry to join them at the small table. "Harry, I'm glad you received my message. I'd like to introduce you to Jacques Delafote, the French Ambassador to the Irish Ministry. He came to us today with a bit of a problem and I was hoping you could clarify a few things for us," Amelia said.

Harry shook the Ambassador's hand and nodded to Amelia before sitting. A house elf appeared at his side and handed him a cup of tea.

"I'll try, Minister."

Amelia looked over at the Ambassador and nodded for him to begin.

"Mr. Potter, yesterday we had a number of what we think are German citizens who appeared at our customs point after arriving from Britain. Most of them apparated away before we could process them, but eight of them immediately fell ill, and some of those who apparated away also appeared to be ill. Now, in light of your warding of Britain, we felt it necessary to ask why these people might possibly be sick. Our healers are saying that some are close to death."

The Ambassador leaned back on his chair and calmly sipped at his tea, studying the young man before him.

"Eight of them, you say? Good. I'll assemble a medical and interrogation team," Harry said, placing his cup on the table.

"Pardon?" asked the Ambassador in surprise.

Harry stopped and looked at the Frenchman. "We can cure them, but not without interrogating them first."

"Unacceptable. You will provide us with the cure, Monsieur," said Delafote.

"Ambassador, the reason these men are sick is because they are guilty of killing someone recently and their auras have turned black because of that murder. I assure you, all of them, including the ones that got away, will be deathly ill within a few days.

The Ambassador waved a hand dismissively. "It matters not. These men are under the direct protection of the French Ministry for Magic."

Harry's eyes hardened. "If you will not accept an interrogation team, then they will die," he said flatly.

The Ambassador reeled back as if struck. No one talked to France like this! "Madam Minister, surely you do not let this child dictate your policy!" he sputtered.

Amelia sniffed once and adjusted her monocle. "He does not dictate our policy in this matter. Point of fact, he is following our policy to the letter. As it turns out, Mr. Potter is the only person capable of imbuing the potion with the necessary magic to cure these men. If you want them to recover, you will have to cooperate with our wishes."

Delafote frowned. "I see. Well, I can tell you now that my government will not allow these men to be questioned. It is not possible."

"Then I'm afraid we are at an impasse, Mr. Ambassador. Now, might I ask why your government is making this hostile gesture? Are you declaring yourselves allied to Lord Voldemort?" asked Amelia, her tone cool.

"Every other government on the continent and elsewhere has known about the restrictions imposed by my barrier and no one has complained about it. Six times now we've sent out medical and interrogation teams to talk with people coming through the barrier. Tell me, Mr. Ambassador, just what will the rest of the world do to France when they learn that you are allying yourselves to Voldemort?" Harry asked conversationally.

Delafote paled. "This is an outrage! We would never do such a thing!"

"And yet, we have proof that your own customs service has been working in cooperation with Voldemort's forces in Britain. There is considerable corruption in your government, even you have to admit that," Amelia said, chiding the older man gently.

The Ambassador sat quietly for a moment. The charge was true and he knew it. But it was his job to follow his government's wishes and uphold the honor of France.

"I'm truly sorry, Mr. Ambassador. Because your government will not allow the men to be questioned, they will die. All I can suggest is you take comfort from the fact that they deserve their fate," Harry offered.

"Your words are disturbing, Mr. Potter. You accuse us of allying ourselves with a monster. That we would never do. I will convey your requirements to my government, but I can tell you now, they will not agree to them," he said, then he turned to Amelia, "And pardon me for saying so Madam, but my government will not take your threats seriously. You are, after all, a Minister of a country that has been conquered, no?"

The Ambassador stood and made his way from the office.

"Well, that went well," Amelia said angrily.

Harry blinked. "I'm sorry, Amelia. Do you think I should have given them the potions?"

"Oh, Merlin, no. I'm not angry with you, Harry. We've been expecting a break with France for a while now. There are simply too many pure blooded bigots in power over there. The muggles are cooperating on the international scene, but the French Ministry of Magic ignored our repeated warnings that their customs service was compromised. Then they ignored completely the attack on Susan and Terry, except to complain about our having a security detail watching them without French approval. Now this? I daresay we won't get much help from France until they clean up their own house," she told him.

Harry breathed a sigh of relief. "I'm glad you have to deal with this stuff instead of me. Quite honestly, I'm tempted to visit the French Ministry and clean house myself. But I don't think that would be a good idea on the diplomatic front, however."

Amelia smiled and picked up her cup. She swirled the tea around for a moment before looking at him again. The idea of Harry visiting the French Ministry actually appealed to her, for a moment. "No, it wouldn't be a good idea. But you're young and still learning that you can't always let your emotions rule your actions. Diplomacy, like politics, means smiling at someone you absolutely loathe, pretending to be their best friend, all the while plotting their downfall."

"That seems rather harsh, don't you think? I mean, how do you know who your true friends are?"

"That comes from your instincts, Harry. You and I both know where we stand in relation to each other. Your relationship with my niece and her husband practically makes us family, and our common goal cements that relationship. But you don't always have the luxury of knowing exactly where you truly stand. The allies of today could be the enemies of tomorrow.

"There are few constants in international diplomacy. Britain's relationship to the common wealth nations seems to be one, and our relationship with the Yanks is another. But Britain has a long history of war with France, and one cannot simply sweep that history under the rug," Amelia said. She paused for a moment, her brow wrinkled in thought.

"Harry, I don't mean to lecture you about this, but as an Ambassador at Large, you need to remember these points whenever you are speaking to an official from another government. I have been putting off repeated requests for you to meet with certain members of our muggle government, as well as with others. But I won't be able to hold them off for long. You represent so many aspects of our struggle that many people want to meet with you."

He scowled. He didn't like the idea of people wanting to meet him because of what he was.

Amelia leaned over and placed her hand on his. "Take some advice from an old lady, Harry. Your fame is a tool, just like your staff. Learn to use it for the good of others, like you do your staff, and you'll be unstoppable."

She glanced at the wall clock and gasped. "Oh, damn. I best be moving. Susan is cooking something special tonight and wanted me home early for once," she exclaimed.

Harry grinned then. Susan and Terry had moved from the manor into the Minister's residence a few weeks back. Terry was working under Caleb most of the day, and spending the rest of the day in therapy, trying to master regrown nerves. Susan, now nearly four months pregnant, helped Amelia around her office, learning the ways of the Ministry.

"I understand, Amelia. Hermione doesn't like me missing too many meals either," he replied, standing. Then, with a cheeky grin, he bowed and vanished from her office.

## Wizengamot Investigative Committee (Nov 22nd)...

"Mr. Pickerton, you filled the role of Deputy Minister for Defense from April until late August, did you not?"

"Yes, Mr. Chairman, I did fill that role until I had to leave for health reasons," replied Miles.

Amhar looked up at Miles for a moment, then scribbled something on the notes in front of him.

"Let's see, during your time as Deputy Minister, you employed over two hundred house elves..."

"Actually, Mr. Chairman, we didn't employ any house elves. They were all volunteers," Miles corrected.

Amhar blinked and frowned. "Volunteers? How can a house elf be anything more than a servant?"

"The house elves who are current assisting the Ministry in the war effort are all volunteers, Mr. Chairman," Miles repeated.

"Surely, Mr. Pickerton, you can see the obvious dangers to treating house elves as equals?" asked Andrew Korwin.

Miles shrugged. "It wasn't my decision to make. Lord Potter suggested the use of house elves and then he asked them for volunteers. Quite a few wanted to help."

Amhar smiled thinly. "Getting back on track, then. I understand you undertook a mission to assault a group of supposed Death Eaters in Northern Ireland?"

"Yes, sir, that is correct."

"Can you elaborate on that mission, please?" Amhar asked in a silky tone.

"On 28th June, forces of Ireland, the United States, Canada, and Britain assaulted a farm house in Armagh, Northern Ireland. The Irish Ministry was quite concerned. Their intelligence services, along with our own, had located a large number of Death Eaters who had managed to escape Britain before the line of death was put into place.

"Allied forces attacked the farmhouse and overwhelmed the forces. I don't have the exact figures on hand, but close to one hundred confirmed Death Eaters were either captured or killed that day. Those captured were sent to an Irish military facility, where they were tried under a military court and executed."

"Executed? All of them?" exclaimed Korwin, his face paling.

"Yes, sir."

"But... but they were pure bloods! I've seen the list myself. Some of them were from the finest British families that ever existed!"

"They were the enemy, sir," Miles replied flatly.

"How do you know they were the enemy, Mr. Pickerton? You and your wild bunch attacked a farm at dawn and either killed or captured every person you found there!" Korwin shouted.

Miles looked at Korwin contemptuously. "That farm contained over one hundred dark artifacts, and more than one hundred marked Death Eaters. I can assure you, *Councilor*, every person killed or captured at the farmhouse that morning was either a confirmed Death Eater or waiting to become one. Every one of them was tried in front of a military tribunal, using Veritaserum, and found guilty of multiple capital offenses."

Miles paused and looked around at the committee. "Don't you people understand? This is war! These people are our enemy and we don't arrest enemies, we kill them. Every day hundreds, if not thousands of our fellow citizens are killed and you sit here, safe, casting doubt on our efforts.

"I was here when Haven was empty. I watched as people filtered in, crying with relief to be safe and weeping in sorrow and fear for those they left behind. I saw the Ministry rise from the ashes of war and helped as we rescued family after family. I watched us grow from a group of huddled, frightened people to a working, fighting machine that is trying to take the war back to our enemies. And you people have the gall to sit here and question our motives and methods?"

"MR. PICKERTON! You will retain a civil tongue in your head or you will find yourself in contempt of this committee," Amhar shouted.

Korwin leaned back, looking smug and wondered if Pickerton would be the committee's first victim.

Miles smiled broadly. "Mr. Chairman, I already hold this committee in contempt. You drag me away from my job and ask me to worry about a few useless morons who are too stupid to realize they've fallen for Voldemort's lies? And then you threaten me with contempt? In case no one has informed you, Mr. Chairman, you have no enforcement arm!"

Amhar bounced back on his chair, looking shocked.

"I'm afraid that Mr. Pickerton is quite correct in his statement. Currently there is no enforcement arm that we can turn to, nor are there any plans to put one in place," Trenton Largo commented to no one in particular.

"What do you mean there is no enforcement arm?" shouted Korwin.



"The Ministry never reconstituted the DMLE, Councilor," Largo explained smoothly. "The Constables, while nominally under the control of the Ministry, are bound by Irish law, which does not recognize this body. And the Aurors working for the Magical Ministry of Defense are considered troops, not law enforcement personnel."

Amhar sat clenching his fists spasmodically. This was news to him! He never expected that the Ministry would reform without a Department of Magical Law Enforcement. More importantly, it also meant that his committee was really a toothless tiger. Oh, they could make recommendations or levy charges, but it lacked the power to enforce those charges.

Amhar leaned forward on his seat. "I can assure you, Mr. Pickerton, that the lack of an enforcement arm is strictly a temporary situation and I will do all in my power to see you held in contempt if you do not behave yourself. I will be speaking to the Minister today about reforming the DMLE as soon as possible," he said icily.

Miles and Amhar stared at each other for a long moment, their mutual hatred clearly visible. The tension in the room increased with each passing moment. Then Trenton Largo coughed, causing Amhar to look away. Several of the neutral members of the committee sighed in relief.

"Mr. Pickerton, just for the record, was Lord Potter on the mission to attack the Death Eaters in Northern Ireland?" asked Largo.

Miles turned to face him. "No, Councilor, Lord Potter was still in training. His group provided us with the location of the farmhouse and some support back in the Operations Center, but Lord Potter did not participate in that attack."

Jackson Hillmet, one of the neutrals on the committee, consulted a piece of parchment. "And yet Lord Potter was, from what I understand, one of the principle planners of the operation at Azkaban, as well as a participant."

"That's correct, Councilor. Lord Potter and several members of his group had completed their tactical command training well before the Azkaban operation. During our post mission debriefing, it became obvious that his input in planning the assault was pivotal to the mission's success."

Hillmet frowned. "Yes, Potter's group. I understand that is covered under the Official Secrets Act, but can you tell us how many there are in his group?"

"I'm afraid not, Councilor. I am bound by an Oath of Secrecy," Miles replied with a shake of his head. "It is perhaps best if you think of Lord Potter's group as a special unit answerable only to the Prime Minister and the Crown."

Amhar leaned forward, scowling. "For the record, I do not like the idea of having a group of people who seem to be able to flout our laws and are answerable to no one."

Miles smiled thinly. "Councilor, Lord Potter holds himself answerable to a number of people. He has a degree of integrity and nobility I have not seen in all my years. On top of that, the man has more power than anyone I've even read about. In the Azkaban operation, he secured the northern end of the island with a single spell, killing the attacking Death Eaters in the process. And despite his position and power, he is a humble individual who only wants to live his life in peace."

"Well said," murmured Largo, then he leaned over his desk. "Lord Potter's qualities, while admirable, are not really our focus here. I do know that Lord Potter will allow no one and nothing to stand in the way of winning this war, but I'm digressing. Turning back to the matters at hand, Mr. Pickerton, might I inquire as to why you accepted a contingent of Saudi Arabian fire breathing calvary?"

"Of course, Councilor," Miles replied.

Largo leaned back on his chair, content that he had again diverted the committee from picking on topics they shouldn't be dealing with.

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## Parliament Building (Nov 25th)...

"*Crucio!*"

The man on the floor writhed and screamed. Lucius lifted his wand and stared at him. Truthfully, Malfoy was bored and torturing General Worthington any more was not going to provide enough entertainment to be worth the effort.

It didn't help matters that he had just re-enforced the Imperius curse on the man. Right now, he'd welcome the pain, thinking it was what Lucius wanted. It was difficult to enjoy torturing someone when that person took a perverse joy in the act..

He sighed wearily and canceled the curse. "Yes, yes. You're in pain and think you're going to die. Now, do get up off my floor."

Worthington got to his feet slowly, hissing in pain and looked blankly at Lucius.

"General, the next time you hide information from me I'll see that you are truly punished," Lucius growled threateningly.

"Yes, sir. It won't happen again, sir," Worthington said quietly.

The man's tone and manner were too much for Lucius. He surged to his feet and pointed towards the door. "Out, damn you! Out! And don't come back unless you have good news!" he shouted.

He watched the General's retreating back and clenched his fists. He was panting with rage and Worthington was incapable of providing the release he needed.

Worthington was reporting more and more bad news of late. Convoys were being spotted and wrecked by allied air forces. Barracks and field encampments were being bombed. Slowly but surely the British Army was being bled dry and they were largely powerless to stop it.

Lucius had tried to assign wizards to protect vital depots, but that plan failed miserably. A wizard with a wand simply couldn't shoot down an aircraft traveling at hundreds of miles per hour. There were a few lucky shots here and there, but that's all they were.

The sole bright spot on this cloudy morning was that he'd finally gotten all of his wizarding forces back up to full strength. He now had nearly fifteen hundred wizards at his disposal. He had about a thousand working with the army, and another five hundred guarding key locations. With the return of his men, Mulciber assumed control over the Wizarding camps. It was a responsibility that Lucius was glad to be rid of.

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### **The Willow Wand Pub, Haven...**

Alicia Spinnet looked around the crowded pub. It was the same place once run by Dumbledore, but had since been taken over by a reputable group of businessmen. Alicia stood on her toes, searching the crowd. She was a witch on a mission.

Spotting her quarry, she pushed her way through the crowd until she came upon the table she wanted. Its sole occupant was slouched down on a chair, three sheets to the wind, and it was barely six in the evening!

"Oliver!" she snapped at him.

He looked up at her, his eyes bloodshot and bleary, and squinted. "There be two of ya!" he slurred, then he turned towards the bar. "Barkeep! Bring two glasses fer me friends."

Alicia scowled and resisted the urge to stamp her foot. "Oliver, you can't go on like this!"

He looked up at her and blinked owlshly for a moment. "Did I ever tell ya that I nearly made it ta the wor-wor-wor... Ah, hell, that cup thingy!"

Alicia sighed and sat down on the chair next to him. "Oh, Oliver, what am I going to do with you?"

Oliver put down his glass and stared morosely at it. "Nothin'. No team... no job... gonna be a failure just like me ol' dad, bless 'is heart. Leth drink ta dear ol' dad!"

Alicia looked at him in dismay. "Ollie, your dad was one of the most successful healers in Scotland!"

He pushed his glass away and started to lay his head down. "Be a good chickiedee and wake me if Alicia comes by. I wouldna want her ta sees me like dis," he mumbled. In seconds, he was snoring.

Alicia stood and shook her head. Pulling out her wand, she cast a sobering charm on him. It would sober him up, but leave him with the mother of all hangovers.

Oliver lifted his head and held it with both hands. "What in the name of Merlin? Alicia? What are you doing here, love?"

"Don't you call me love, Oliver Wood!" she snapped, her eyes flashing with fury, her hands on her hips. "I come down here to rescue you and you call me a chickiedee? Why, if I didn't care so much I'd hex off your dangly bits!"

Oliver winced and shrunk down into himself. His head was pounding and he was sure it was only his two hands that kept it from exploding. Alicia's yelling wasn't helping matters much, either.

"Get up, Oliver. You're coming home with me," Alicia said angrily.

Oliver nodded and slowly stood up. Alicia pushed him through the crowd towards the door. Outside the pub, he straightened a bit in the fresh air and resisted the urge to hold his head together with both hands.

The walk to the school grounds, where Alicia had a small cottage, helped him somewhat. But even as she pushed him into a chair and handed him a hangover cure, he was certain he was going to die any minute.

"Drink that," she ordered. Then she bustled about her small kitchen, muttering under her breath.

Oliver looked at the smoking concoction in the goblet; it was thick, almost syrupy in texture and made a slight moaning sound as he tilted the goblet to his mouth.

He downed the potion as quickly as he could and resisted the urge to gag. Alicia would probably not appreciate his being sick on her floor and table. She put a pot of tea on while his every limb shook and his body underwent an amazing series of color changes. A dense fog surrounded him for a moment, then slowly dissipated.

She sniffed once and turned a shade of green herself. She whipped out her wand and opened a window, then banished the thinning fog outside.

She sat next to him at the table and poured them both a cup of tea. Oliver was ashamed of his behavior and was reluctant to look her in the eye.

"So, now what?" he asked glumly.

"You can't keep yourself in oblivion every night. You've spent most of the money the Ministry gave you and you have nothing to show for it except a hang over. You need to make changes in your life. Yes, you were a great professional Quidditch player, and perhaps you will be again. But not today. What you need to do is go see Professor McGonagall first thing in the morning. Madam Hooch injured herself last week and she'll be laid up for quite a while. The school is now desperate for a new flying instructor who can also double as a Quidditch referee."

"Madam Hooch was injured? What happened?"

"You know how she is. Despite the school receiving a shipment of brand new Cleansweeps, she insisted on using one of those antiquated Shooting Stars. It gave out on her and she crashed," Alicia said.

"Perhaps I will go to see McGonagall tomorrow," he replied, grinning.

"And you'll stop drinking?" she pressed him.

"Yes, I'll stop drinking. Any other changes you want me to make?" he asked, rather grumpily. It was just like a woman. Give her an inch and she tried to change a man's entire life.

"Just one more," she whispered, then she climbed into his lap and kissed him.

He blinked in shock for a moment, then he slid his arms around. *I'll never learn to understand women*, he thought.

*Merlin, I should have given him a mint first*, she thought, tasting the hangover potion.

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### **Padfoot Manor (Nov 29th)...**

Harry looked up from his notes and glared sourly at Caleb.

"I'm telling you, my lord, I didn't come up with the name; they did," Caleb said, trying to suppress a grin.

Harry buried his face in his hands and ignored the smiles and chuckles of the people around him.

"It's supposed to be a secret! Couldn't they have picked a better name?" he asked with a groan.

"Oh, it's not really that bad, Harry. It's kind of flattering," offered Remus.

Harry glanced at Hermione. He could feel her mirth through the bond.

*"It could be a lot worse, my heart. They could have picked Potter's Brigade,"* she sent him.

He winced mentally.

"Harry," Amelia said lightly, "I understand why you're upset with the name they chose, but when you think about it, it makes sense. Both the press and members of the Wizengamot have heard rumors about the Brotherhood. Having a Brotherhood Brigade will muddy the waters and confuse the issue so much that no one will believe the real story if they hear it."

Harry looked up at Amelia. Her reasoning was sound and she was right; it could have been a lot worse. He looked back at Caleb. "And what did Stanton's group name themselves?"

Caleb coughed and managed to look embarrassed. "Well, it probably was a bad idea letting the two groups name themselves. But then they are mostly Yanks and Canadians in that group; always a little on the wild side. They called themselves Stanton's Raiders."

Harry grinned. Charles 'Chuck' Stanton was a no nonsense man who had elevated pragmatism to an art form. Harry knew Chuck would hate the name his men had chosen, but because they'd picked it, he'd accept it. *All in all, my group's name isn't as bad as Stanton's*, Harry thought.

"Alright, the Brotherhood Brigade it is then," he said with a sigh. "Anything else?"

"I have a few points to bring up," Amelia said.

Harry motioned for her to proceed.

"The report came back from the forensic healers used by the Irish in regard to the murder of Alissa Quinn. Their forensic specialists agree with ours, in that the single stab wound was not sufficient to cause death. They do suggest that the blade was probably the mechanism used to deliver the death blow, but it was obviously magical in origin.

"Both forensic healers agree that the condition of the body resembled an individual who had died after a Dementor's kiss."

"Wait, this sounds familiar," offered Remus.

"In what way?" asked Harry in surprise.

Remus held up his hand while he searched his memory. He'd heard about something like this before. But from where? "I remember reading last summer about previous dark lords and what they did. There was one who'd been a natural enchanter. It's a very rare talent and he..."

"Excuse me, Remus, a natural enchanter?" asked Harry.

Remus leaned back on his chair. "This is what happens when you sleep through History of Magic," he chided with a smile. "A natural enchanter is a unique talent, like a Metamorphagus or even a Seer. They are like any other enchanter, the only difference being that they do not have to study and plan for what they want to enchant. For example, a natural enchanter could watch Tonks make her changes and then turn around and hand you an amulet that would give you the same ability. You're an enchanter, Harry, but you need to plan what spells you intend to imbue an object with and it takes time. A natural enchanter instinctively knows what he needs.

"Anyway, I seem to recall a dark lord, I can't remember his name off the top of my head, but he did something with daggers that he gave to his cadre of assassins," Remus said, then he shook his head. It wasn't important at the time and now he couldn't remember the details.

Amelia looked up from the notes she was taking and smiled. "That's a good start, Remus. I can give this to Michael and he'll be able to narrow it down now. Especially since the Irish have given us access to the people at their Department of Mystery.

"The next issue is the Wizengamot Investigative Committee, Harry," she continued. "As you are aware, they have been slowly winnowing their way through the Ministry. Chairman Coeur de Lion was most upset the other day when Miles pointed out to him that the Ministry had no law enforcement branch, other than the town constables, and that the constables are constrained by Irish law, not ours."

"Well, I reckon he has a reason to be upset, then. I have heard about some of the questions he's asking," Harry replied, grinning.

Amelia returned his grin. "Yes, he's looking for reasons to cause problems. It will take us a while to get a department of Magical Law Enforcement operational, but first I think I'll ask Arthur to consult with the Irish to see what kinds of limits we have to impose on them."

Everyone snickered at Amelia's clear attempt to stonewall Chairman Coeur de Lion yet again.

"He is most upset about your relationship with the muggle government," she added.

Harry blinked and glanced at Hermione, as if to ask if he heard correctly. "My relationship with the muggles?"

Hermione shrugged her shoulders. She was as confused as he was.

"Yes. We knew that when we placed you as an Ambassador we'd need approval from the muggle Ministry in Exile. I pulled a few strings so that your Brotherhood is officially attached as a special unit of the Special Air Service and covered by both our Official Secrets Act and the muggles. By doing so, it keeps the Brotherhood away from our friend, Coeur de Lion.

"The downside to all this is that you've attracted the interest of several highly placed people in the muggle government who would like to meet with you."

Harry leaned back and pinched the bridge of his nose tiredly.

"*Why do I think a piano is about to be dropped on my head?*" he asked Hermione plaintively.

"*I knew I shouldn't have let Dad show you those Warner Brothers cartoons. It's not that bad yet, Harry. Hear her out,*" she chided in return.

His head snapped up and his eyes bored into hers. "*I seem to recall you saying something similar a few months back. The next thing I knew, I was an Ambassador!*"

"*Oh, do be quiet. After all, your diplomatic status did get us to New York, something you were crowing about at the time, if I remember correctly. And I do,*" she said, her expression smug.

"Alright Amelia," he said, turning to face her. "You're clearly setting me up for something. Let's hear it."

"It's not that bad, Harry. The Prime Minister and His Majesty would both like to meet with you sometime after the upcoming operation. His Majesty had extended an invitation to you and the other members of the Brotherhood to attend a Yule celebration at the embassy in New York. Prior to the celebration, you and your wife will meet with him privately."

Harry frowned. Then the rush of excitement coming from Hermione over the bond nearly swamped him.

"I don't know what to do. What do I wear or say? I don't know... meeting the King?" he sputtered.

Amelia smiled at his discomfit. "You won't be alone, Harry. The invitation has been extended to myself and others in the Ministry. And I'm sure Hermione would be happy to help you pick out something to wear."

Harry glance at Hermione who was almost bouncing on her seat as she beamed at him. He was smart enough to restrain the urge to roll his eyes. "Fine," he muttered. "But we'll worry about it *after* we deal with the camps."

Amelia relaxed and sat back for a moment, enjoying her victory. Hermione looked ready to explode with excitement, much to the amusement of everyone present. She had been raised as a muggle and had a greater degree of respect for the muggle government than most pure bloods.

"One last thing, Harry, Michael wanted me to pass along the news that the Yanks seem to be working out wonderfully. Most minor crimes are down, and we haven't had another killing. He does, however, think caution should be used. He believes the killer will strike again," Amelia said quietly.

The mood in the room shifted dramatically. Harry scowled at the Minister for a moment before his expression softened. It wasn't Amelia's fault, after

all. She was just passing along news that no one really wanted to face. He nodded and looked over at the Deputy Minister of Defense.

“Caleb?”

“The troops are back from their stand down. As I'm sure you know already, they are in fine form, rested and ready to go. We have scheduled a few days of light training to make sure everyone stays at their peak. The muggles have warned us of a cold front coming down from the arctic that's crowding our schedule. I had scheduled the attack for December tenth, but I think we may need to jump earlier. December seventh, I think, if we are to do anything before the cold front moves in.”

Harry closed his eyes and reviewed everything that needed to be done with his forces between now and then. He nodded slowly. “I have no problem moving up the time. If it's alright with Chuck, let's do it.”

Remus sucked in his breath and watched the two men. “Will we have everything on time?” he asked, thinking about the special equipment supplied by the Weasley twins.

“I spoke to Q Branch this morning,” Caleb began. Draco shot him a dirty look; he had forgotten the password again. “They tell me they will have everything ready by the fifth.”

Harry nodded and turned to Draco. “You're all set, aren't you?”

“Yes. We'll have over two hundred elves deployed. They'll be creating distractions and setting a few fires here and there. The Weasleys are doing a bang up job. I fully expect that production of some of their more useful items will really take off once the factory is fully operational.”

“Remus? Any comments on that?” Harry asked, turning to him.

“We have Charlie Weasley taking over as plant manager. He's been hiring, but some of the jobs are pretty specialized, so he's having to look rather far afield to find people. Last time I spoke with him, he told me that he expects to be fully staffed by the middle of next month. Figure twenty days from now,” Remus replied.

“By the way, Harry, we think you made the right choice with Charlie. He's been studying your portal design and has already come up with some ideas to improve them. He doesn't have the rune experience, but he's passing the ideas onto the rune masters he's been hiring on.” the older man added.

“What will they be making first?” Amelia asked, curious. She had seen the large building going up next to Granger Publications. It was the largest commercial building in Haven and she could only guess at the number of people they would employ there.

“First will be the freight portals, which we will be installing at Gringotts, world wide,” replied Hermione. “After that, we'll expand the facility and modify it for the consumer portals.”

“How many people will you be hiring?” Amelia asked.

“Charlie is hiring close to five hundred. When we start working on the consumer portals I expect we'll triple that,” Hermione said.

“*Hermione? Howmuch are we spending on this?*” Harry sent her, a bit worried.

“*We're spending nearly thirty million galleons, love, but I expect us to recover that loss within the first year,*” she replied offhandedly, though her eyes danced.

“Have you informed the Irish about this, Harry?” Amelia asked.

Harry coughed and tried to recover from Hermione's comment, then he looked at Amelia. “Inform the Irish? Do they need to know about this, other than for taxing purposes?”

Amelia sat back and considered her answer. “No, not really, but you're talking about building a business on their soil that will be ranked right up there with their largest companies. You've already got an agreement with Gringotts worldwide, which puts your Potters Portals on the fiscal map in a big way. The Irish, when they discover what you're doing, are going to be extremely happy.”

Seeing his confused expression, she smiled. “Imagine if the Excalibur Corporation had started here in Ireland, rather than abroad,” she told him.

He looked thoughtful. Excalibur was a well known brand name of brooms. They were sold world wide despite the company being based in Australia. Harry remembered reading in 'Which Broomstick' that the Excalibur Corporation was one of the largest companies in Australia, muggle or magical. Excalibur was a international brand that influenced both broom design and Wizarding sports. And if that wasn't enough, the Australian Ministry of Magic was exceedingly proud of the fact that Excalibur called Australia home.

“I don't think it's really necessary, Amelia, but if you want to talk to the Irish about it, be my guest. It would probably be nice to have something good to talk about for once instead of the war, or what Voldemort or France is doing,” Harry replied with a smile. *Let Amelia have some fun for a change*, he thought.

“*Nicely done, my heart,*” Hermione sent him.

“*I thought so,*” he sent back smugly.

## Wizengamot Building, Office of Andrew Korwin...

Andrew Korwin grunted as he took the pile of mail his secretary handed him and tossed it on his desk.

"Thank you, Maggie," he said absently, not paying attention her as she scurried from the office. She didn't mind working for Councilor Korwin, but the man had a temper that she had seen on occasion when he was busy. She did not want to see a repeat of it, even though he had bought her roses and apologized profusely for his behavior later that same day.

Korwin looked over the notes and transcripts from the latest testimonies in front of the committee. He was slowly compiling his notes for the final report that would be produced.

He turned from the pile of parchments and rifled through his mail. One letter in particular seemed out of place, as it was heavier than his usual mail. Grabbing a letter opener, he sliced the envelope open and pulled out a piece of parchment. There was a tinkling sound as something hit his desk. Moving the letter out of the way, he saw a Gringotts key.

*Who would be sending me a Gringotts key? I already have an account,* he asked himself, frowning.

He opened the parchment and began to read, paling as he did so.

*Dear Councilor Korwin,*

*I realize this letter comes as a complete surprise, but I've been reliably informed by one of your colleagues that you are amiable to our cause. Our good friend, Councilor Coeur de Lion, was kind enough to leave me with pensieve memories of your meetings with him at Stonewall Lane. I can promise you that I will do everything in my power to make sure that those memories do not fall into the wrong hands, so long as you cooperate with us.*

*Believe me, Councilor, when I say that cooperation is in your best interests. Your friend informed me of your peculiar tastes when it comes to polyjuiced prostitutes. I'm sure the public would not be as accepting as I am, should the facts surrounding your particular brand of pleasure become known.*

*Along with the Gringotts account, which we will be making monthly deposits into, I can offer you a steady stream of such entertainment, all supplied discreetly, of course.*

*I look forward to working with you, Councilor.*

*Regards,*

*Maime Murphy*

Korwin looked at the key and letter as if it were a poisonous serpent. Coeur de Lion had set him up with a minor bribe and rolled him. Now he had to figure out what he was going to do. Maime Murphy wasn't just a witch in charge of illegal potion sales in Ireland for a larger drug cartel, she was a firm supporter of Voldemort. If he cooperated, he'd be guilty of treason!

Korwin was a lot of things, including a coward, but he was loyal to his country.

He stood and pulled on his cloak. "MAGGIE!" he bellowed.

She came rushing into the office, looking at him fearfully.

"I'm going to be out of the office for a day or two, perhaps longer. Please inform the chairman of the committee that I will be absent. I'm... not feeling well," he said. He then scooped up the key and parchment, slid around his desk and bolted from the office.

Maggie's eyes widened in shock at her boss's uncharacteristic behavior. In a moment Korwin was gone and she was left to straighten out his desk. *Why would someone send a vault key via Owl post?* she wondered. It didn't make any sense to her.

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## Padfoot Manor (Dec 5th)...

Hermione padded up the stairs towards the bedroom. She walked carefully, trying not to spill the tea she was carrying. She had learned to be quiet when sneaking down to the kitchen, otherwise a house elf would awaken, or worse, Winky would appear and give her the lecture about not getting enough sleep and how drinking tea late at night would only keep her awake longer.

Slipping into the bedroom, she moved over to the breakfast table to sit and drink her tea. It wasn't all that late but the manor was silent, as everyone had turned in early. This would be the last night they would stay in the manor. Tomorrow they would move into specially prepared rooms at the Operations Center where they would spend one last night before the attack on the camp.

She watched the quarter moon cast pale shadows over the lawn and pondered her role in the coming attack. Frankly, she was sick of all the training and just wanted it to be over with. She had muscles in places she didn't want muscles.

Privately, she was more than a little afraid. She had shared her fears with Harry and he had helped her as best he could. He reminded her how she had stood up to Voldemort, and how she had fought against Death Eaters before. He didn't seem to understand that those times had been spur of the moment things, or remember how she'd shook with fear and had been sick to her stomach after it was all over.

She placed her cup on the table when a slight whimper came from the bed. She frowned and looked at Harry. In all the time they had slept together

She had experienced only a few of his nightmares, and very few since they had bonded. They were few and far between now, but they always seemed to come during periods of great stress and their content varied. She had slipped into several of his nightmares after they had bonded and discovered the horrors that sometimes afflicted her husband.

She walked over to the bed and slid under the covers, cuddling up to him. She relaxed against him, then widened their link, delving into his mind.

*There was a brief falling sensation, then she stopped and looked around, scowling. This was a new nightmare. She had expected to see Sirius falling into the veil, or perhaps Dolohov hitting her with that purple hex. Both of those nightmares were common when he was upset. This, though, was different. She seemed to be standing in front of the box-like homes on Privet Drive. The sun was shining and she could see several neighbors out tending to their cars or lawns. She turned and eyed the door to number Four uneasily.*

*Opening the door, she slipped into the house and looked around. The place was immaculate; not even a dozen house elves could make the house any cleaner. She turned when she heard a small sound and gasped, spotting a small Harry, perhaps five years old, struggling to put away a mop and cleaning supplies. He wore a baggy t-shirt that was stained with cleaning fluids, and a pair of shorts held up by twine tied around his waist. Even with his shirt on she could see bruises peeking out from under it and her heart went out to the small lad.*

*Harry glanced at the clock and whimpered. He slammed the cabinet door closed and ran to his cupboard. He was about to close the door when Hermione slipped in behind him. She was sure there wouldn't be room inside for them both, but there was. Harry huddled on his bed, staring at the door in fear.*

*Somewhere in the house a door slammed and she heard a voice.*

*"WHERE IS THAT FREAK BOY!"*

*Harry whimpered and pushed himself up against the back of the cupboard.*

*Hermione scowled and gestured. One of the things she had learned about Harry's dreams was that she could perform magic in them, better than she could in real life. With her gesture, the door vanished and the noises in the house receded into the distance. She turned to Harry, who was looking up at her in awe.*

*Despite his injuries she sincerely hoped their children would be as attractive as he was at this age. His eyes shone with emotion; fear, and hope warred in them.*

*"Harry, you're dreaming, love. You need to wake up," she said to the little boy.*

*"This is a dream? Really?" he asked, his voice trembling.*

*Hermione nodded and smiled. Even in this state she could see elements of the man she would fall in love with.*

*"Close your eyes, Harry, and wish to wake up," she said soothingly and suppressed a laugh when the little boy did just that.*

*There was a moment of silence and then came a roaring sound. She blinked in surprise when little Harry looked up at her and smiled. He mouthed 'Thank You', then the roaring grew louder and the scene was torn away from her.*

She pulled back into herself and opened her eyes. A moment later, she was staring into Harry's emerald gaze. He rolled up onto one side, propping his head on his hand. Under the covers, his other hand sought out hers and gripped it tightly.

"Bad one?"

"The worst kind," he replied with a bit of shiver. "Have I ever thanked you?"

She blinked in surprise at him. "What for?"

"What you do for me. You've kept all but the very worst of the nightmares away, Hermione. I used to hate sleeping because I'd have a nightmare every night. Now I have them only once in a while. I didn't realize it myself until we bonded, but that's one of the things you do for me."

Hermione's blush was visible, even in the low light cast by the single candle. He moved closer and ran one hand softly up under her nightshirt, caressing her flank.

"You've done so much. But most of all I think you've kept me human. I'm not sure I could have spent my life with those nightmares and not lost myself to them. But you chased them away," he whispered, as he kissed her forehead.

She leaned into his embrace and closed her eyes. She narrowed the link between them for a moment when a wave of fear washed over her, but she couldn't hide her shiver. She wasn't afraid for herself, but she was afraid for him. Sooner or later she knew he would be fighting Voldemort and he would be alone. That frightened her to the bone.

"Hermione?"

"I'm sorry. Some Gryffindor I make, huh?" she sent him, unable to hide her tears.

"We're all afraid, Hermione. Why do you think I was having nightmares?"

*But you never seem to be afraid!"*

She looked up and searched his eyes in the dim light.

He tightened his grip on her. *"Don't you believe it. I may not look afraid, but when it's over I shake like a leaf. The only reason why you haven't seen it before is because Madam Pomfrey never let anyone get near me until that phase had passed. Merlin, I miss her still."*

He buried his head between her neck and shoulder and breathed deeply. She always smelled so wonderful to him. He started to kiss her neck and she sighed loudly.

*"Mmmm. Harry."*

*"Hmmm?"*

*"Make love to me tonight. Give me some of your strength and courage."*

*"Funny, I was going to ask for some of yours,"* he told her.

Her hands slid into his boxers and his breath hitched when she gently grasped him. He took her lips in a soul searing kiss and she melted against him.

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### **Haven Operations Center (Dec 7th, 0400 hours)...**

"Elveses of Haven!" shouted Toby.

Over two hundred pairs of eyes turned to the small elf in the early morning darkness.

"Today we helps Haven againsts the bad mens! You knows what to do."

Heads nodded and Toby checked his watch; a present from Draco and Luna. Noting the time, he waved his hand.

The first fifty elves vanished, heading to Britain in what would become the largest single elf diversion of the war to date.

Toby waited, glancing at his watch. The next group would leave in fifteen minutes.

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### **Haven Operations Center, The Brotherhood Brigade Assembly Area (Dec 7th, 0400 hours)...**

Harry downed the Pepper-Up potion that the medic handed to him and shuddered. *Why can't they make potions that taste good?* he asked himself.

*"Because then you would want a potion for it's taste and not because you need it,"* came a bubbling reply, then a light mental caress. *"Sorry, love, but you were thinking very loud this morning,"* Hermione laughingly sent him.

He looked around for her, but the room was crowded with people slowly packing or checking their gear. She was in a far corner where she was going over the final checklist, making sure the command post staff had everything and that it was all in working order.

*"It's a good thing we started this with these Pepper-Up potions. I don't knowabout you, but I didn't get much sleep last night,"* he sent to her as he made his way towards one end of the huge room.

*"I missed you, too, last night,"* she replied. Neither of them slept well without the other.

Harry spotted Draco and motioned for him to follow. Draco was assigned as commander of Echo company and he was second in overall command, just under Harry.

Harry had scattered the Brotherhood among the five companies, with two exceptions. Hermione would be in his company, and Luna would be in Draco's. Hermione's presence was a compromise and Harry sincerely hoped it wasn't a bad decision. He had placed Luna with Draco because of their unique bond. Draco was, quite literally, Luna's protector. The two needed to be close together in order to function properly.

"Everything ready, Draco?"

"I think so, Harry. Most of us have checked and rechecked our equipment," he replied, then he turned to eye the crowd of Aurors-turned-soldiers.

Harry glanced at a wall clock for a moment. "Get a detail up here to break out the return portkeys. Make sure everyone gets at least four, and for Merlin's sake, don't let them mix up the return portkeys with the one for Haven. After they have the portkeys, get them assembled."

Draco grinned. "Will do."

Harry grinned back, then moved back through the crowd.

Draco move to join the most Senior Auror in the Brotherhood Brigade. He had been a contemporary of Mad Eye Moody and a former Unspeakable



who went by the nickname of Twister due to his fondness for weather spells, despite their unpredictability.

Twister was a gnarled little man with a keen eye, a sharp wit and a sharper tongue. Born Morrison Sigma Northingham, he was the chief senior Auror, equal to the senior non-commissioned officer in any muggle military unit. When Twister spoke, people listened.

Twister accepted his orders from Draco with a nod. He was used to wiping the noses of young, up and coming rookies, but Harry and his Brotherhood were in a different class than he was used to. They didn't make that many mistakes and they were willing to learn.

Harry moved off, only partially listening to Twister shout out orders.

*"I feel like I'm going to be sick,"* came a moaning mental voice.

Harry chuckled. *"It's just the jitters, love. Take the potion you have for it and your stomach will settle down. At least forty percent of our people will use that potion and most of them are veterans, so don't feel bad."*

Harry walked among his men, talking quietly and helping where he could; sometimes just sharing an off color joke or two.

*"What did the witch do with the pony and the two midgets? I missed the punchline. And are soldiers always this crude?"* she sent him.

Harry turned in her direction. He couldn't see her well, as she was still across the room from him. But as the men and women fell into lines and started to move to the assembly area, he could see her more clearly. She turned to look at him and he was struck by just how well her combat fatigues fit her.

*"I'll take that as a yes, considering the feelings you're sending me,"* she sent in wry tone as she rolled her eyes at him.

*"They're just blowing off steam. As for me... Well, that outfit looks good on you. I just might grab a spare one for you to bring home."* he replied.

*"Pervert."* she sent him laughingly.

*"Only for you, love,"* he replied.

He smiled when she giggled over their bond. He was about to say something else when he felt a hand touch his arm. Turning, he saw Luna, who was acting as Draco's assistant.

"Harry," she said quietly and he winced slightly. No one had been able to get Luna to conform to any sort of ranking system. "Dray wants you to know that the remotes are coming up for the landing zones."

He nodded. "Thanks. I'll be right there. Better get your gear," he added, then dropped his voice. "Merlin watch over you and keep you safe, Luna."

She smiled prettily at him and patted his cheek. "You too, my brother," she replied, then turned away and trotted up the line.

Harry turned and crossed several lines before he came to the wall. From there he walked to the front of the room. At the front, people were picking up their portkeys and filing off out a door to the assembly room, where each company would use a large rope portkey to transport them to their landing zone.

Delta and Echo companies would leave the building first. Since they were attacking from the east, they had the furthest to go. They would be arriving in a large open air car park on the outskirts of Leeds, from which they would make their way to the camp.

Able, Baker and Charlie companies would be arriving in a field just north of the camp. Their landing zone was over three kilometers closer to the camp than Delta and Echo companies.

Harry examined the two repeater screens. A pair of house elves had set up versions of the Fairy Fliers so that he could see what the status of each landing zone was.

"Looks good so far," mumbled a voice behind him.

Harry turned to see Caleb Newman looking anxious and just a bit envious. Caleb was unused to being left behind, but his new position had forever placed him outside of the physical fighting. It was something that Carolyn, his wife, was profoundly grateful for.

"Caleb! You startled me. Yes, the landing zones look good so far."

"I don't want any heroics out there today, Harry. Your job is to lead, not blow up half of Leeds," Caleb said, teasing him gently.

Harry flushed. "We'll get the job done, Caleb."

"I know you will." He checked his watch. "It's 0445, Harry. Let's get them moving. Your first two companies leave in fifteen."

Harry nodded and spoke to a few of the senior Aurors nearby and they got the line moving faster. He then turned to move back down the line, but Caleb stopped him.

He turned back and Caleb placed his hand on his shoulder. "Do us proud and bring them home, Harry. Merlin watch over you."

Harry nodded grimly. "We'll bring them all home, and hopefully bloody a few noses along the way."

Caleb nodded once and walked away. He still had Stanton and his Raiders to visit before heading to the War Room.

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### **The Town of Haven (0500)...**

Normally, a small, sleepy, country town like Haven would still be slumbering in the early morning hour, but not today. Every light in the Ministry Building was on and the building buzzed with activity. Amelia and Arthur were at their desks, busy working. Very soon they would leave for the Operations Center.

Representatives from several allied nations were working with Group Captain Anderson, who was linked via a satellite radio to a US Navy task force steaming off the coast of England.

Behind the hospital, an additional field hospital was being set up by house elves and representatives of the International Red Pentagram. The bed space that had been built on the fly after the Azkaban raid was temporarily turned into space for additional staff to bunk down until the rescued prisoners began to arrive.

A house elf run field kitchen was operating near the hospital.

In the town itself, many of the small cottages had lights on as worried spouses paced nervously and tried not to alarm their children. The block wardens, under the guidance of Olga Johansen, had organized a roving group of adults to act as emergency nannies in case a spouse needed to go to the hospital. Olga didn't know why it was necessary, only that Sven had asked for her help after getting the request from Amelia.

But not all of the cottages that were lit contained worried families. In one cottage, Amhar Coeur de Lion scowled and wondered why his neighbors were up and making noise at this ungodly hour. He glanced at his clock and growled. The Wizengamot offices didn't open officially for another four hours. He'd have to wait to lodge a complaint about the noise.

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### **Haven Operations Center, The Brotherhood Brigade Assembly Area (Dec 7th, 0500 hours)...**

"Delta Company! Echo Company! LIFT!" shouted Twister.

Draco leaned down, picked up the rope, and shot a thumbs up at Harry. He wouldn't be leaving the building for another fifteen minutes.

Harry grinned back and nodded to Twister, who was controlling the portkeys. "Three, two, one..."

Delta and Echo companies, a total of two hundred and eighty men and women, vanished, on their way to southern England.

"Final equipment check," Harry murmured.

Twister nodded. "Able, Baker and Charlie companies, check your gear and check your mate's gear," he shouted.

Harry joined Hermione at one end of the line and began to check her rucksack and belt. She was using her wand today, unlike Harry. He noted with satisfaction that her nervousness had died down. While she was occupied checking the pack of the girl next to her, he reached down and tapped the wrap around his leg with his staff. The wrap immediately tightened and warmed. It would stay that way for hours.

All that was left to do now was wait.

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### **The War Room, Haven Operations Center (0500)...**

Caleb stepped into the war room and paused when an aide handed him a fresh cup of coffee. Terry limped over to him, handing him a sheet of parchment listing contact reports. He glanced at it quickly before handing it back. "Everything alright, Terry?" he asked quietly.

"Looks that way, sir. We have the landing zones up on the screens," he replied, pointing to the wall with four active view screens.

Caleb nodded and glanced at the visitors gallery. It was, thankfully, still empty. That would change soon, of course. He expected Amelia, Arthur and several of the allied nations representatives to be up there before the hour was out.

With a shake of his head, he turned his attention back to the room. There were several large maps laid out on two tables and a couple women were carefully setting up little markers for each unit. As the units deployed, they would move the markers according to the information they received via the portable floo made by Q Branch.

In another corner, Group Captain Anderson was talking quietly on a muggle radio set that had been specially charmed to work around magic. Anderson spotted him and waved him over with a smile.

Caleb joined the man who was standing before a large map on his desk. He shook his head and marveled again the ingenuity of the muggles. Anderson wore a small headset that went to a box on the desk. He flipped a switch on the box, then turned to Caleb.

"Caleb, we're all set on our end. At oh six hundred, elements of the RAF and the US Navy will begin an aerial bombardment of Manchester, the nearest location of army reinforcements. There's a large mechanized force holding the town. With it being close to both Leeds and Wilmslow, once the attack begins, they will probably order the army out. We'll be there to keep them penned in," Anderson said.

Caleb nodded, then turned one of the girls placing markers on the maps began to speak. "We have contact at Landing Zone Two. Repeat, contact at Landing Zone Two." she said calmly.

She laid a large red marker next to the two markers indicating Delta and Echo companies of the Brotherhood Brigade.

"Damn! Send word to Lord Potter. Inform him that Delta and Echo companies have been spotted!" Caleb snapped. One of the girls at the map table activated her portable floo.

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### **Delta and Echo Companies, Leeds (0502)...**

Draco's knees flexed on landing and he looked around. They were in the parking lot of a small mini mall. Almost instantly people moved to cover, crouching down close to the buildings. Draco was in charge of both units, although he was the nominal head of Echo company.

He whistled softly and several men began to move out toward the camp. Luna crouched down next to him and his attention was on her and the rest of Echo as they made ready to move out when a noise hit him. He looked around wildly, realizing most of his men were still in the open.

The muggle army patrol had made a change in their regular patrol route due to some roads being blockaded. It was a common practice these days and the army was used to running into these types of ambushes. However, the official policy was to avoid them if possible. It was in avoiding one of these ambushes that the patrol route was changed, placing the army unit on the road at this particular time.

There came a chattering roar of a machine gun as the APC came around the corner and spotted the group of men. Shields were cast and spells fired. The wheeled APC tilted to one side. Its machine gun continued to fire until it finally flipped over onto its side. The weakly armored undercarriage was no match for the multiple spell fire; the APC was literally torn apart.

There was a moment of shocked silence while the APC burned brightly in the middle of the road. Draco winced as he heard calls for medics up and down the line of men and women. A quick glance at Luna reassured him that she was fine.

"We have to go on, Dray," she said calmly.

"I know," he replied. Then he turned to one of the senior Aurors. "Evacuate the wounded and get everyone ready. That thing made enough noise to wake up the dead. We're going to have to run to the gate."

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### **Haven Operations Center, The Brotherhood Brigade Assembly Area (0505)...**

Harry snapped his floo closed and looked around for a moment, thinking furiously. Hermione stood behind him; she had overheard the conversation and could feel Harry's tenseness via their bond.

"Damn," he swore, then turned to Twister. "Alert all units. We go in three minutes. Delta and Echo have been spotted."

Twister's eyes widened and he nodded. He moved off and Harry could clearly hear him muttering. "Another plan hosed before it got off the ground. Great Merlin's balls!"

Twisted walked to the front of the room and blew on a whistle. "Emergency Porting! We go in three. Do one last equipment check and remember your training," he shouted. Then he reached down, grabbed the rope, and turned to watch the wall clock.

Harry picked up his section of rope. As much as he wanted to turn to kiss Hermione, that just wouldn't appear proper to the rest of the brigade. There were other married couples besides the Brotherhood in the brigade and they didn't have the chance to kiss their spouses now. Fortunately for Harry, he did have one advantage. He widened the bond between them and sent her a mental caress.

She turned and smiled gently at him. "*Later, love. Later tonight I'll show you just how much I appreciate my Maglios,*" she sent him.

His eyebrows shot up and he stared at her impish grin. "*I don't think Echo had that sort of appreciation in mind when he instructed the Brotherhood in the role of the Maglios. But far be it from me to turn down that sort of thing,*" he replied with a chuckle. His mood darkened as the clock on the wall turned red. "*Be safe, my beloved,*" he sent.

"*Merlin protect and guide you, my heart.*"

"BROTHERHOOD BRIGADE! LIFT!" shouted Twister. "Three, two, one..."

There was a loud whooshing sound as four hundred and twenty people vanished from the Operations Center.

---

### **The War Room, Haven Operations Center (0510)...**

"The Brotherhood Brigade has left the assembly area. No contact as yet with any of the Brotherhood companies," reported one of the women.

Caleb leaned forward on his chair and frowned. "They weren't supposed to go for another five minutes. Someone confirm that," he snapped.

Terry turned to Caleb. "Harry probably jumped early because of Delta and Echo being spotted. He knows he can't allow those two barracks of Death Eaters into the camp," he said quietly.

Caleb looked at his aide for a moment, then nodded thoughtfully. It did make sense. Since the first two companies had been spotted, going early would keep the Death Eaters in the barracks from reinforcing the camp.

“Stanton's Raiders report ready to go. Commander Stanton is asking for permission to go early,” said another girl at the map.

“Haven Hospital is reporting receiving wounded from both Delta and Echo companies,” said another girl.

Caleb shook his head. It was like trying to watch multiple Quidditch games at the same time. How the blazes did Miles handle this?

The lights came up in the small observation room when the doors opened. Amelia stepped inside with several of the allied representatives. Caleb winced to himself when he saw her and the others, but there was nothing he could do about it.

“Tell the hospital that I want updates every fifteen minutes. Also, get a list of names of wounded. “Inform Commander Stanton that he is to standby. He is not to jump without my order,” Caleb replied.

---

### **Able, Baker and Charlie Companies, Landing Zone One (0512)...**

All three companies touched down in a clearing surrounded by woods, just a few hundred yards from the north gate of the camp.

Harry stumbled and his leg wrenched painfully under him. He used his staff to brace himself and stay upright.

Twister landed lightly not far from Harry and ran up to him.

“Call for orders group, Twister,” Harry said as he looked around. The skies were overcast and there was a hint of rain in the air.

Within two minutes, Allan Humbert, commander of Able company, Jullian Marx, command of Baker company and Bryan Marchen, commander of Charlie company were standing in front of him.

“We don't have a lot of time,” he said, then he paused and winced. In the distance he could hear an explosion. “Delta and Echo have been spotted and attacked. We need to pin down the Death Eaters in the barracks before they can get into the camp. In a few minutes we're going to rush the gate and hopefully pin down the...”

He stopped when Hermione touched his shoulder. She handed him a portable floo. “Echo Six is on the floo, Commander,” she said. Harry couldn't help but note the twinkle of mirth and pride in her eyes.

He nodded and took the floo. “Echo Six, Brigade Six, report,” he said tensely.

“Brigade Six, Echo Six, we're about a half mile from the gates. We ran into a spot of trouble at the landing zone and decided to run for it. We've had a little trouble since then and picked up a few casualties, but we're still good,” said the tinny little voice. The flame atop the floo danced merrily as Draco spoke.

“Echo Six, Brigade Six, acknowledged. We're in the field and will be hitting the northern barracks and gates within three minutes, repeat, three minutes. Hit the eastern gates as quickly as you can, Draco.”

“Brigade Six, Echo Six, acknowledged. Echo Six out.”

Harry handed the floo back to Hermione with a nod, then turned back to his commanders. “You have your orders. Let's get the men moving.”

He looked up as a siren wailed in the distance. “Move!” he snapped to the three men.

He tightened the straps on his own rucksack and trotted towards the front of the brigade. The siren was a problem. The camp was waking up and the Death Eaters knew there was a problem. Now if only they thought it was someone else's problem and not theirs...

---

### **Delta and Echo Companies, Leeds (0520)...**

It had been a nerve wracking run to the camp. They had taken a few more casualties in the run, but had largely made it unscathed.

The eastern gate was up ahead. He gagged from the smell coming from the camp and from the nearby mass grave.

Luna came up behind him and pointed. He nodded, seeing the ten men approaching the nearest tower. He knew another group of men were sneaking up on the other tower.

The ten men stood up. Together they repeated an incantation as they aimed their wands at the base of the tower.

“FILIOLUS PANGO FRENDO!” they bellowed.

There was a series of explosions at the base of the tower, then the structure twisted and slowly toppled over. Its impact raised a huge cloud of smoke and dust.

Draco glanced over to see that the other tower had already fallen and that another group was already assaulting the closed gate.

“Inform the Commander that the two towers are down and that we are attacking the gate now.”

---

### **Able, Baker and Charlie Companies, North Gate (0520)...**

The northern gate of the camp was next to the two buildings that housed the Death Eater guard force. When the alarm had gone off a few minutes earlier a ready force of thirty Death Eaters spilled from the barracks. They were just getting ready to disperse to their stations when Able, Baker and Charlie companies burst from the tree line, hurling hexes. But some of the guards had already entered the camp.

Harry stepped from the tree line and aimed at one tower. The observation post atop the tower ceased to exist, blasted into small pieces. Then he turned his attention to what his men were doing. He knew he wasn't supposed to fight unless necessary. He was there to direct, not to duel.

One of the barracks had been set on fire and all the windows had been shattered. Death Eaters crouched near the windows, shooting out at them. Harry's men scramble for cover or transfigured whatever they could into something to hide behind.

He turned to Hermione. “Set up the command post over there,” he said, pointing to a sand pit with a nice berm in front of it. It was a good location for the command post, but they'd have to run over a hundred yards of exposed ground to reach it. She and her command post staff would be fully exposed until they reached the berm.

Hermione nodded and took a deep breath. With a nod at her staff, she began to run, her people following behind. Harry watched and winced a few times as curses were flung her way.

She leaped behind the berm and crouched down, counting her people as each made it over the barrier. One man shook off his rucksack and pulled out a large silver cube.

He blew on a whistle, then tapped the cube with his wand before backing away from it. Hermione and several others in her group popped up over the edge of the berm, casting smoke hexes to obscure the view.

The cube began to expand. It was an improved version of the portable headquarters first introduced during the Azkaban raid. Originally it was an American invention, but Q Branch had introduced some improvements to the model.

It took the building a full minute to expand to its regular size. When it did, Hermione walked over to a large rune set that Q Branch had installed and tapped it with her wand. A glistening blue dome appeared over the building. The runes were part of the set Harry had created and were powerful enough to absorb hundreds of spells. It wouldn't stop an Unforgivable, but you had to see your target in order to shoot one of those spells and no one could see through these walls. The command post staff could work in relative safety.

Hermione stepped into the building and immediately activated her floo. Several others entered right on her heels and Fairy Flier operators began to unpack their units.

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### **The War Room, Haven Operations Center (0530)...**

Caleb's hands tightened on the arms of his chair as several wall screens flickered and came on.

“I have contact with Brigade command of the Brotherhood Brigade. They're reporting they have begun the assault on the barracks. Brigade command post is not yet fully online, but it will be momentarily,” reported one girl.

“Echo Company is reporting they have reached the eastern gate and are meeting little resistance,” said another.

“Sir, we must send the Raiders. If that camp is alerted...” Terry began.

“Go,” Caleb interrupted.

“Order Commander Stanton to portkey,” Terry called to one of the girls. She immediately turned and spoke into her floo.

“Haven Hospital reports twelve casualties so far, most are from muggle weapons.”

“The Brotherhood Brigade command post is coming online.”

“The muggle navies are launching their airstrikes,” called Group Captain Anderson.

Caleb stood up and walked to the map. Harry's brigade was now fully engaged, and the Raiders would soon be in the same boat. The flow of information was coming in fast and furious now and he was having difficulty keeping it all straight in his mind.

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### **Delta and Echo Companies, Leeds (0530)...**

Draco rocked back on his heels as the eastern gate blew apart. It had been heavily warded and it had taken the concentrated efforts of dozens of people to force them open. What clinched it for the gates was Luna. Draco watched with his heart in his throat as she darted forward. She got within twenty feet of the gates, stood up and cast a spell he'd never seen before. The wards crumbled and the spells attacking the wards immediately blew apart the gates. Luna vanished in a flash of light and smoke.

Draco darted forward until he reached the position. The smoke was slowly clearing and he cursed when a spell caught him in the left shoulder. He dropped to his knees and fired off a spell blindly in the direction of the camp. Another spell whizzed just over his head and he rolled on the ground, clenching his teeth from the pain. The smoke finally cleared enough to see Delta and Echo companies streaming into the camp.

Struggling to his feet, he looked around wildly for signs of Luna, but all he could see were bodies of Death Eaters. Heartsick, he stumbled and then straightened up. He'd find Luna later. Right now he had a job to do. His link with her told him she was still alive. That was something, wasn't it?

He moved into the camp following one of the squads. Up ahead he could hear shouts and the sounds of spell fire.

He signaled to a nearby senior Auror, who joined him a few seconds later. The man blinked once, then pulled out his field medical kit. He slapped a self sealing bandage on Draco's shoulder.

Draco waved off the offer of a pain potion. "Not now, we have work to do. Find Echo's squad leaders and move them west to the center of the camp. We need to get to the Dementors before it's too late."

The man nodded and ran off while Draco moved deeper into the camp. All around him he could hear the men and women of Echo and Delta yelling to the prisoners to get down on the ground and stay down until the fighting is over.

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### **Echo Company, Luna Black (0535)...**

Luna had been one of the first through the gates. Echo company was moving well and the first row of blockhouses was clear of Death Eaters. She hadn't come across the enemy yet, but she knew contact had been made, as she'd heard the sounds of fighting off to her left.

She peeked around the blockhouse she was using for cover, trying to block out the worry she felt coming from Draco. He knew she was alive and that was the best she could do for now. They both had jobs to do.

Seeing no one in the avenue, she sprinted to the next row of blockhouses. Putting her back against the wall, she waited for a moment, listening. She could hear the prisoners inside the blockhouse moving around. Some where crying, others moaning. Moving towards the next avenue, she stopped long enough to look through the blockhouse window and felt her gorge rise.

Inside were what could only be termed the walking dead. The people were skin over bones; their cheeks sunken in; their eyes huge. Most were alive, if barely. But a few had obviously been dead for some time. Visual decomposition had begun, and the smell was nearly overwhelming.

Luna's face twisted and her eyes blazed. Never before had she felt such anger, such rage. How could anyone do this to another person?

Taking a deep breath, she shoved away the negative feelings and straightened her shoulders. It was true that Nature required a balance, but sometimes Nature needed a bit of help.

"Excuse me," she called to the prisoners, causing many to cry out in alarm. "I'm part of the British Ministry and we're going to be rescuing you today. But I need for everyone to get down on the floor."

The babble of voices in the blockhouse became so loud, Luna feared the prisoners would bring the Death Eaters down on them all.

"Now that's enough of that," she said firmly. "I know you've all been through a spot of trouble, but we're taking care of it. Now, get down on the floor and stay down. We don't want anyone hit with accidental spell fire. Stay inside, stay down and wait. We'll be back for you."

"Merlin bless you, Lady," one of the prisoners called.

"It's Luna, and thanks," she said with a little smile.

She ducked down from the window and moved quietly to the end of the blockhouse before stopping to listen once more. She could hear nothing over the chatter from the prisoners, but could feel the hair on the back of her neck trying to stand up.

Taking a quick, quiet breath, she conjured a mirror. Then, with a few wand strokes, she sent it across the avenue and stuck it to a blockhouse in the next row. There, in the mirror's reflection, was a man. He was about nine feet away, standing in front of the blockhouse door, ripping off his black robe. His mask had already been discarded and lay at his feet.

Luna's eyes narrowed. She couldn't see a wand, and guessed that he'd probably thrown it aside as well. Raising her own wand, she waited until he'd tossed his robe and mask away, then she stepped out to face him, her wand pointed at his chest.

"Please!" the man cried when he saw her. "Please, don't shoot! I'm a prisoner, I'm unarmed!"

"Really? How terrible for you," she said calmly, before casting an *Incarcerous* spell.

Luna walked towards him as the ropes tightened around him. He babbled at her in fear, still insisting that he was a prisoner, an innocent victim, and she gave him points for persistence, though she did have to deduct a few for simple annoyance. She tilted her head to study him for a moment before she reached out and poked him in the chest with one finger. Off balance, the man fell to the ground hard, unable to break his fall due to the ropes.

Leaning down, Luna smiled. "I'm so sorry. Did you trip?"

"Please don't kill me, please!" the man stammered.

"Why would I want to kill you? You are, after all, a prisoner."

"That's right! I'm a prisoner." The man continued to gibber at her, but she ignored him.

Turning away, she opened the door to the blockhouse and once she'd calmed the prisoners, she smiled.

"I've brought you a present," she told them cheerfully. "He insists he's one of you, so I thought I better bring him back to the fold." Raising her wand, she levitated the bound man into the blockhouse and set him gently on the floor.

"He's not a prisoner!" a man called out angrily. "He's one of the night guards!"

"Really? Oh, dear. My mistake then. I'm wondering though. Would you dear people keep an eye on him while I finish up my work? I'm running a bit behind schedule and really haven't the time to drag him with me."

"Leave him to us, Lady," a woman said as she shuffled forward. "We'll treat him with the same respect he's given us."

Luna beamed. "I knew I could count on you. Thanks ever so much."

She moved towards the door, then turned back for a moment. "Remember, try to stay down and be as quiet as possible," she reminded them.

"We will, Lady. Be safe," one of the men said as he approached the former guard with a wooden bed leg in his hand. He was swinging it like a cricket bat.

Closing the door behind her, she checked the avenue carefully. Seeing no one, but hearing fighting in front of her, she sprinted to the next row of blockhouses.

Sliding to the window of the blockhouse, she went through her instructions once again, telling the prisoners inside to get down on the floor and be as quiet as possible. When something exploded overhead, the prisoners hit the floor with surprising agility and Luna shook her head. Someone's aim had been off and they'd wasted a spell.

Moving quietly to the corner of the blockhouse, she peeked around it and watched as two Death Eaters picked themselves up off the ground. The misfired spell and resulting explosion had at least been useful for something.

With quick wand movements, Luna stunned both Death Eaters, then quickly checked the avenue for movement. Seeing none, she stepped out and pointed her wand at the first man.

"Reverto is somes ut orbis terrarum," she murmured, then widened her stance as the ground shook slightly.

Vines sprung up from the earth under the man and wrapped around him, much like the *Incarcerous* spell. Once they'd tightened, they slowly dragged him down into the earth.

She heard a small popping sound and glanced down. A small, naked man stood next her leg, stroking the horn on his head rather rudely. He made several gestures at her, obviously angry.

"Of course I didn't kill him first," she told him. "Where's the fun in that?"

She waved her wand at the second stunned Death Eater and watched with satisfaction as he was wrapped in vines and dragged under ground like the first.

"We all go back to the earth in our own time," she said cheerfully. "This was their time."

The little man grabbed his privates with one hand and gestured again with the other.

"Yes, well, Nature's timing is a little vague," she grouched. "I just helped things along, that's all."

The little man passed wind and stroked himself suggestively while he watched her intently.

"Now that was just uncalled for!" she exclaimed. "Don't be rude, dear. I have work to do and you're holding me up."

The creature grabbed his horn with one hand, flipped her a crude salute and vanished.

Luna shook her head and moved off. She would have to talk to him one of these days. He was really getting out of hand.

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### **The War Room, Haven Operations Center (0600)...**

"Haven Hospital reports over forty wounded have arrived so far and ten killed in action."

Caleb winced. He knew this had to happen. It would have been a bloody miracle if no one died, but hearing it stated so calmly? It chilled him to the bone.

He glanced up at Amelia, who nodded in understanding. She knew what he was feeling, and why.

"Stanton's Raiders are assaulting the camp at Wilmslow. They are reporting moderate resistance at this time and some casualties," said one of the map girls.

"The Brotherhood Brigade is reporting they have breached the main gate at Leeds and are entering the camp compound," said another.

Caleb looked up when the door opened. To his surprise he saw Fred and George Weasley and the Johansen twins step into the room. All four were looking uncharacteristically serious, for once. He joined them.

"I hope you don't mind... sir," Fred said.

"We have family on this raid," George added quietly.

Caleb waved a hand at them. "Relax. Just stay out of the way and out from under our feet and you can watch all you want. Understand?"

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### **Able Company, Ginny Longbottom (0610)...**

Ginny was an angry witch. Plans had been changed because of what happened to Delta and Echo companies this morning. As a result, her company had entered the camp instead of providing outside security as they'd planned. At least a hundred Death Eaters had escaped from the barracks to the camp and they needed everyone to find them before the Death Eaters started killing prisoners.

Normally the change in plans wouldn't have bothered her, but what she saw entering the camp would be forever burned into her memory.

Just inside the gates were four children, tied to stakes. The Death Eaters were apparently punishing them. She had rushed over to what appeared to be the youngest one, a girl of maybe five or six years. She was naked and tied to the pole with bailing wire, which cut cruelly into her skin.

Ginny was about to kneel and remove the wire when a hand touched her. She looked up to see a matronly lady wearing the red pentagram, indicating she was a medic. The medic shook her head, her expression pained.

"They're gone. You can't help them," the older woman said angrily.

Ginny knelt and looked up at the child's eyes staring blankly back at her. They were a pretty blue, those eyes, and she probably had an infectious smile. But she'd never smile again.

Ginny nodded to the medic and stood, then tightened her grip on her wand and moved out, looking for her squad.

The camp was confusing. The blockhouses for the prisoners were lined up in neat rows, perfectly aligned to form avenues. Ginny darted from one blockhouse to another, looking for her squad. Running around one building, she came face to face with a Death Eater who was, apparently, trying to escape. She raised her wand, pointing it at his head.

His expression was haunted. He sunk to his knees in front of her, his eyes pleading with her. He had lost his mask and wand somewhere along the way. He was a handsome young man, perhaps a little older than herself. In another life, she probably wouldn't have minded dating someone as handsome as he was.

"Please...", he begged, tears running down his face. His black robe was stained wet with blood.

Ginny thought of that pretty little girl with the vacant eyes and adjusted her aim slightly. Her wand was now pointed squarely between his eyes. "*Reducto*," she hissed.

The spell blew off the top of his head, spraying blood, brains and bone against the wall of the building. His body collapsed and blood fountained out of the gaping hole as his heart continued to pump furiously, not understanding that death had already come.

Ginny was angry and she'd give any Death Eater she caught the same type of mercy as what was given to the little girl.

Stepping over the body, she moved on, never once looking back at the man she'd killed.

She rounded a corner and ducked back as several spells were hurled at her. Taking a breath, she rushed forward, firing explosive hexes and severing charms to cover her movement.

Pausing, she crouched next to the wall of one blockhouse, trying to spot where the hexes came from. When she moved, she had blasted out a chunk of the building near a window. She thought the spells were coming from there.

Inside the building she could see a man dressed in a black robe moaning on the floor. He had a large piece of wood sticking out of his stomach. In the darkness of the building, several shapes moved warily forward. She raised her wand, ready to strike again, but paused.

The building's prisoners shuffled forward, all staring intently at the writhing Death Eater on the floor. They looked emaciated; their stripped prison garb hung loosely from their bodies. Some had the distant, uncaring look of those who no longer felt a part of the world.

With an inarticulate cry, the group of prisoners swarmed over the Death Eater. One grabbed the wood in the man's stomach and wrenched it out, only to plunge it back in. The Death Eater screamed and the rest fell upon him like a pack of jackals. Someone gouged out his eyes, others clawed and yanked on any part of the man they could reach.



Ginny fell back, sickened by the sight. She could have sworn someone was using their teeth to attack him.

She leaned against the wall and threw up for what seemed an eternity. When the heavens finally ceased, she was alarmed to find herself surrounded by prisoners, who seemed confused by her strange garb.

"Who are you," croaked one woman.

Ginny straightened. She had been drilled extensively on what to say in this situation.

"I'm with the British Ministry Commandos. We're here to rescue you all," she said, then tears started flowing. She couldn't believe these were her people, these filthy, smelly, almost animal-like people. Her people. Wizards and witches.

She turned slightly, showing her arm. Her sleeve had a patch with the British Union Jack on it. Below that, the sigil for the British Ministry of Magic. On her other arm was the patch of the Brotherhood Brigade.

"Rescue?" said the woman in disbelief. Behind her, a murmur was rising, almost like a keening wail of grief.

The sound tore at her soul and sent shivers down her spine.

"That's right," Ginny said tearfully. The older woman collapsed into Ginny's arms, weeping her thanks. People were standing around her, staring at her in shock, or simply weeping with relief. Several fainted away, overcome.

Ginny's discomfort with these people receded as her compassion kicked in. They had been brutally treated, but that time was quickly coming to a close. She gently pushed the woman away until she held her at arms length and she looked the woman squarely in the eye. "You must listen to me," she said intently. "Your time of rescue is nearly here. For now, go back into the building and stay low. We'll come back for you soon and take you to a safe place. I must rejoin my unit now. We still have Death Eaters to kill."

The woman nodded as Ginny's words sunk home. She pulled Ginny into a quick embrace. "Merlin bless you and thank you!" she whispered. Turning away, she ushered her fellow prisoners back into the building, where the good news spread like wildfire.

Ginny leaned against the wall for a moment longer. The scene had been emotionally exhausting and she was sure she'd have others like it before the day was out.

She crouched low once more and moved towards the sounds of distant fighting. Behind her, she could have sworn she heard the sounds of Rule Britannia being sung from the blockhouse.

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### **Delta Company, Neville Longbottom (0620)...**

Checking that the avenue was clear, Neville motioned for his squad to move forward to the next row of blockhouses. Sprinting quickly, he reached the next blockhouse. As one of his men gave instructions to the occupants, he moved up to the corner of the structure and once again checked the avenue.

He jerked back suddenly as a *Reducto* curse was fired at him. It hit the edge of the blockhouse, blowing out chunks of masonry. He raised his arm to protect his face from the flying debris and cried out in pain when something struck his forearm.

One of his men grabbed his shoulders and spun him away. "Medic!" he cried before taking Neville's place at the corner.

"It's not serious, Martel," Neville hissed, holding his arm carefully.

"Of course not, sir," Martel said. "Excuse me a moment." He leaned out to fire off a spell, then ducked back. "But it's always better to have it looked at," he continued conversationally.

"Perhaps," Neville replied as the medic arrived. "It's not serious," he told the woman.

"No, just broken," she replied cheerfully as she examined his arm. "I used to wonder what it was that made men prone to injuries like this, but I think I've got it figured now."

"Oh? And what's that, Marlene?" Neville asked as she slathered pain relieving salve on his arm. He'd refused the potion.

"Oxygen deprivation," she replied, a bit too smugly.

"Oxygen deprivation?" Martel asked as he fired off another shot. "What's that got to do with anything?"

"Men suffer from it continuously," she told them as she immobilized Neville's arm. At their blank looks, she rolled her eyes. "Blood carries oxygen to the brain," she explained. "But men were given a brain *and* a penis, and only enough blood to run one at a time. And seeing how the Leftenant here is a newly married man..." She left the rest hanging as Martel snorted a laugh.

Neville rolled his eyes at her and looked down at his arm rather pointedly.

"You should be sent back to Haven," Marlene told him. When he scowled, she returned it. "Yes, fine. I didn't think you'd like that idea. You've been numbed up, it's immobilized. My advice is not to fall, lean or otherwise bang it up any more than it already is."

"Fine, great advice. Now you want to let go of it so I can go about my job?" he asked her.

"Oh, you're very welcome, sir," she said, batting her blue eyes at him.

He looked a bit sheepish. "I'm sorry Marlene, Thank you."

She grinned impishly, then moved back a bit.

"That's not your wand arm, is it?" Martel asked suddenly.

"No," Neville replied, moving up next to him. "So what do we have?"

"I took out the bastard who shot at you, but he had friends," Martel said with a shrug.

Neville motioned him back so he could see for himself. Three Death Eaters were crouched behind one of the blockhouses across the avenue from them. He watched them for a moment, then sighed. He could hit the blockhouse to flush them out, but that risked the prisoners inside. However...

He turned to Martel and explained quickly. After looking over the area, Martel shook his head.

"It won't work. If the spell's too powerful, we risk injuring the prisoners," he said.

"Any suggestions?" Neville asked.

"Erumpent fluid? The vials are small enough and shouldn't damage the blockhouse."

"But they're not going to just let us toss it at them. They'll see it coming," Neville said, thinking out loud. "A banishing charm, maybe?"

Martel narrowed his eyes for a moment, then nodded. "It's fast and if we twist the spell slightly we should be able to direct it's path." He reached for the vial clipped to one of his rucksack's straps and held it up. "This should do it." He looked at Neville and waited.

"Do it when you get a clear shot," Neville told him, moving back and informing his men of the plan.

The resulting explosion was what they'd hoped for. Acting much like a muggle flash/bang grenade, all three Death Eaters were stunned just long enough for Neville and his squad to surround and disarm them.

As the squad began to spread out once more, Neville and Martel broke the wands of the Death Eaters, who were beginning to come around.

"Now what?" Martel asked, holding his wand on the now kneeling men.

"You heard command," Neville told him grimly. "No prisoners and no one left behind." Pointing his wand at the base of one man's head, he murmured, "Cruor vas praemium."

The man shrieked once and grabbed his head. He pitched forward and his body jerked spasmodically. When his screaming stopped, he continued to twitch, and Martel raised an eyebrow.

"Don't worry. He's dead, he just doesn't know it," Neville told him, his voice cold.

"What did you do to him?" he asked curiously

"Ruptured a few blood vessels in his brain."

"This works just as well," Martel said. Pointing his wand at the head of one man, he cast a *Reducto* r curse.

As the blockhouse wall was sprayed with gore, Neville wrinkled his nose and turned away. "Sloppy, very sloppy."

Dispatching the third Death Eater in the same manner he'd used on the first, Neville motioned for Martel to follow.

"Are you ever afraid that we're becoming just like them?" Martel asked quietly as the moved to catch up with the men of the squad.

Neville stopped suddenly and turned to face him. "Was killing that man pleasurable to you?" he asked seriously.

Martel scowled. "Of course not!"

"Then you're nothing like them," Neville said fiercely. "I've known a few Death Eaters and the act of killing and causing pain is what they enjoy, it's what they live for. While you and I will be haunted by our actions here today, a Death Eater would revel in them. Now let's get going. We still have work to do."

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## Echo Company (0630)...

Draco looked up at the building that used to house the Dementors in the camp. If he hadn't been feeling so drained and washed out, he would have been in awe. Echo company had broke into the main courtyard of the camp, and each member had cast their Patronus towards the building.

The Dementors had boiled out of the building, then flinched back into the mass of ghostly creatures. Draco walked among them, complimenting them and chiding them where necessary. Standing up to so many Dementors was a difficult task. His men had begun to weaken when the rest of the Brigade finally arrived.

Slowly the Dementors were forced back into the building. Several men ran up to the structure and placed a set of rune stones on it. The building turned white as it, and the air around it, froze solid.

The Dementors weren't dead, but they weren't coming out of the building until the three feet of solid ice encasing it melted. Draco figured that would be sometime around next May.

He leaned back against a wall and closed his eyes. His shoulder was causing him a lot of pain, but he knew he couldn't leave yet. He fumbled with a flask at his hip, trying to get to the pain relief potion, but he couldn't get it released from his belt.

Twister, the senior Auror for the Brigade, trotted past him heading towards the center of the courtyard.

He could hear the man shouting orders, but he couldn't work up the energy or emotion to care. He still hadn't found Luna and it was killing him.

When hands tugged at his shoulder, he opened one eye and blinked. "Luna?"

She smiled at him. She was filthy, had a cut under one eye, and a bruised cheek. She was also a stunningly beautiful sight to him.

She pressed some chocolate into his hands. "Eat this, Dray, while I check your shoulder," she replied, then began to hum softly to herself.

Slowly the chocolate lifted his spirits and her gentle touch calmed his soul. "I was so worried," he whispered.

"I know. But I'm here now and we're alright. Your shoulder hurts, but it's something easily fixed," she told him. Over their bond he could feel her siphoning some of the pain away from him, easing his hurt. He tried to protest, but she wouldn't allow him to block her out.

He leaned against her, and for a brief moment all was right and well in the world, despite the fact that they were in one of the few places on the planet that made Hell look like a luxury spa.

Not far from where they sat, Twister stood, hands on his hips. He had already passed the orders from Harry to the company commanders. Now he watched with satisfaction as the Brotherhood Brigade began sending people off to safety.

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### **Harry, Outside of the Command Post (0630)...**

Harry handed the floo back to Hermione, who passed it to one of her command post staff. He looked at the outside of the camp. Extending his senses, he looked for the aura of the wards on the camp. He needed to find their edge.

Hermione frowned and watched him as he seemed to stumble a little before walking forward. The sand made for poor footing and made it difficult for him to brace against his staff.

She glanced meaningfully at one of the senior Aurors and he followed Harry, hanging back a discrete distance. By her reckoning, she was in charge of the Command Post and the security around it. And a Command Post was nothing without its Commander, therefore she was in charge of him, too. It wasn't quite military logic, but it worked well enough in her mind to be acceptable, even if she hadn't told him about it.

Harry stopped at the edge of the wards and examined them closely. He could see they had been badly cast and some were even conflicting with others. He could see the central nexus of the wards; it was the point from which they originated. The conflict between some of the wards was weakening all of them at the nexus. It was sloppy ward work at its worst. He wasn't about to complain, however, as he could take advantage of it.

He raised his staff and the Auror behind him stepped back with a gasp as Harry's body began to glow brightly.

"Ego to order illa moenia occumbo!" Harry shouted.

Suddenly a pale blue spiderweb of light appeared over the camp. The center pulsed a sickly greenish yellow color. His spell magnified the conflicts within the wards and the spider web wavered wildly for a moment before exploding in a silent display of magical pyrotechnics. There was a moment of awed silence, then came a wail as the blood wards also fell, releasing the poor souls who had been sacrificed to erect them.

Harry reached into a pouch and pulled out four discs engraved with runes. One by one he lifted the disc and murmured an incantation. Each disc rose in the air, then flew towards one corner of the camp. When all four discs were in place, he lifted his staff and activated them. For a brief moment, four large overlapping golden domes covered the camp before each faded away.

Allied anti-apparation wards were now active over the camp.

"Send a message to Able and Baker companies to start pulling out of the camp. We need to set up the traps," he sent to Hermione.

"I'll take care of it. Are you alright?"

"I'm fine," he sent back.

"Harry..."

*We don't have time for this, nor is this the place for this discussion! Send your messages, then prepare to move the command post into the camp,"* Harry snapped.

Hermione's eyes narrowed. If she was outside, she would have glared at him. It didn't help that he was right about one thing. She didn't like taking orders from him.

"Yes, sir," she replied formally. She was angry, but she was smart enough to realize that she shouldn't be angry with him. It was her problem and she'd have to work it out.

---

### **Baker Company, Nymphadora Tonks-Lupin (0635)...**

Tonks opened the door to the blockhouse and cast a shield before entering. The last blockhouse she had entered she had been pelted with rocks, sticks and mud before she managed to get anyone to listen to her.

"British Ministry Commandos, we're here to rescue you!" she shouted.

The prisoners surged forward. Tonks knew exactly what to do. She reached into the box she was carrying and started pressing portkeys into outstretched hands. That caused some to start to panic, but by now she had others from the Brigade backing her up.

"TONKS!" someone yelled.

"What?" she shouted back. Honestly, was it that difficult to see that she was busy?

"Baker company's been ordered to the main gate to begin laying the traps. Pass the box off to someone in Charlie and get a move on," came the reply.

Tonks nodded and handed the box to Remus, who had been standing next to her. Harry had split up most of the Brotherhood couples. Hermione stayed with Harry, as she didn't want to take part in the fighting, and Luna was with Draco, as their bond made it difficult, if not dangerous, to split them up.

Remus and Tonks were in different companies, but that hadn't stopped them from fighting side by side. Both knew it was wrong and Harry was going to pitch a fit over it, but they didn't much care. They were a team and that was final.

Tonks moved outside and gasped in the cleaner air. The smell inside the buildings was fetid and overpowering. She had seen things today that would haunt her for the rest of her life, and she had killed, not once, but many times. Despite all her training, she had never killed before. It made her feel dirty, and she was unsure if she'd ever be clean again.

Remus had killed before, in the first war, so this wasn't new to him. She knew she'd need his support in the coming days to get through the horror of this mission. But that would come later.

Tonks shuddered once, then sprinted for the main gates.

---

### **The War Room, Haven Operations Center (0645)...**

"Brotherhood Brigade reports the Leeds camp has been cleared of Death Eaters and the Dementors have been successfully contained. They're clearing the camp of prisoners now."

"The Raiders report the Wilmslow camp has been cleared of Death Eaters and the Dementors are contained. They're also clearing the camp."

A cheer went up in the room. Caleb leaned against the map table and bowed his head. Barely two hours had gone by and the camp defenses were taken. This was a success beyond anything he had expected.

"Haven Hospital is reporting one hundred and six wounded, thirty two dead and eleven who've been kissed," said one of the girls at the table.

"Alert the International Red Pentagram at Fort Ord to expect incoming casualties," Caleb said quietly.

One of the women working near the map table responded by speaking into a wall floo.

"The Americans and Haven Hospital are reporting arriving prisoners!"

Caleb glanced up to see Amelia smiling. She gave him a thumbs up. Several people working at the table began to smile and a few cheers went up.

"Steady, people," Caleb called across the room. "We still have one more phase to go on this mission."

His words had the desired effect as everyone went back to work with a renewed vigor.

"Sir, Leeds camp wards are now down and allied wards are in place. Evacuation of the camp is continuing."

"Wilmslow reports difficulty in taking down the wards. They expect them down within the next twenty to thirty minutes."

Caleb frowned and considered ordering Harry to Wilmslow to tear down the wards. Harry was capable of doing in a few minutes what it was taking

a half hour to do with curse breakers. But if he ordered Harry to Wilmslow, that would leave Leeds without Harry in charge; not something he wanted to do.

*No, let them have their thirty minutes, Caleb thought. If they don't have the wards down by then, I'll order Harry to go help them.*

---

### **Haven Hospital (0700)...**

Healer August looked at her staff with pride. The wounded coming in from the field were being treated as quickly as possible, while the dead and kissed were moved to the portable morgue they'd set up. Medi-witches and healers moved among the injured, healing and comforting them as best they could.

August walked down to an exit and made her way to the portable hospital the Red Pentagon had set up behind Haven's hospital. She shook her head and marveled at the wonder of it. It contained a triage center, three operating theaters and bed space for thirty critical care patients. The remainder of the patients would either go to the main building or one of the four buildings built by the elves for the Azkaban raid.

Right now, however, she was most grateful for the additional operating theaters and trauma trained staff offered by the Red Pentagon. Haven's hospital hadn't been designed to handle such a large influx of casualties at one time. And they'd come in, in record numbers.

She paused to watch Susan Boot, niece of the Minister of Magic, issue instructions to a large group of student volunteers.

"Everyone gets a blanket and a cup of the broth. When you receive your assigned patient, you are to stay with them until they are issued a bed, then you will escort them to that bed. Remember what we talked about. Be soothing, be comforting. Don't make any promises you aren't willing to keep. If they ask you to find someone, don't promise you will. Just say you'll check the roster. Not all of the patients are coming here," Susan said seriously, then stepped back from the group.

An older woman took Susan's place and called a name. A student detached himself from the crowd and stepped up. He took a blanket from a box and a thermos full of broth before trotting into the portable hospital. Before he'd entered the building, six students were on his heels, moving quickly and orderly.

Sylvia watched Susan for a moment, her professional eye taking in the young woman. She stood off to one side, matching prisoners with volunteers on the lists she held in her hands. She was pregnant and just out of her first trimester, so she was only beginning to show. Sylvia approved of her no-nonsense approach to dealing with the volunteers and the patients.

Healer August reminded herself to send a note of thanks to Headmistress McGonagall. She had allowed most of her sixth and seventh year students to volunteer. They were a serious and dedicated group, and had bedded down at the hospital the night before the attack so they could be on hand when needed.

She shook her head, trying to clear the cobwebs. She had work to do. There were incoming patients who needed her.

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### **The War Room, Haven Operations Center (0710)...**

"Sir, Wilmslow reports the anti-apparation wards are down and have been replaced with our own wards. They are proceeding with laying the traps and continuing to evacuate the camp."

"U.S. Navy reports armored column heading north from Manchester. Column consists of four Challenger tanks and six Saxon APCs. They're commencing their attack."

"Haven Hospital reports they have reached triple capacity on wounded and are requesting permission to call in Irish aid."

Caleb glanced up at the observation room and Amelia nodded. The Irish had been standing by for this.

"Give Haven the go ahead to initiate Irish Aid," Caleb said tersely. This would initiate a complex set of steps that would result in healers and medi-witches flooding into Haven from all over the Emerald Isle. St. Patrick's in Dublin also stood ready with an extra one hundred and fifty beds, if needed.

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### **The War Room Observation Deck, Haven Operations Center (0710)...**

"Arthur, I think it's time we go roll up our sleeves and pitch in where we can," Amelia murmured.

Arthur stood. "I agree, Minister. I think Caleb has it under control here."

Amelia glanced down at the war room and the bustle of activity, then she turned to the allied representatives. "Gentlemen, if you'll follow me? Let's go find someplace where we can be of use."

Caleb never noticed the lights go out on the observation deck. He had far more important matters to worry about.

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### **Harry, Outside of the Leeds Camp (0715)...**

Harry crouched down next to Allen Humbert, commander of Able company. Both men were looking at the map they'd spread out on the ground.

"Put observation posts here, here and here. And two more, here and here, covering the eastern entrance," Harry said, pointing at the map.

Baker company was putting portable swamps along the walls that held no gates. That would prevent anyone from trying to climb over the walls. The only way into the camp was to fly, though anyone on a broom would be in for a nasty shock if they tried. There were now wards in place to hex any broom flying into the area, causing it to crash.

Q Branch had managed to come up with an array of booby traps that would make any force trying to get into the camp pay dearly. First, there were the Jelly Pits. They looked like normal ground until enough men stepped into the danger zone, at which point they sank into the pit and drowned in a viscous, jelly-like fluid.

Then came the slightly less dangerous, but always fun, wand detonator wire. A simple hexed wire was strung along the ground and looked rather innocuous. Stepping over the wire, however, would cause any wand or magical object to explode rather violently.

There were other traps, some hidden, some so obvious as to be overlooked. No matter what they looked like, they all had one thing in common; death. And not a neat, painless type of death. The twins had been especially vicious with their creations. The man-eating trash cans worked in pairs to rip men in half; the fake galleons, a few spread around on the ground of each camp, were packed with enough explosive force that, once triggered, could blow a man into pieces. Oh yes, the twins had been busy.

Harry stood carefully, leaning heavily on his staff, while Humbert snapped out orders to his men. He spotted Ginny nearby and he limped over to her.

"How are you doing?" he asked.

She sighed and put down the box of wand detonator wire. "It's not like I thought it would be, you know?"

"I know, but you're strong. You'll get through this," he replied gently.

"And what about you, Harry?" she asked. "You know Hermione's going to pitch a fit when she sees you limping as badly as you are."

He grimaced, knowing she was right. "I know, but that couldn't help. I twisted my leg the wrong way when we arrived at the landing zone."

She looked at him for a moment, then stepped closer and fingered the potion flask at his belt. It was nearly empty. Her eyes widened and Harry backed away.

"Ginny, don't say it."

She put her hands on her hips and glared at him furiously. He had been using his pain relieving potion for his leg, something he hadn't needed in a long time.

"I don't have to say it, Harry. If one of us were in that much pain, you'd order us back to Haven," she hissed, angrily.

"Maybe, but I have a job to do and so do you." Harry retorted.

Ginny reached down and picked up the box. "I'm not done with you, Potter," she growled. "You may be in command here, but you're going to catch hell when we get back to the manor!" Turning, she walked away, muttering to herself about stubborn men and their idiotic notions.

Harry watched her for a moment, then he shook his head. She was right, but he had too much to do at the moment and his leg wasn't bothering him *that bad*. He didn't know how much time they had, but he had to make the best use of what was left. With that in mind, he limped off to see how things were going elsewhere.

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## Parliament Building (0715)...

Lucius woke to the sound of someone banging on his door. Angrily he climbed over the sleeping boy in his bed and threw on a robe.

"I'm coming, damn it!" he shouted and the banging stopped.

Stomping his way over to the door, he threw it open. "What the bloody hell is wrong now?" he shouted at the quivering man.

"My lord, we have word that the camps at Leeds and Wilmslow are under attack! We've been unable to reach either camp since word first reached us," the man replied.

Lucius leaned back a little and smiled. Voldemort had transferred responsibility of the camps to Mulciber a couple weeks ago. Up until that point, it had been his responsibility.

"Fine, I'll be in my office. Wake up everyone," Lucius said. He turned away from the door and hurriedly put on his clothing. The last things he grabbed before leaving the bedroom were his black robe and mask.

Several minutes later, Lucius sat at his desk and wondered exactly what he should do. Realistically, it wasn't his worry anymore. On the other hand, if he did something and it turned out well, it would make Mulciber look very bad.

He looked up when the commanders of his Death Squads entered the room.

"Has anyone informed Hogwarts about this?" he asked.

"No, my lord," replied Joseph Meade, one of his more competent lieutenants.

Lucius leaned back on his chair and thought for a moment. "This is not our concern anymore. As much as I'd like to rush in, it's really Mulciber's job. Here's what I want everyone to do. Get everyone ready and send out some scouts. Let's watch what Mulciber does before we decide to jump into the fire."

When the group nodded, Lucius stood up. "Send word to Mulciber that the camps are under attack, then ready the men. If Mulciber gets too badly beaten, we can jump in and pull his arse out of the fire."

Many of the men grinned, a few even chuckled. Screwing your fellow Death Eater was the key to climbing the ladder of success and power in Voldemort's forces.

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### **The War Room, Haven Operations Center (0900)...**

The flow of information altered radically in the last hour. Both the Brotherhood Brigade and Stanton's Raiders were firmly entrenched in the two camps. So far, there hadn't been a response from the Death Eaters.

The only information Caleb was getting now came from quarter hour updates, or the hospital, where they were dealing with over two hundred wounded and fifty dead or kissed. Irish healers had poured into Haven during the past hour. Large open air potion brewing kitchens had been set up and potion masters from all over Ireland were helping brew whatever was needed. Meanwhile, potion stocks around the country were being used heavily.

The latest news from the Americans was that they were processing nearly thirty five hundred people at Fort Ord in Monterey, California. It was a decommissioned muggle army base and perfect for the American Department of Magic's needs.

Caleb clenched the report in his hands. It was only a rough estimate and the numbers were changing constantly, but it looked like the rescue had been a smashing success. Between Haven and the Yanks, they had received eighteen hundred and twelve men, sixteen hundred and forty two women and five hundred and two children, for a total of three thousand, nine hundred and fifty six people.

Caleb looked up in surprise when Inga Johansen handing him a fresh cup of tea, along with a few extra napkins. He had been considering the conditions these people had endured and wondering if his two little girls would have made it out. He nodded jerkily and took the tea and napkins, then he turned away to wipe the tears from his eyes.

Inga eyed him knowingly. Strong men were often afraid to show signs of weakness. The Weasley men were like that, only they covered their fears with jokes and pranks. But in the middle of the night, when the jokes and pranks didn't work, their women knew the truth.

"Contact! Brotherhood Brigade Observation post is reporting a force of Death Eaters approaching from the north. Estimated force strength in excess of one thousand Death Eaters."

Caleb's head whipped up and he stared at the girl for a moment. "Get me Lord Potter," he snapped. Then he stood impatiently while the girl mumbled into the floo for a few minutes before handing him the little device.

"Haven Six, Brigade Six," came a tinny voice.

"Brigade Six, Haven Six... Harry? Can you hear me alright?"

"I hear you, Caleb. I figure you're calling about our visitors."

"Damn right I am. Our plan called for you to have superior numbers."

"I know what the plan called for, Caleb. I helped you create it, if you'll remember. They have at least four hundred more men than I do, but I'm in the defensive position. You know that a fortified position acts as a force multiplier. They may a thousand men, but with my traps and other defenses, I have the strength of nearly two thousand.."

"Don't lecture me, Harry! I taught you most of that stuff," Caleb snapped angrily into the floo.

"Then let me use what you taught me, for Merlin's sake! Look, Caleb, the traps will account for a hundred, two if we're lucky. Then I'm going to hold them by the nose and bloody it good before we leave," replied Harry.

Caleb looked uncertain. He'd made command decisions before, but never one of this magnitude.

"Wilmslow reports contact with a large Death Eater force approaching from the southeast. Estimate attacking force strength in excess of eight hundred," said one map girl, breaking the silence.

Caleb sighed, then turned back to the floo. He had never felt as alone in his life as he did right now. "Very well, Brigade Six, continue as planned. Haven Six out."

Caleb handed the portable floo to the girl and turned away, not bothering to wait for Harry's acknowledgment.

The plan was in motion, friends were in harms way, and all he could do was sit in the Operation Center and pray.

---

### **Leeds Camp (0905)...**

Harry handed the portable floo to Hermione and looked over the roughly drawn map of the camp. All of the living prisoners had been evacuated. Some blockhouses near the gates had been demolished in order to provide cover for the brigade. Delta and Echo companies were covering the eastern gate, while Able and Baker covered the northern gate. Charlie company was held in reserve in the center of the camp, ready to move in either direction, as needed.

Harry knew his position was bad. He had been right about fortifications multiplying his force strength, but he neglected to point out the obvious fact that he had to split his forces to cover two gates. He shook his head and walked over to examine one of the Fairy Flier screens. It showed a large force of Death Eaters moving cautiously up the northern road towards the camp.

"Recall the observation posts on the northern flank," he said quietly.

Hermione turned to pass the order on. A few minutes later the men manning those posts were back in the camp.

"Anything on the eastern side?" he asked.

"No, sir. We have Fliers out to nearly a mile and don't see anything," one of the operators replied.

"Contact Echo. Have them shift to the northern gates and leave Delta as a blocking force."

"Contact," said one of the Flier operators.

Harry turned to look at the screen. He winced and tried to ignore his leg for the moment. On the screen he saw the Death Eaters coming into the clearing adjacent to where the barracks used to be. There was a moment of silence before someone ordered them to spread out and move forward.

The group moved forward slowly, then flinched when several of their number screamed in fright as they began to sink into a Jelly Pit. The men nearby tried to pull their comrades out, only to fall into the pit themselves. Others attempted to levitate or summon them and were horrified when they discovered that they could only summon that part of each man that was *above* the jelly.

Learning quickly, the Death Eaters began to send scouts out in front of the main body. While those scouts weren't enough to trigger a Jelly Pit, they did trigger the wand detonator wire.

Harry blinked in surprise. He was watching one scout who vanished in a gory explosion of flesh and bone. Apparently the man had a wand in his hand and another in a holster strapped to his back.

He straightened and shook his head. "I've seen enough. Keep the communications up and running, but prime the building for demolition. I don't want them getting any prizes for their efforts. I'm heading to the north gate," he told Hermione.

Hermione watched him leave and she nibbled her lower lip with worry before she turned to issue new orders.

---

### **The War Room, Haven Operations Center (0915)...**

"Leeds reports it is fully engaged with the enemy."

Caleb looked up at the map. It was too late to pull them back now. They were committed, regardless of the outcome.

"Haven Hospital reports more incoming wounded."

"Wilmslow reports it is now fully engaged."

Caleb sat heavily. There was nothing more he could do. He could send no aid, no advice, nothing. It was the most depressing and demeaning thought a man of action could possibly have.

---

### **Leeds, North Gate (0917)...**

Harry stumbled into the hole and someone immediately jumped on top of him.

"What the hell?" he shouted, then ducked as an explosive spell went off nearby.

Twister looked up and grinned at him. "Having fun, sir?" he asked.

Harry noted that, somewhere along the line, the man had lost one of his front teeth.

Twister rolled off him and Harry peeked over the rubble. He found a high concentration of Death Eaters and cast a wide field stunner. More than forty men dropped to a spell that only he could cancel. Since the stunner would never wear off, they were as good as dead.



Alan Humbert jumped into the hole and smiled grimly.

"Report," Harry shouted at him. It was hard to hear over the din of battle. Overhead, bolts of light flew like comets and he could hear people shouting out incantations all around him.

"We're good still. I figure we're at seventy five percent effectiveness, but Echo took a bad hit from an explosive hex we can't identify. They're probably down to sixty percent," Humbert shouted back.

Harry turned and sat back in the hole, thinking for a moment. His orders were to give the Death Eaters a good thrashing, not to stay and fight to the last man. He turned to Twister. "Sound the general recall. I think we've done all we can today."

Twister nodded and made a complex movement with his wand. An eerie siren wail washed over the camp. It was the signal to assemble in the center of the camp and to prepare to activate personal portkeys back to Haven.

Hermione snapped out an order and everyone piled out of the command post building. She waved her wand and the command post quickly started to burn, then she pointed her wand straight up.

"Justicia Praeconor Vestri Vox," she cried. A huge beam of light exploded from the tip of her wand and shot straight up. The beam expanded into a huge Celtic Cross that could be seen for miles around the camp. It was an uplifting sight as the Brotherhood Brigade gathered their wounded and dead and made ready to leave.

Remus hurried past Hermione, then stopped and turned towards her as she started to droop. The spell had taken a lot out of her. He picked her up and hurried to the center of the camp where most of the Brigade were waiting for the siren to stop. A minute later, he was joined by Tonks. Then Twister arrived and shoved a badly limping Harry at them.

Harry staggered for a moment and grabbed Hermione's hand for balance. Then the siren stopped.

There was a moment of utter silence, then people began to vanish, portkeying away from Leeds. In less than a minute, the camp was an empty shell of its former self.

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### **The War Room, Haven Operations Center (0920)...**

"Sir, the Brotherhood Brigade Command Post has sent out the recall signal..."

Caleb dropped his cup of coffee and ran for the door. Fred and George Weasley and the Johansen twins were on his heels, nearly stepping on him as they bolted out of the War Room.

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### **Haven Operations Center, The Brotherhood Brigade Assembly Area (0923)...**

Caleb paced nervously. *Where are they? They should be back by now,* he thought. Nearby, Fred and George watched him worriedly.

A door slammed open and all five of them jumped in surprise. Arthur Weasley stood panting heavily, his hair askew. Caleb was about to say something when the assembly area started to fill with people. He could hear moaning and shouts for medics from all over the large hall.

"Arthur, get the ready medical team down here," Caleb yelled, then he ran to help one man who was bleeding heavily.

George and Fred seemed frozen, immobilized with worry, while their father ran from the room. Then Fred spotted her.

"OI! GIN-GIN!" he shouted. She turned to look at him and her eyes filled with tears. Both sets of twins ran to embrace her. Nearby, Neville sat nursing a broken forearm while the Johansen twins fussed over him. Around them, the medics rushed to find the most seriously wounded before working on others.

Harry sat not far from Draco and Luna. Hermione was next to him, and he could see Tonks and Remus not far away. Draco seemed to be injured, but everyone else seemed alright. He turned and grabbed Hermione, holding her tight. *Military protocol be damned,* he thought. *Right now I need to hold her and have her hold me.*

"Damn straight," she replied via their bond. *"And don't think for a moment I don't know what's wrong with your leg."*

Harry winced mentally, then sighed. She could yell at him all she wanted now. She was safe, they were all safe. It had been a hellish morning, but it was over.

For them, anyway.

Voldemort's forces had yet to face their master. Harry knew all too well that the Dark Lord did not take defeat well. With a Celtic Cross burning over each of the camps, Voldemort's fury would be felt by his own forces for a change.

It was enough to warm the heart of any Boy-Who-Lived.

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**Author's Notes:**

"Well, that was a good place to end it," Bob said with a happy grin on his face.

"Oh, sure. Lots of explosions and fighting. All guy stuff. Where's the girl stuff? You know, candlelight dinners, Harry singing to Hermione, the girly stuff!" Alyx said in a huff.

"Relax dear, it's coming up, along with some other cool things. Besides, we just had a major battle scene. Don't you think I deserve a rest?" he said in protest.

There was a sudden clanking sound and Bob slumped over in his chair.

Alyx looked at him and nodded in satisfaction, then she put away her frying pan. "Now you can rest," she mumbled before reaching for the chocolate ice cream and the video of Thelma and Louise.

A Wizengamot soundtrack? Probably the theme song from the movie Planet of the Apes.

Rebel Goddess: It's difficult to give everyone air time in every chapter, but we're trying.

Mel Evans: We'll see more of the Hogwarts ghosts and Peeves in the coming chapters. They really are a very minor subplot to the story.

Crys: He's meant to be an annoying prick.

Michael: Unfortunately for your sanity, you'll have to hang in there for a while longer.

Aengus: The mystery killer wouldn't be a mystery if we told you who it was, would it?

Lurk: As Eocho stated, for good or for ill, the Angel's role in this war is nearly complete. We'll see them again from time to time, but never organized like they were at Azkaban.

Note to all Amy's out there. And we do this on behalf of Meotoricshipyards. All Amy's must die. Just kidding.

Noylj: We're sorry you don't get it. So let's try one last time. Harry isn't a dictator. He isn't in charge of the war effort. The Ministry is. Yes, Harry has a very important role, but the Ministry needs to follow most of it's own laws, which explains why the Wizengamot had to be brought back. If they hadn't brought them back, they (meaning everyone involved in the war effort, including Amelia and Harry) could have faced war crimes trials once they returned to Britain and the Wizengamot reformed there.

Brownie points to all those who figured out the Bond reference with Blofeld.

The simple fact that Coeur de Lion is annoying so many people merely shows we're succeeding in doing exactly what we hoped for.

For all those Brits who threatened us because we called it "the Union Jack" instead of the Union flag, be thankful we didn't call it Mum's Dish Towel or something equally silly. Besides, we outnumber you, so we're right. NEENER NEENER BOO BOO! (Ducks)

And now, it's time for a new feature of our author's notes. BLOOPERS!

Yes sirree, it's time for bloopers. Each chapter, we'll offer you two bloopers that make you sit up and go, "Huh"? These are taken from online stories and usually are a mistake, but when you look at them, they sort of throw you for a loop. Or should that be Bloop?

Here are the rules for the Bloopers.

It must be a real word, but the wrong one, something that a spell checker would overlook. Ideally, the blooper must be funny. If you want to submit bloopers, you must provide the URL for the page on which it resides, as well as the full sentence containing the blooper.

To show we're impartial, we'll start off with our own blooper first. To be nice, we won't tell you the url from which these bloopers came from, unless they came from our stories.

From our own Dumbledore's Army

***Sitting next to Remus, Harry explained about his trip to Diagon Alley and the mistake made by the Goblin, who brought him to the Family Vault, instead of his normal fault.***

Well, yes, I guess it would be Harry fault if he didn't go to his normal vault.

This next blooper comes from another author's story, though we won't post the URL.

***I would like to especially welcome the new students and coagulate them on a wonderful sorting last night.***

That must have been one bloody sorting ceremony if they need to be coagulated! Good thing they didn't kill off Madam Pomfrey in that fic like we did.

*Bobmin*  
*FanficAuthors.net*

# Sunrise Over Britain

## Chapter 20 - A Matter for Kings and Philosophers

### Standard Disclaimer:

Bob stared at the screen. It was blank and his expression was one of misery.

“What’s the matter?” Alyx asked him. Then she scratched her butt.

Bob watched her for a moment before tearing his eyes away. To him, Alyx’s butt was worth watching.

Bob mumbled something and she leaned forward to hear him but she still couldn’t make it out. His eyes slipped down from her face to the cleavage she was now exposing by leaning over. Cleavage was even more important than watching her butt.

“Get your mind out of the gutter!” she snapped at him. “Now what is the freaking problem?” she screamed, tearing out clumps of her hair in frustration.

“It’s time for me to write another disclaimer!” Bob moaned in desperation.

“Alright, so write it already!” she snapped at him.

“I don’t know what to write!” He moaned, then he grabbed his head to keep it from exploding.

Alyx backed away. The last time Bob’s head exploded, it had taken a week to clean up the mess.

“So, do something quick and dirty! They want the story, not the disclaimer!” Alyx said, still backing up.

Bob nodded. “Give me a drum roll please,” he called.

Alyx rolled a drum around the room and Bob rolled his eyes at her.

Up on the stage, Albus Dumbledore appeared and he seemed to be chased by a neon green super sized butt plug. The type with barbs on them so you can’t get it out.

Dumbledore looked around in fear, then saw the audience. “They don’t own anything!” he shouted, then ran off the stage with the butt plug chasing him.

Alyx stared at the stage in horror, then turned to look at Bob. “What in the name of all nine hells was that?” she asked curiously.

“Quick and Dirty,” he replied smugly.

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### Sunrise Over Britain

#### Chapter 20

#### Haven Operations Center, The Brotherhood Brigade Assembly Area...

Harry slowly lifted his head off Hermione’s shoulder. He had grabbed her and held onto her not long after they had arrived back at Haven. He wasn’t sure, but he thought he might have actually dozed a little in her arms.

He started to pull away, but she tightened her hold on him.

*“Relax, love. Remus has gone off to find a healer for you. You’re in no shape to be moving around right now,”* she sent him.

*“I can’t go to the hospital...”*

*“I knowthat, Harry. You’re too stubborn for your own good, do you knowthat?”*

*“I know, but your just as stubborn.”*

*“Am not!”*

*“Are too!”*

*“Am not!”*

“Do you two want to continue your silent fight or can we let the healer look over Harry’s leg?” Tonks asked, startling both of them.

“How did you know we were fighting?” Hermione asked softly.

Simple. You look just like Remy and I when we're fighting. We just make more noise than you do," she said, smirking.

Harry rolled his eyes and turned to look at the healer, who was already cutting away the leg of his pants.

"Hello, Sam," Harry said, recognizing the healer.

"Good morning to you, Commander. I'm pleased to see you made it out of the fight almost intact," Sam replied while running a set of diagnostic spells on his leg. He frowned. "You've badly strained the muscles and stretched more than a few ligaments, sir. Let me guess, bad landing with the portkey?"

Harry blushed and nodded, shamefaced.

"Well, there isn't much we can do for injuries like this except give you something for the pain and keep you off the leg for the next couple days," Sam said mildly, then his manner turned very serious. "I mean it, Commander. Injuries like this are pernicious. The more you strain your leg, the longer it will take for you to recover."

"I'll see he stays in bed," Hermione said.

Harry frowned. "Love, we can't. Not today, not yet. There are debriefings still to handle. Draco's injured so I can't ask him to fill in for me."

Harry motioned and Hermione turned to see Caleb striding up to them. He seemed rather pleased with himself.

Hermione glared down at Harry, then over to Caleb.

Spotting her expression, Caleb's stride slowed considerably. He frowned, spotting Harry sitting on the floor with a healer bending over his leg.

"My Lord? Are you injured?" Caleb asked.

"Yes, he is," Hermione said coldly.

"I'm fine," Harry said at the same time. The two glared at each other.

Sam stood and turned to face Caleb. "Sir, the Commander has badly taxed an old leg injury and he needs a few days bed rest to heal. The injury is painful, but not life threatening."

Harry glared up at Sam, who shrugged off his glare. "I'm sorry, Commander, but it's my job to see that you are - and remain - healthy," he said.

Harry looked up, appealing to Caleb, who just shook his head.

"My Lord, as of right now you're on medical leave," he said, then he turned to Sam. "Is a week sufficient?"

"Yes, Sir, a week would fix him right up," the healer replied nervously. Somehow he had managed to get himself stuck in an argument between the two top commanders of the war.

Harry started to protest, but Caleb cut him off. "I'm not ordering you to bed for a week, Harry. I'm ordering you off that leg. In the meantime, I'm sure Lady Potter here can help you write up your after action report. After all, it's your leg that's injured, not your mind, or your hands."

Hermione blinked and nodded vigorously.

Sam stepped forward. "Unlike Commander Newman, I am ordering you to your bed, my Lord. Two days minimum, three if possible. And I want your regular healer to see you as soon as possible. As soon as you can leave the Operations center, go home, take a hot soak and get someone to help you into bed."

"I'll take care of that," murmured Hermione.

"Alright, alright. I can't fight all of you," Harry said, conceding. "Is sitting alright?" he asked Sam.

"Yes, you should be fine sitting, but I meant what I said. Get help when you move about for the next two or three days. I don't want you putting any weight on that leg."

Harry looked up at Caleb. "You'll keep me informed as to what is going on?"

"I will. I'll either send word, or stop by the Manor myself. I'll also tell Amelia that you've been laid up and the morning briefings are canceled for the next two days. Meanwhile, I'm ordering both your unit and Stanton's to stand down for a week."

Harry nodded in resignation. He could fight one of them, perhaps two, but he couldn't fight all of them. To make matters worse, he could see both Tonks and Remus creeping up on them and both looked ready to jump into the conversation.

Harry looked over at Draco. A healer had worked on his shoulder and he was sitting up, flexing his arm. It looked like someone had attended to Neville's arm, as well. The Brotherhood was battered, but certainly not beaten, and they were ready to leave the Operations Center.

Harry reached for his staff and he shrunk it back down to wand size before holstering it. Then he looked up at Remus. "Care to give me a hand?"

## Padfoot Manor...

*The manor seems especially empty without Harry and Hermione in it,* thought Dan Granger.

He and Emma had gotten up at dawn. They knew there was a large operation planned for today and that their children would be involved. Neither expected that waiting at home would be this difficult. Barely an hour after dawn they met up with Narcissa, who seemed to be doing the same thing they were. Waiting and worrying.

Time seemed to flow past at a snail's pace. The three had an early breakfast, then tried to do a little studying in the sitting room. Narcissa read from her healer texts, while Dan and Emma did their homework, he in transfiguration, she in charms. None were capable of concentrating very well. After an hour, by a silent mutual agreement, they all gave up on attempting to read and sat back to wait.

They had been in the main sitting room for nearly five hours before they heard a disturbance in the grand foyer. Emma placed her cup of tea on the small table next to her chair and bolted out of the room, pushing her way past Dan, who nearly fell over.

Emma burst into the foyer and swept Hermione into her arms, weeping with relief. Dan and Narcissa appeared right behind her.

Narcissa glanced over the group with a practiced eye. She seemed surprised to find a very grumpy Harry Potter sitting on a stretcher that Neville and Remus were levitating. Draco seemed paler than usual and Neville was favoring his arm. In fact, they all looked like they'd had a rough morning.

A house elf appeared with a pop and handed Narcissa her potion bag.

Before Hermione had the chance to speak, Emma released her into Dan's embrace and turned to embrace Harry. Harry's expression altered from annoyance to pleased surprise. He leaned into her hug until she released him, then she looked at him floating on the stretcher.

"What did you do this time, Harry?" she asked sternly, hands on her hips and sounding frightfully like Hermione.

"He landed wrong and injured his leg, Mum," Hermione answered for him. Harry shot her a death glare, but she was immune to it.

*People used to run when I glared,* he thought. *Well, maybe not Hermione, but still...*

Narcissa eyed Harry again, then made her decision. "Alright, you lot, into the dining room for a snack. Then it's a light sleeping potion and a nap for everyone. Oh, and I'll want to check everyone before bed," she said, her expression stern enough to ward off any arguments.

Narcissa and Dan herded everyone into the room, where Dobby was directing the house elves in putting out a light meal. Harry sighed with relief when Remus floated him into a chair. The change of angle at the knee brought him some additional relief.

House elves bustled about the room serving hot drinks and putting food on the table. But no one was really all that hungry. Harry put some food on his plate and ate half-heartedly.

"I never thought it would be like that," whispered Ginny. She was paler than usual and her hands trembled. Neville wrapped an arm around her shoulders and she leaned into him, closing her eyes.

"The next few days are bound to be difficult for everyone," Remus said quietly. "I suggest we take it easy for now. But talk to your partner if it gets to be too much."

Eocho drifted in through a wall and he eyed his Brotherhood. He had molded them, changed them in ways they wouldn't understand for years to come. In a way, they were his children and his pride in them knew no bounds today.

"The outcome of battle affects us each in different ways. People celebrate our victory, while the fighters heal and rest. Our time of celebration comes not after the battle, but after the war, when we can sit back, relax and raise our goblets in memory of those that have gone on before us," Eocho said softly, then he turned to Ginny and drifted closer. "Do not be afraid to weep, my daughter. You have seen and done terrible things; things you fear will stain your soul. They will haunt you, but your soul remains pure, child. Use the knowledge you have gained this day to harden your heart to the tasks ahead of you. This is but one battle of many to come."

Ginny had looked up when Eocho first started to speak. When he finished, she released Neville, wiped away her tears and nodded to her mentor.

Conversation in the room began shortly afterwards, as if Eocho's words had breathed life back into them.

Harry ate quietly next to Hermione, listening to the conversation flow around him. He glanced up at Eocho gratefully and was surprised when his spectral mentor winked back at him. A small pop by his side signaled the arrival of a house elf. When he turned and accepted the folded note, the elf vanished with a pop.

He opened the note, never noticing the drop in conversation around him, and read it carefully. Then he looked up.

"What is it?" Hermione asked worriedly.

"It's the numbers. They aren't firm yet, but it should be fairly accurate," he replied softly.

"Well, don't just stare at us, Harry. What are they?" Tonks exclaimed in exasperation.

Harry unfolded the note again. "The total number of wounded from both units, two hundred and thirty seven, fifty four dead, another twenty eight kissed," he said quietly. He paused and looked around the room before dropping his eyes to the note again.

“Total rescued: Three thousand, nine hundred and fifty six people. Over five hundred were children.

“Preliminary estimates suggest that over eleven hundred Death Eaters were killed, counting the guard force.”

He looked up from the note and let it drop from his hands to the table. Everyone was trying to understand the numbers.

“It sounds so cold. Four thousand people? How do you put that into something you can understand?” asked Emma in an awed voice.

“You don’t,” replied Luna seriously. “It would have been a victory if we’d rescued only one person. The numbers mean little. What matters is the lives that will go on because of this morning.”

Everyone turned to stare at the blond witch.

Her eyes sharp, she met the gaze of each person in the room. Then she shrugged her shoulders, blinked twice, and her expression became vague and slightly dreamy once more.

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## Hogwarts Castle...

Lucius Malfoy bowed and moved off to the one side of the Great Hall where he could watch the show. He had just finished giving Voldemort a report on the morning’s activities. His own troops had arrived far too late to help Mulciber’s men and he had been certain that Mulciber had not reported this latest defeat to the Dark Lord.

But Lucius had. And he had just finished explaining the morning’s events to his master.

“Send for Mulciber,” Voldemort said in a voice that dripped with venom.

Several black cloaked figures ran from the room.

Horatio Mulciber paced in his office. Today had been a major disaster and he wasn’t sure how to present the news to his master so that it didn’t look like his failure.

He jerked to a halt when a pounding came at his door. He rushed to the door and threw it open. “What?” he demanded.

“The Master wishes to see you, immediately,” said the Death Eater with a hint of a smirk. Mulciber realized that Voldemort must have heard by now, otherwise the man would have been far more deferential.

He paled, then he pushed past the man, hurrying down to the Great Hall.

He entered the hall and froze. Standing near Voldemort was Lucius Malfoy. That was bad news, but even worse was the fact that his wife, son and daughter stood to the other side of the Dark Lord’s throne.

Resisting the urge to soil himself, he rushed forward until he reached the throne, where he bowed deeply. “You summoned me, my Master?”

“Yes, Horatio. I asked for your presence so that you might answer a few simple questions,” Voldemort said, silkily.

He glanced nervously at his family, who looked back at him in terror, then he nodded to Voldemort. “O-o-of course, my lord,” he stammered.

Voldemort leaned back on his throne and clapped his hands. “Excellent. See? This isn’t going to be unpleasant at all!” he proclaimed, then his eyes flared and an aura of deep red, almost black flickered into existence around him.

Mulciber cringed away.

“Now then, Horatio, exactly what happened to the Wizarding camps this morning?” he asked dangerously.

“My lord, we don’t have all the facts as yet. I’ve sent...”

“*Crucio*,” the Dark Lord whispered, his wand pointing at Mulciber’s wife. The wand seemed to expand slightly and the woman was flung across the length of the Great Hall. Voldemort looked up in surprise and stared at his smoking wand.

Mulciber’s wife hit the far wall with a meaty thump, but managed to maintain consciousness. She slid to the floor and started to laugh and gibber insanely, despite the pain she had to be in.

Mulciber moaned and his children looked at their father with hatred in their eyes.

“I know you lost both camps today, Mulciber, and I know you also lost a large number of my servants. Why are you trying to hide this from me?” Voldemort asked in a deceptively calm tone.

“My Lord, I wanted to have all the facts...”

“Oh, just kill the failure and be done with it,” Mulciber’s son muttered.

Voldemort glanced at Lucius. His wand was still smoking and he didn’t want to risk using it again until he had figured out how to avoid that.

Lucius nodded at the unspoken command and pointed his wand at the young man. “*Crucio!*” he shouted.

He crumpled to the floor writhing and begging for mercy.

“Foolish child,” Voldemort chided. “Do you think you are adult enough to speak in my presence? Do you presume to command me?”

Mulciber bit his lip and watched helplessly as his son started to froth and foam at the mouth.

Voldemort gestured and Lucius lifted the curse. He gazed coldly at the youth on the floor for a moment before turning back to Mulciber. “This is my final warning to you, Horatio. I will not tolerate another failure on your part. Now take your pitiful family and get out of my sight!”

Mulciber helped his son stand, then he bowed and grabbed both his son and daughter, dragging them over to where his wife still lay, gibbering and drooling.

Voldemort watched the man leave with his family and shook his head angrily. *If I didn't need the man, I'd consign him to the ritual,* he thought to himself.

Voldemort turned to Lucius. “How badly have we been hurt?”

Lucius paled. He didn't want to give this sort of news to him! “Close to fourteen hundred dead, my lord. By the time my forces were aware of the problem and arrived, it was already too late to help.”

Voldemort pounded on the arm of his throne. “Damn you, Potter!” he snarled. “Lucius, we must strike back. That brat is making us look like fools.”

“Potter and Haven are too well protected, my lord,” Malfoy replied in protest.

“Perhaps... Then again, perhaps we should strike back at a target that isn't so well protected...” Voldemort said, his eyes narrowing in thought. “Leave me! I must consider this.”

Malfoy bowed and exited the Great Hall, happy that he hadn't been on the receiving end of the Master's anger today.

Voldemort drummed his fingers on the arm of his throne. He couldn't send Death Eaters against Haven, and he already had people causing trouble there. Perhaps he could attack the muggle government somehow? It was worth thinking about.

He glanced down at his wand. It still smoked slightly and he smiled. His power was obviously growing, but he was unsure about the stability of his wand. It was something of a concern. Wandless magic was an option, but he'd never gained the focus needed for the skill; he'd never needed to until now.

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## **Haven Operations Center...**

It was nearly seven in the evening when Terry knocked and opened the door to Caleb's office.

Caleb looked up at him, his eyes were bleary with exhaustion and he watched the young man enter.

“Caleb, I have word from the hospital,” Terry said quietly.

Both men turned when the door opened again to admit Amelia and Susan into the office.

Caleb rubbed his temples tiredly. “What word do you have?” he asked.

“Healer August reports that all but thirty six of the wounded have been treated and released. Of the thirty six remaining, their injuries will require more care. Fourteen are listed in critical condition. Six more have died, bringing the total killed in action to sixty.”

“It's a great achievement, Caleb. You should be proud of what you've done this day,” Amelia said gently. “Now go home to your wife and children, they need you as much as you need them.”

Caleb nodded and stood. He was so tired he never even noticed that he left them standing there in his office.

Terry smiled at Susan. She was finally out of her morning sickness phase, although it seemed to happen in the early evening more than it did in the morning.

The three stood silently for a moment. It had been a rough day all around and the silence was welcome.

“How did Harry and the others do?” Susan asked finally, breaking the silence.

“He injured his leg again. Draco and Neville were lightly wounded, but they were fine when they left the building,” Terry replied.

“Maybe we should go to the manor? I'm sure they're going to have a rough go of it for the next day or two,” Susan offered.

Amelia watched her niece and husband discuss it. The people of Potter's Brotherhood were a family unto themselves.

Susan turned to Amelia. “You don't mind, do you, Auntie?”



She waved a hand at the pair. "Go, I'll be fine. Right now you should be close to them."

She watched them leave, then she sat on a chair and considered what tomorrow would bring. The announcements and press releases would greatly cheer everyone. *It's fitting to start off the holiday season with good news like this*, she thought. The politician in her reveled in the idea of good publicity and what it would do for the war.

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### Padfoot Manor...

"Welcome home. Master Harry and Miss Hermione will be so happy to see you," a little elf said, then he proceeded to help Susan and Terry remove their cloaks.

Hermione stopped in the grand foyer and looked at them in surprise. "Susan? What brings you here? Is there something wrong?" she asked. She held a cup of tea in her hand and wore a fuzzy robe and slippers.

Susan walked over and hugged her. "No, there's nothing wrong. We just felt that the next few days might be difficult, and we needed to be here. We couldn't go with you, but we're here now."

Hermione relaxed into her embrace for a moment. "Well, come on in. It's cold enough out there. Some of us are gathered in an upstairs sitting room, just talking."

She glanced over at Terry and noted how well he was walking, although he still needed the cane. "You're moving better, Terry. Come on, everyone will be glad to see you back."

She led the pair upstairs and into a large sitting room. Remus and Tonks and her parents were present, as were Neville and Ginny. Hermione sat on the rug between her parents and placed her tea on the table.

"Terry! Susan! Come on in," shouted Neville. Ginny looked up and smiled at the couple.

Terry looked around suspiciously. "Where's Harry?" he asked.

"Hermione slipped him a heavier dose of sleeping potion. He's not allowed to put any weight on his leg for two days," Ginny replied with a grin. For some strange reason, slipping Harry a sleeping potion tickled her fancy.

Hermione turned to Ginny. "Why does my slipping Harry sleeping potion amuse you so much?" she asked curiously.

Ginny scowled. "Sometimes he makes me so mad. I'm glad you have to deal with him and not me, Hermione. Today, while we were placing out the traps, he and I spoke. I could see he was in a lot of pain. His pain relief potion bottle was nearly empty, he had been using it *that* often. And yet he refused to admit he was in any kind of trouble. Merlin knows I like a stubborn man, I married one myself, but Harry takes stubbornness to an art form."

Remus laughed. "Lily often said the same thing about James," he told them.

Neville looked over at his wife and grinned. "I'm not stubborn," he replied stubbornly.

Hermione grinned. He denied his pain to others, but not her, thought she didn't tell those in the room that fact. He hadn't discussed it in the field, of course, but later, in the privacy of their bedroom, he hadn't attempt to hide the pain he was in. It was, in her mind, just another way he showed her how much he cared, by dropping the barriers he'd built to let her in.

Terry led Susan to a chair near the fire while the others talked. When he sat down, Susan promptly sat on his lap.

One of the by products of her pregnancy was she always seemed cold. She stoked the fire with her wand and then snuggled back into her husband's embrace.

"So how are you guys?" Terry asked them seriously, his arms tightening around Susan.

Ginny looked down at her feet. "I've had so many mood swings in the past eight hours I'd swear I was pregnant," she said in a whisper.

Neville turned his head and looked at his wife sharply.

"Don't worry, I'm not," she said. Then her grin turned impish. "Yet," she added with a sparkle in her eye.

Neville grinned and kissed her forehead. "Good. Mind you, I want kids, just not right now. Perhaps after I get my mastery in Herbology," he replied, then he leaned over and squeezed her shoulder comfortingly.

"It wasn't anything like I expected," Tonks said. "It's all a jumble, noises, lights, like it's all out of focus. And the faces of the prisoners. I don't think I will ever forget those faces."

Several of the others nodded in somber agreement. Ginny shuddered and leaned against Neville for support.

Dan put his drink on the table and looked over at Tonks. "Nor should you forget those faces. Emma and I weren't there, we can't begin to understand everything. But I do know this much. Those people are the reason we fight. To forget that would be to dishonor them. For the first time I

can honestly say I wish we went through the training. Being left behind is an awful feeling.”

“Oh, no, Daddy. Don't say that,” Hermione said, her expression shocked.

“She's right, Dan,” Remus offered. “I know it may be difficult to sit here and wait. But for us, knowing your safe is a comfort and one less thing to worry about.”

Emma placed her hand over her husband's and looked into his eyes. He closed them and nodded silently. It wasn't easy being left behind.

Hermione stood and bid everyone a good night. She was tired and she wanted to check on Harry. She was pleased to note that he was still sleeping when she got back to their bedroom. He shivered slightly in the bed. She echoed his shiver as she took off her robe. Winter was coming and the night had a chilling bite to it. Climbing in next to him, she cast a warming charm on the bed and made a note to herself to ask the elves to put out the winter weight blankets tomorrow.

## **Haven and elsewhere (Dec 8th)...**

The morning following the attack the residents of Haven woke more subdued than normal. An eerie quiet had descended on the town; even the school children walking to the primary school spoke in hushed tones. Rumors had run rampant all day yesterday once the fighters began to return from the field.

They had rescued a thousand people. No, it was three thousand, which later became ten thousand, with ten thousand Death Eaters killed.

As soon as one rumor swept the town, another followed on its heels. Meanwhile, the spouses of the fighters waited in fear, some clutching their children for comfort.

Sven Johansen took it upon himself to bring the really bad news to people. No one wanted to see Sven knocking at their door.

The morning following the attack was as different as the morning of the attack. Everyone wanted to know just how the operation had fared, so they waited quietly for the group of elves to begin the deliver of The Paper.

When the popping sounds of the delivery elves began and people started to read their morning paper, the citizens of Haven turned out in droves.

The Paper, who's official motto was 'All the news that's fit to print, even if we have to make it up', published a special edition that morning and delivered it to every home in Haven.

*British Deal Massive Blow to You-Know-Who  
Boy-Who-Lived leads raid to rescue prisoners*

*In a surprise communique from the British Ministry of Magic in Exile, it was revealed yesterday that forces led by the British successfully stormed two prison camps in Britain, rescuing the prisoners.*

*Harry Potter, the Boy-Who-Lived, led one assault team consisting of over five hundred combat trained Aurors against one of the Wizarding camps in Britain. The raid, which consisted of forces from allied nations, assaulted two prison camps that contained men, women and children. Inside sources claim that a terrible fight ensued at both camps, although allied casualty figures were relatively light.*

*In the meantime, representatives of the International Red Pentagram have announced that they processed nearly four thousand rescued prisoners. The IRP is refusing to comment on the prisoners conditions, except to say that they will need considerable help to overcome the physical and psychological trauma they have endured.*

*The muggle British Ministry in Exile issued a statement to the Wizarding press this morning, applauding the action and praising the forces of the allied nations*

*“Today another four thousand of our people breath the air of freedom,” said Amelia Bones, the British Minister for Magic. “They can do so because of the courage and tenacity of our forces. Our forces and those of our allies took the war back to the enemy yesterday, and in doing so, have struck a blow for freedom everywhere. Today, our people begin the long road to recovery, and those still in Britain take heart, knowing we have not forgotten them.”*

*Offers of food, potions, healers and dry goods have flooded into the IRP at record levels. This latest blow against You-Know-Who has convinced many neutral countries to actively support Britain in her time of need.*

*In related news, Harry Potter was reported to have led the 'Brotherhood Brigade' against the Wizarding camp at Leeds. This Brotherhood Brigade is said to be comprised entirely of specially trained war wizards, wielding magical weapons of awesome power. The Brotherhood is said to be an ancient religious order that Harry Potter has revived for the express purpose of crushing evil everywhere.*

*When questioned about the Brotherhood Brigade, the British Ministry in Exile admitted the unit was named that, but as to the rest, they refused to confirm or deny any rumors. This is the third time in less than a year that Harry Potter has led an attack against You-Know-Who.*

*The Irish Ministry confirms that St. Patrick's in Dublin aided the British by accepting some of their wounded.*

*The Saudi Arabian Government has released photographs of their Calvary aiding in the attack at Wilmslow*

*In other news....*

The citizens of Haven flooded the town square, some still in their pajamas, celebrating.

The news of the attacks at Leeds and Wilmslow raced around the globe. Offers of supplies and aid to help the rescued prisoners flooded into the Ministry building and into the Headquarters of the International Red Pentagram. Several more countries came on-board, offering Auror support.

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### **Padfoot Manor...**

Hermione stretched and reached for Harry, but she found only empty space. She bolted up in the bed and scowled. He knew he was supposed to stay in bed! Throwing off the blankets, she stood up and put on her robe.

*"Harry?"*

*"Good morning, my heart,"* he replied.

*"Don't you 'good morning' me, Mr. Potter. You heard the healer yesterday! What are you doing out of bed and who said you could get up? Where are you?"* she asked angrily.

There was a moment of shocked silence across their bond. Then she could feel his amusement, which only made her angrier.

*"I'm in my study. As to what I am doing out of bed, I'm with Danni, who just finished looking over my leg. You were still sleeping and we didn't want to disturb you. She's given me a crutch for today and tomorrow and taught me a charm to lock my knee so that the leg doesn't touch the floor. If you want to be angry at someone, come yell at Danni,"* he said calmly, though she could feel his laughter just below the surface.

Hermione flushed and realized she had jumped to conclusions. *"I'm sorry,"* she sent back to him.

*"I know you're only looking out for me, love. If Danni hadn't arrived this morning, I'd probably still be in bed. However, you could have saved yourself the embarrassment and simply asked me what was going on."*

*"True, but it's a rare day when you listen to the advice of a healer,"* she chided him, gently. *"I'll be right there."*

After she'd dressed, Hermione hurried into Harry's study, where she found him moving around unsteadily on a crutch. His leg was bent at the knee so it was well above the floor. Danni walked slowly behind him, watching his gait.

Harry's expression brightened when she entered the room. "Hermione, look! Three legs," he said jokingly.

She smiled slightly. She didn't like seeing him this way and didn't think the problem with his leg was something to joke about.

Finally Danni steered him back into a chair and he sat with a thump.

"It will do for today and tomorrow, Harry," she said seriously. "But you need to go easy for the next two days. I didn't bring the crutch over so you could run all over the manor, either. This is to get you from the bed to the bathroom, and maybe to your study where you can sit and work, but that's it."

Harry looked up at her and nodded. "I realize that, Danni. I don't want to end up using one of these all the time," he replied.

Hermione added her own agreement to Harry's, then she sat in her customary chair. "How are things at the hospital?"

Danni sat in one of the plush armchairs facing Harry's desk and wiped her face tiredly. Dobby appeared next to Harry with a quiet pop. The two spoke quietly for a moment before the elf vanished.

"Honestly, it's a madhouse right now. Nearly every bed is filled and the patients are different than the ones from Azkaban. We have children who have been raped - some of whom are now pregnant - and others who are completely non-responsive. Injuries of every type you can imagine, malnutrition, disease. The healers and medi-witches are barely holding their own with so many to care for, and nearly every patient is recovering from some sort of psychological trauma," she said tiredly.

Dobby appeared and set up a small table in front of Danni, laying out food for the healer. Winky arrived next, serving Harry and Hermione.

Danni looked surprised at the meal appearing before her.

"Eat, Danni. It's obvious you're tired. And if I know you, you probably haven't eaten since yesterday morning," Harry said.

"Aren't there enough Healers and volunteers, Danni? I thought the International Red Pentagram was bringing in a lot of extra help?" Hermione asked quietly. Neither of them wanted to think about the consequences of rescuing all those people and being unable to care for them.

Danni took a sip of coffee and nodded. "We have enough staff. Maybe I'm overstating things. It's just that we have so many patients with differing needs. It's..." She waved a hand, helpless to find the words to describe the situation.

"Overwhelming?" Harry offered.

Danni nodded. "Yes, that too. We'll get the mess straightened out. It's just overwhelming right now."

"We need to find better ways for you to move around, Harry. You fall using both the floo and portkeys," Hermione said teasingly, trying to change the tone of the conversation.

Harry laughed. "Isn't that the truth? That's why I much prefer apparation. Or even the Portals. Both work nicely for me, thank you."

Harry looked over at the healer, turning serious again. "I'm sort of at a loss here, Danni. As much as I'd like to help you, I don't know what I can do. I imagine Amelia will be around sometime today. I'll speak to her about getting more help out to the hospital, if you think it would help."

Danni smiled wanly. "I don't think that will be necessary, Harry. I guess I'm just fretting over nothing. Right now we have so many volunteers and helpers, people are climbing over one another. Did you know Olga Johansen showed up yesterday afternoon with about twenty other women? They marched right in and took over the children's ward. That was the only reason why that ward finally settled down yesterday. Between Olga and the other ladies, they got the children settled down, fed and calmed enough for the healers to work on them."

Harry shook his head in amazement. "We really need to do something for the Johansens," he said to Hermione. "They've done so much for the community."

Hermione nodded and turned back to Danni, her expression growing serious. "What will be done with the women and girls who've become pregnant as a result of being raped?"

"I suspect that some will want to abort the pregnancy, Hermione, but most won't," Danni replied quietly. Abortion was a tricky issue in Wizarding society. It was rarely practiced and the only time it was approved was in cases like this, where rape resulted in a pregnancy. It was a stigma for women undergoing the procedure, and potentially damaging to their magic. Many women opted to have the child rather than risk a possible loss of power.

Harry sighed and leaned back on his chair, rubbing a hand tiredly over his head. "I reckon we should have expected that we'd confront issues like this. Merlin knows we weren't expecting issues with the last raid. We prepared ourselves this time, only to run into new issues."

"It can't be helped, Harry," Danni replied, then she stood and placed her tea on the small table Dobby had set up for her. "Thank you for the breakfast, but I'm due back at the hospital in an hour. I still want to catch a shower before I go back to work."

She eyed Harry suspiciously. "Remember what I said. Use the crutch to get from the bed to the bath or study, but no further," she warned.

"I'll behave," Harry replied cheekily.

"Yes, he'll behave," Hermione replied firmly, her eyes boring into his.

Harry shrank back from her glare. He knew she'd make sure he kept his word.

Danni nodded and said her goodbyes before leaving the room. Hermione turned to sort through the mail, putting aside that which needed Harry's attention. When she was done, she handed him his mail to deal with, while she went to get her notes and materials from her study.

She hadn't been kidding. She intended to keep an eye on him today.

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### **British Ministry Building, Office of the Minister, Haven...**

"Amelia, do you have a moment?" asked Arthur Weasley from the doorway.

Amelia waved him in. "I hope you're more rested than I am today," she said in a jovial tone.

"Somewhat," he replied. "I visited with Ginny for a few hours last night, then pretty much collapsed into bed when I got home."

Amelia nodded and passed him a cup of tea from her ready service, which the elves kept hot all day long. "Yes, yesterday was pretty stressful for you, for all of us, in fact. Now, then, what brings you here today?"

"I received an interesting dispatch from Department M-Ireland," Arthur said seriously.

Amelia's eyes widened. She pulled her wand, sealed the door and cast several privacy and anti-eavesdropping charms. Every British Embassy had a Department M, which consisted of a Wizard who acted as an intermediary between the Ministry of Magic and the muggles. In normal times, the role of Department M was relegated to helping British Wizards stranded in foreign countries.

The British Embassy in Ireland acted as the contact point between the muggle British Government, the Crown, and the Ministry of Magic in Haven. While there were representatives of the government in Haven, none had access to the secure communications system available at the Embassy.

Amelia reached for the parchment that Arthur was offering her. He resisted the urge to smile as he passed it over.

She scanned the document quickly, a grin appearing as she read. When she was done, she placed the parchment on the desk and carefully made several duplicates of it. Then she looked up, her eyes dancing. "Well, Arthur, will you be able to find a date?" she asked with a laugh.

He blushed. "I believe I might be able to find someone," he said hesitantly. "Amelia, we're going to need to put together a bunch of passports. If you have no objection, I'll contact Department M-Ireland and get them working on it?"

Amelia stood. She held one copy of the precious document in her hand. Others would be given to various department heads or archived. It wasn't often that the Ministry of Magic received praise from the Crown.

“Yes, do that, Arthur. We don't have much time to set this up, so we have our work cut out for us. Harry and Hermione have passports. In fact, I think most of the Brotherhood members do. But some of our department heads probably don't. Let's make it easier on ourselves. Reissue passports for the Brotherhood. I want everyone listed as a diplomat.”

Arthur grabbed a copy of the document and nodded. “I'll get right on it.” He turned and canceled the locking charm on the door before leaving.

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### **Wizengamot Building, Office of Amhar Coeur de Lion...**

Amhar was in a foul mood. The Ministry had run some sort of joint military operation yesterday and they had not informed the Wizengamot about it in advance!

He stared moodily at the Daily Dublin sitting in front of him.

*'Harry Potter leads rescue of over six thousand from Britain!' screamed the headline. It felt like a slap in the face.*

*Potter!* he snarled mentally. *By the time this war is over Potter will be untouchable if I don't do something about it.*

Amhar considered some of the rumors he had heard that morning and he ground his teeth in frustration. The Ministry was becoming more entrenched in its backward policies, and Harry Potter was achieving hero status among the nations of the world.

He sat back heavily and considered his options. He could call Potter and his cronies to stand before the committee, but the Ministry was resisting his attempts to put together an enforcement arm, citing the fact that because they were on Irish soil there was no need of one. Amhar knew that was a sham. That bitch, Bones, was just doing it so that she could ignore him.

But maybe... Maybe it wouldn't be a bad idea to start pulling in Potter's cronies. Maybe if he pressed hard enough, he'd squeeze some damaging admission out of one of them, something he could pin on Potter to take him down.

He reached for several summons forms, then frowned. The committee had called a temporary recess because Andrew Korwin had left Haven, saying he'd be back in a few days. That had been nearly a week ago. Korwin's secretary seemed to think he was ill. But he needed Korwin if he was to bring down any of Potter's people.

He filled out the forms anyway. He was tired of waiting around for the man. He'd restart the hearings without him.

“Stephanie! Get in here!” he shouted to his secretary.

He waited until he heard the sound of the door opening, then he thrust a wad of parchment at her. “See that these are served, and alert the other members of the committee. We're restarting the hearings on December tenth,” he said with a barely concealed growl.

Stephanie took the parchments and walked back out of the room.

Amhar admired her gently swaying hips until the door closed behind her. *A fine ass, he thought. Too bad she's such a prude. I wouldn't mind having a piece of that, if it weren't for her husband. Although a silencing charm, a quick, hard fuck and an Obliviate might not be amiss. The silly bitch would never know.* He shook his head. *No, that Auror of a husband of hers might notice the memory loss.*

Beyond the now closed door, Stephanie shivered and felt the need for a shower.

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### **Padfoot Manor, Harry's Study...**

Harry signed the Gringotts draft, then folded the parchment and sealed it using his family ring. Hedwig winged through the magically charmed window and landed in front of him.

“Hello, girl,” he murmured, stroking her soft feathers.

Hedwig nipped at his hand affectionately, nudging him to scratch her head.

“I don't know if I should be jealous or not,” Hermione said, looking up from her Arithmancy book and smiling. She'd always loved his owl, how could she not? Hedwig was beautiful, and obviously cared deeply for Harry. She was also convinced that Hedwig was far more intelligent than most owls.

“Don't be jealous, love. You don't see me taking Hedwig to bed. But she is special to me, I can't argue that,” he replied.

He carefully tied the letter to Hedwig's leg, then he looked squarely into her eyes. “Don't tire yourself out with this, it's a long trip. And do be careful.”

Hedwig bobbed her head twice and flew out the window.

Hermione looked at him inquisitively.

“I received a letter from Sheik Alim Hosary today,” he said conversationally.

"Oh? How are things in Egypt?"

"Hot," Harry replied with a wry grin.

Hermione looked at him, her eyes narrowing. He knew that look and knew he was in trouble.

"Er... Well, he writes hoping we're both doing well. He's managed to finally bring the Library staff back up to it's full size, although he admits that some of the new staff will need to be trained. He also says he's worried about the Blood Jihad."

Hermione marked her place, then closed her book and frowned. "Weren't they wiped out at the Library?"

"Only partly. According to the Sheik, the leaders of the organization were all captured in August, but most of the membership got away. Now he says they have a new leader. But rather than causing trouble, they seem to be dropping out of sight. He also mentioned talking to his Chinese counterpart, who mentioned something similar concerning one of the Chinese Magical Tongts."

"Is this something we should be worried about?" Hermione asked, putting her book to one side.

Harry reached down and kneaded his leg slowly. "I don't know. Maybe I should pass this information to Draco and Caleb. It can't hurt for them to know about it."

Hermione watched him massaging his leg. "Sounds like a good idea. Why don't you write a note and give it to Dobby to deliver? Then I think a nice hot soak in the bath is in order. It would do you good."

Harry was about to reply when a knock came from the door. "Come," he called.

Amelia opened the door and entered the room with a huge smile on her face.

"Amelia? What has you grinning like the kneazle that ate the niffler?" asked Hermione.

Crookshanks, who had been sunning himself on the windowsill, looked up for a moment. Not spotting a niffler, he returned to his nap. *Humans are so strange*, he thought.

As Harry waved her towards a chair, her smile slipped a little when she saw the crutch leaning against his desk.

"Oh, Harry, I'm sorry. I forgot that you were injured."

"Nonsense, Amelia. It was my own clumsiness that caused the injury. Besides, it will be gone by the day after tomorrow," Harry said, dismissing the topic as unimportant.

Amelia could tell from Hermione's expression that he was understating things, as usual.

"Well, here's a bit of good news to lighten the mood then," she said with a grin as she waved a piece of parchment. "This is a letter of thanks and praise from His Majesty. He also commands an audience with you and the other members of your group on December twentieth. He also extends an invitation to attend the Yule Celebration on the twenty-first at the British Embassy in New York."

Hermione grinned widely, practically bouncing in her seat, as Amelia passed the parchment to Harry.

*Madam Bones,*

*We would like to extend our personal note of congratulations to you and the soldiers for their superb performance today. Their courage and resourcefulness is an inspiration to myself and all of our people.*

*To know that another four thousand of our people have been freed from that tyranny is a blessing during this festive season. We can only pray that the war will be over soon and that we can return to our homes.*

*Duties permitting, we would like to meet with you and Mr. Potter and his Brotherhood on the twentieth of December at the British Embassy in New York. Following our audience, there will be an informal dinner and we invite you to join us at the Yule celebration on the twenty-first.*

*Respectfully,*

*Charles*

Harry paled while reading the note, then he passed it to Hermione with a trembling hand.

"Harry?" asked Amelia in alarm.

He looked up at her, as if startled. "I can't meet the King," he said in protest.

Hermione glanced up at her husband and frowned. "Why ever not?"

"What am I supposed to say to him? I don't know how to act when talking to the King! And a Yule celebration?" he stammered.

Hermione bit her tongue to prevent herself from replying. She realized that this was his upbringing talking. He truly didn't feel he was worthy of it. She leaned across his desk and took his hand in her own.

*Relax, my heart. We'll get through this,"* she sent him calmly.

Harry closed his eyes and breathed deeply a few times. After a tense minute, he opened his eyes and sighed. "Well, I guess we're going to New York before Christmas," he murmured. Then he winced. Hermione was already deep into the idea of organizing a shopping trip for new clothes. "I'll have Remus summon the others for a meeting tonight at dinner," he added, resigned to his fate.

Hermione looked up from the note she was re-reading and frowned at him. "You're not supposed to walk that far yet."

"I won't. I'll apparate," he replied smugly, knowing full well she couldn't argue with that.

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### **Melinda McKinney's Cottage, Haven (Dec 9th)...**

The bathroom was still a bit humid from the shower when Melinda McKinney stepped out of the room wrapped in a towel. Once in her bedroom, she shucked the towel, and not wanting to bother, cast a quick drying charm on her body, then another on her hair. Choosing her clothes for the day, she set about dressing.

She had just put on her shoes when Dilly appeared in the doorway of her bedroom.

"Your Mister Minister do be here to see you," Dilly said, her eyes bright.

"Thank you, Dilly. I'll be right out," she replied, smiling with pleasure.

"Dilly will be putting tea on for Melinda and her Mister Minister," the elf informed her.

"That would be lovely. Thank you."

When Dilly disappeared, Melinda grinned. It had taken weeks, and the eventual involvement of Dobby, to persuade Dilly to call her by her given name. The thought of being called Mistress still made her skin crawl. Once she had informed Dilly that they weren't just friends, but a family, the little creature had wept joyously and consented to calling her by her given name.

Standing, she straightened her slacks and tucked in her blouse, then eyed the work robe she'd set out for her shift later that afternoon. With a shrug, she left it on the bed. There was no need to wear it yet.

Leaving the bedroom, she followed the sound of voices and discovered Dilly and Arthur in the kitchen. Arthur had been seated at the table, served tea and cake, and was currently being chided by the elf for not eating enough or getting enough rest.

"Hello, Arthur. What brings you by? Ministry not keeping you busy enough?" Melinda asked, her eyes sparkling.

"According to Dilly, they're keeping me too busy," he said with a laugh. He stood and embraced her, holding her close.

"I'm afraid I have to agree with her," she murmured. "I don't see you nearly as often as I'd like." Standing on her toes, she brushed her lips across his. When he deepened the kiss, she sighed and leaned into him.

Dilly laughed happily and clapped her hands, causing the two humans to spring apart. Arthur glared at the creature for a moment, but Dilly simply smiled at him, then placed tea and cake on the table for Melinda.

"You will be calling Dilly if you be having a need, Melinda," the elf said. She beamed at them both, then vanished.

Arthur blinked for a moment, a bit surprised. "Melinda? You actually got her to call you by your given name?"

"It took some doing, but Dobby and I finally convinced her that family doesn't stand on formality," Melinda told him, taking the seat next to his.

"Family?" Arthur asked as he sat back down.

"Well, she is," she said, a bit defensively.

"I'm not disagreeing with you, I'm just a bit surprised, that's all. Most people commonly think of house elves as nothing more than servants."

"That's their loss. Dilly has a heart as big as Haven, and she's willing to help anyone in need. She felt I needed her, to my great good fortune, and she was right. And while the servant/mistress relationship bothered me a great deal, we managed to work around that problem. Being family means not being so formal with each other. Of course, it also means, in her eyes anyway, that she gets to boss me around. But then, she's always done that."

Arthur laughed, realizing just how true that was. Dilly bossed everyone around.

"As for most people," she continued in mock disdain, "when will you learn that I am no common witch?"

"That's not something I need reminding of," he said gently, brushing his hand across her cheek.

She leaned into his touch and smiled softly.

"I did come here for something specific, however," he continued, then nearly groaned when she leaned closer and kissed his neck. "If you keep that

up, I'll never get to it."

Moving away from him slightly, she smiled knowingly. "Oh, I think you'll get around to it eventually."

"Behave yourself, woman. This is serious," he said, his voice gruff.

Her eyes darkened with concern and she sat up straight. "What's wrong? Has something happened?"

"No, it's nothing like that. It's a serious matter, but it's nothing bad," he told her quickly, sorry to see the light in her eyes dim. "I need a date," he blurted out. Seeing her confusion, he muddled on as best he could, trying to make her understand. "I want to date you. In New York. Just before Christmas. You'll need a gown, of course, and time away from the hospital."

When he paused and looked at her hopefully, she could only shake her head in confusion.

"So, you want to date me, but only in New York, just before Christmas?"

"No! Well, yes, but..." He raked his hands through his hair and growled in frustration before trying again. "Several of us have been invited to New York by the King and the Prime Minister. They're holding a Yule celebration at the Embassy there, and they want to meet with us. I want to take you with me. We'll be gone for about three days. I'll only have a few official functions and you'll be able to join me in most of them."

"New York? For three days?" she repeated, her eyes wide. She'd have to talk to Healer August about getting the time off, but Sylvia was sure to agree, especially if she offered to work overtime until her departure.

"We'd be able to spend most of our time together. No interruptions, no children, no patients. And, for a few days, no war. I'll take care of the official paperwork. All you need to do is get the time off, and you'll need a couple of gowns; one for the formal dinner, another for the Yule celebration," he said. Taking her hand in his, he looked into her eyes. "I know this is a lot to think about, but please say you'll come, Melinda."

"I'll come," she said, simply.

"You can get the time off?"

"I'm sure Sylvia will grant me three days. I'll offer to work overtime until we leave."

He scowled. "You work too hard as it is."

"You're one to talk," she chided gently. Before he could speak, she placed a finger over his lips. "Don't, Arthur. I'll be fine. And who knows when we'll have a chance like this again? Finding time to be together is too rare for us to pass up this opportunity."

They spoke for awhile, making plans for their trip. But once Arthur had left, Melinda found herself with a problem. They were invited to a muggle celebration, and she had no idea what she was supposed to wear. Arthur mentioned gowns, but she was unaware of muggle fashions.

"Dilly?" she called, a bit hopefully.

The elf appeared with an arm load of magazines and she danced over to the table. "Dilly be knowing what you be asking for, Melinda, so Dilly did be stopping by Headlines and Beans. Mrs. Lachlan did be letting Dilly borrow these." With that, she dumped the magazines on the table and beamed at her.

With a laugh, Melinda hugged the elf and Dilly crowed with delight.

"I don't suppose you know anything about sewing, do you, Dilly?" she asked as she sorted through the pile on the table.

"Why would Dilly be sewing when she has magic?" the small creature asked, a bit puzzled.

Melinda paused for a moment, then groaned in disgust. "I bragged about not being a common witch and I was right. I'm the only witch who forgets she has a wand!"

When Dilly looked at her oddly, she simply shook her head. "Never mind. Help me go through these. I need to find two gowns."

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### **Sibiu, Transylvania in Romania (Dec 10th)...**

Dumbledore balled up The Paper and tossed into the air where it ignited in a flash of fire. In less than a second the paper was incinerated, leaving only pieces of ash floating gently in the air.

*That should be my name in the headlines, not Potter's!* he thought with a snarl. *Here I am, stuck in the middle of no where, training up a militia for hire when I should be using these men for my own purposes!*

Dumbledore stood and walked to the window of his tower. On the ramparts below he could see the men training and exercising. He opened his window and fired off a bludgeoning spell, which caught one man and flung him off the rampart.

Dumbledore ignored the cry from the man as he fell to his death. *Damn them! I tell them time and time again to be more wary, to be ready for an attack, and still they ignore me! Well, perhaps now they will pay attention,* he mused. Then he giggled to himself and danced a little jig around the room.



"Oh, I do hope you enjoy your Christmas, my boy. I've gone to a great deal of trouble with your gift this year, thought it may be late in getting to you. And while I'm sure you won't like, I'll find it exquisite!" he whispered.

He stopped dancing when a knock came at the door.

He walked back to his desk and sat down. Calming himself, he straightened his shoulders and shouted, "Come!"

The door opened and Nickolai entered, followed by his two goons.

"This is good training? Randomly killing one of my men?" Nickolai asked angrily.

"Your men have become lazy, Nickolai. I picked one as an example that they will learn from," Dumbledore replied stiffly, then he twisted slightly in his chair and suppressed the urge to giggle in front of the mobster wizard.

Nickolai looked at him thoughtfully for a moment then he nodded and smiled. "It is a good Soviet way of training, yes? Take one man and shoot him, that convinces the others to work harder."

Dumbledore returned Nickolai's grin, then he turned around in his chair, reaching for a bottle and two glasses. He placed the two glasses out in front of Nickolai on his desk and poured two shots.

"I'm glad you agree," Dumbledore said smoothly, then he picked up a glass and offered it to Nickolai.

The mobster arched an eyebrow and with a silky smile he reached for the un-offered glass still on the desk. Dumbledore blinked and his smile broadened. *Nickolai is a cagey bastard*, he thought. *It will take guile to rid myself of him.*

The two men tossed back their drinks, then Dumbledore stood and walked around the desk. "Come, Nickolai, let me show you around and show you what your men have learned."

"When do you think you'll be ready with them?"

"Just after New Years day, I'm sure," Dumbledore replied with a smile.

*Good. I have time still before I have to deal with the great Albus Dumbledore*, thought Nickolai.

*I doubt that you'll be able to, my friend*, Dumbledore said to himself. *These people never learn to control their thoughts around a legilimens.*

He waved Nickolai forward and together they left the small tower office, each plotting the downfall of the other.

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### **Wizengamot Investigative Committee...**

Amhar took his seat and glanced sourly at the empty spot where Andrew Korwin should have been. Korwin had been missing for nearly two weeks now and it was seriously annoying Amhar. After all, he hadn't paid the man to vanish on him like this.

He then glanced down at the man sitting at the witness table and scowled. This was going to get messy today, he was sure of it.

He lifted a sheet of parchment and was about to speak when the door opened and Andrew Korwin walked in and took his regular chair. The man definitely wasn't looking well. He had a thin fringe of sweat along his brow and his skin color bordered on white.

"Councilor Korwin," Amhar said smoothly, looking at the man. "I think I speak for all of us in the committee when I say we're pleased to see you back. But are you sure you are well enough to attend these proceedings?"

Korwin leaned forward slightly. "Thank you for your concern, but I can assure you that my healer has said I'm fit to return to my duties," he replied in a shaky voice.

Amhar nodded. He could clearly see that the man was still recovering from an illness. Although he didn't normally care about the health of his colleagues, he found himself pleased by Korwin's obvious lack of health. Since the man's disappearance, a tight knot of worry had begun to form in his chest. With his return, that worry melted away.

He turned back the witness table and nearly grimaced in revulsion. "State your name and occupation for the record," he said brusquely.

"Remus John Lupin. I'm Lord Potter's chief of staff and I also function as a financial adviser to Lord Potter," Remus said calmly.

"Ah, yes, you're the one who oversaw the construction of Haven, did you not?" asked one of the neutrals.

"Yes, sir, that is correct."

"And when did the construction of Haven begin, Mr. Lupin?"

"In early December of last year, sir. I made several large land purchases around the Manor and contracted a local construction company to erect the housing units."

Amhar leaned forward. "Tell me, Mr. Lupin, did you at any time council Lord Potter to warn the Ministry about the upcoming attack?"

“No, sir, I did not.”

“Why ever not?” asked one of the neutrals in surprise.

Remus looked at her for a moment then shrugged. “Because it would have accomplished nothing. Minister Fudge was more interested in maintaining his own power and prestige than he was in protecting the common wizard and witch. Besides, we had several prophecies from unimpeachable sources that told us that any warning we gave would not have changed the outcome.”

“Yes, we've heard about these prophecies,” murmured Amhar sourly. He had tried to find out more information and had run into the stonewall of the Official Secrets Act.

Remus sat placidly in his chair. He knew Amhar was annoyed by the fact that he couldn't find out more about the prophecies, but it wouldn't do for him to rub his nose in it.

“Mr. Lupin, how much did Lord Potter spend on constructing Haven, and does he honestly expect the Government to pay him back?” asked Lillias McFerron, one of the committee's neutral members.

Remus looked startled and he leaned forward over the table he sat behind. “Councilor, the construction of Haven, including the purchases of lands and the building of the town, cost Lord Potter between one hundred twenty and one hundred thirty million galleons. I do not have the exact figures with me.

“As to any sort of payback, Lord Potter has never asked for any and would be appalled by the very idea. He neither expects, nor wants, the Ministry to pay him back for his expenses. After the war, Haven will become a new Irish wizarding town and Lord Potter will be the sole landlord. For the duration of the war, however, people will continue to live here at no cost.”

Councilor McFerron made a few notes, pleased with Lupin's answers, before looking up once more to meet his gaze. “And what of the monies he has given to the Ministry?”

“Those are loans, Councilor. Had he not funded the Ministry, it would have been unable to function. I helped negotiate those loans myself. They are long term, with modest interest rates, and need not start the pay back schedule until after the successful conclusion to the war.

“As an additional point, I'll add that it was on Lord Potter's word that the Ministry was able to secure additional funding from Gringotts,” Remus added as an afterthought.

“Just how is it that Lord Potter has access to his wealth, when all the rest of us became paupers when the country fell?” demanded Amhar icily. He hated dealing with this dark animal.

“Last Christmas season, Lord Potter transferred the bulk of his wealth, and that of several others, to the Stonewall Lane branch of Gringotts. He warned Ragnok of what was coming and, unlike our Ministry, Gringotts heeded his advice. If you recall, Councilor, Gringotts sent out a notice to all their account holders suggesting that relocation to a branch off shore would be a prudent move. From what Ragnok was willing to tell me when I spoke to him last, less than one percent of the account holders moved their assets.”

“Potter was willing to tell Gringotts, but he wasn't willing to tell the Ministry!” exclaimed Amhar.

Remus smiled and said nothing for a moment.

“Councilor, you are aware that the Ministry of Magic is one of Gringotts largest account holders? While I cannot speak for Gringotts officially, there is no doubt in my mind that they received the same notice from Gringotts that everyone did, warning them of upcoming unrest. One of Harry's reasons for warning Gringotts was that he knew they would warn the government. He knew Minister Fudge would ignore any warning he might have tried to give personally,” Remus replied reasonably.

Amhar frowned. There was nothing he could do about the Gringotts connection. It irked him because he did remember receiving a notice from the bank, which he tossed in his fireplace. At the time he thought it was quite presumptuous of those nasty Goblins to offer advice on how he should handle his money.

“Lord Potter inherited quite a large estate from the Black Family, including controlling interest in a number of companies. What has he done with most of that?” Amhar asked, trying a different approach.

“If you are referring to companies like Darke Dirks and Potions, Lord Potter divested the Black Estate of most of its holdings as soon as he was able to. In one case, he kept the company, but instituted new management and turned the direction of the company around entirely. BMR Security has been renamed to BP Security, purging the Malfoy and Rookwood interests, and is now one of the largest Wizarding security firms on the continent, offering armed guards, warding and protective services. The days of it being a place to hire hit wizards are long gone.”

Amhar scowled, his calm composure started to crack. “You seem to have an answer for everything, werewolf!” he snapped.

“Mr. Chairman! I protest this unseemly behavior!” protested Trenton Largo. “Mr. Lupin has been shown to be free of his disease. As you recall, you even had Healer August in here to testify to that effect.”

It was clear from Largo's tone that he felt this line of questioning, as well as the questioning of Healer August, was a waste of time.

Amhar turned to glare at Largo. “I am trying, *Councilor*, to ascertain if Mr. Lupin is indeed still a dark creature. He refuses to explain how he was cured. I have spoken with the Healers at St. Patrick's and they assure me that there is no cure! So how did he do it? Some dark ritual, perhaps?”

“Councilor,” Remus said mildly, “while the details of my cure are covered by the Official Secrets Act, I can assure you, no dark rites were performed.”

Amhar’s head whipped around. “You will answer my questions when I put them to you *Mr. Lupin*,” he sneered, “and not until then. In the meantime, hold your tongue, or I will hold you in contempt.”

Remus sat stiffly for a moment, then nodded. He was seriously considering walking out, even though he knew it would forever cause problems between Harry and the Wizengamot if he did. *The fool’s attitude needed serious readjusting*, he thought angrily.

“I will remind you, Mr. Lupin, you are under oath here. Now then, did you engage in dark magic in order to cure your Lycanthropy?” Amhar asked with a sneer.

Trenton Largo shot to his feet and banged his fist on his desk, causing everyone to jump. “This is madness and I protest. Mr. Lupin, I excuse you from further testimony. Mr Chairman, need I remind you of the fact that, under Article Sixteen of the Official Secrets Act, I can levy a charge of treason upon you for even attempting to force Mr. Lupin to answer that question?”

Largo was breathing heavily and he was white with anger. He glared at Amhar and Amhar knew he had pushed too far today. He couldn’t risk his position yet.

“The witness is excused,” he growled. “The committee is recessed for now.”

Remus stood and nodded at Largo who shot him a weak smile and shrugged. Remus shook his head and walked out the door. As he closed the door behind him, he could clearly hear the sounds of shouting. Coeur de Lion and Largo were yelling at each other.

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### **Potter’s Portals, Factory Opening, Haven (Dec 15th)...**

Harry and Hermione had finished the tour Charlie had given them, and the three now stood up on a small stage with Amelia, Brogan Mallory and Ragnok in front of a crowd amassed for the dedication and opening of the factory.

Harry blinked in surprise when he saw the size of the crowd. *There has to be over a thousand people standing here waiting for a factory opening*, he mused.

“*Employees and family, my love. You have a lot of people working for you*,” Hermione sent, a hint of amusement in her tone.

“*I have people working for me?*”

“*Of course you do. Don’t you remember your security company? Or any of other companies you have an interest in?*”

“*Yes... But those are companies my parents and grandparents invested in. They really belong to the Potter and Black estates.*”

“*That’s true, but Potter’s Portals will also be part of the estate our children and grandchildren inherit. Does it really make a difference, since you own those estates?*”

“*Well no, not when you put it that way. I just never really thought of it before. Oh, here comes Minister Mallory*,” he said with a mental snort.

“*Be nice, love. He really isn’t like Fudge.*”

“*I know, I just can’t help it. I don’t trust politicians.*”

“*And what about Amelia? You don’t trust her?*”

“*Wench! I hate it when you use logic on me.*” he mentally growled back at her. He could feel her laughing via their bond.

Mallory stepped up to the podium and gave a short speech, in which he explained how pleased and happy the Irish Ministry was to welcome the opening of Potter’s Portals. Then Mallory turned and addressed Ragnok, welcoming him as an equal.

Ragnok blinked in surprise, then he bowed to the Irish Minister.

One by one Harry watched as dignitaries gave their speeches. He was thankful that he wasn’t one of them. He had, over Hermione’s protests, passed that responsibility to Charlie Weasley.

Finally, Charlie stepped up to the podium. “Employees and families, honored guests and members of the press, welcome to the grand opening of Potter’s Portals. What you see today is the culmination of a dream of one person. Harry Potter designed and built the first set of portals. In doing so, he opened up a whole new way of transportation for us. Today you see the heavy freight factory. In the future, however, Potter’s Portals will be as common as the floo, but infinitely more comfortable.

“So without further ado, I declare this factory open!” Charlie said, to the resounding roar of approval from the crowd.

Someone inside the plant activated a charm and a whistle sounded. The doors of the plant opened and the employees entered the building, followed by their families.

Harry and Hermione stood and followed Charlie into the factory. No one was going to work today, of course. Instead, they had set up a huge buffet in the cafeteria area.

Harry walked over to talk to Ragnok. "It is good to see you again. How is Leenar?" he asked the goblin.

Ragnok smiled toothlessly. "She is well, Mr. Potter. She had so wished to attend today. At it is, I was honored to receive your invitation. We were very surprised and quite pleased when you sent word that you had solved the live transport problem."

Harry smiled, trying to fight the urge to squirm under the praise. "I will tell Mr. Weasley to expect to hear from you. He'll arrange tours of the plant for whomever you want, including your lovely Leenar. The live transport problem was solved by redesigning the control pedestal. It was Hermione that pointed out where the problem lay. From there, a fix was easy."

Ragnok nodded knowingly. He had received the reports sent to him by the rune masters Charlie had hired. Part of the partnership included Harry sharing information with the Goblins at Gringotts. It was something Harry and Hermione had pushed for, and was a measure of equality that impressed Ragnok more than anything else about the Potters.

Ragnok turned to Charlie. "Mr. Weasley, can you tell me when you expect the first portals to be built?"

Charlie ran a hand nervously through his hair and thought for a moment. When Remus had given him the job, he had immersed himself into the concept of the portals and what was involved in making them. "Well, Director, I expect we'll have some ready by the end of the month. But this is a new facility, building a brand new device. It would be an error on my part if I didn't expect some problems in the beginning," he said cautiously.

Ragnok nodded appreciatively. "Excellent. We are already ramping up for distribution to our branches world wide. Would it be safe to say you'll be ready to start training operators next month, then?"

"Oh, most assuredly. I was planning on holding back two units for training purposes," he replied.

Harry grinned at Charlie. The change in the man was quite noticeable. Being duped like he was by Dumbledore had left him with serious self confidence issues. In working to build the shelters for Haven, then in being appointed the manager for the plant, his confidence had come roaring back.

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### **Wizengamot Investigative Committee...**

Amhar watched the committee's latest witness take her seat with no small amount of glee. Considering what was happening back home, he had been downright ecstatic when he'd discovered that the former Mrs. Malfoy was now living at Potter's mansion.

Amhar waited until Narcissa was seated, then he glanced around to make sure that every one of the councilors were present. He had prepped Korwin before today's session so that Korwin would know what to say and what not to say.

"Now then, Mrs. Malfoy..."

"Excuse me, Councilor. My name is Miss Black," Narcissa said, overriding Amhar.

He glanced sourly at her. "Very well, then. Let the record show the witness is claiming an alias of Narcissa Black."

"Mr. Chairman," Narcissa said, coldly, "I am not claiming any alias. My name is Narcissa Black. The head of the Black family officially approved of my divorce and of the adoption of my son, Draco."

"We have no record of your divorce here, Madam. We'll just have to assume you are telling us the truth," Amhar said snidely.

Narcissa's eyes narrowed and she stared up at Amhar for a moment. "Of course, Mr. Chairman. I know you are aware of my relationship with Lucius Malfoy. After all, it was you who gave us those marvelous crystal decanters and toasted Lucius and myself at our wedding, wasn't it? In fact, you called Lucius your 'oldest and dearest friend', if I remember correctly."

Amhar gazed down at Narcissa, his expression calculating. She gazed back at him, unblinkingly.

"Miss Black, might it be safe to assume that you have copies of your divorce decree in your possession back at the manor house?" asked Trenton Largo. Largo sounded as though he were struggling to hide his amusement. After all, it wasn't often the committee had a witness who could so easily put Amhar in his place.

"I do, Councilor. If you like, I can see to it that a copy of the decree is sent over to the committee later today," Narcissa replied.

"Madam, this is getting far afield of what we planned to discussing. When was the last time you heard from your husband?" Korwin asked.

Narcissa turned to look at Korwin and he quailed under her gaze. "I have not heard from my ex-husband since before he was captured in that idiotic raid on the Ministry. I did not attend his hearing, nor did I visit him in Azkaban. In fact, I understand he has a price on my head of ten thousand galleons," she replied, her tone making it clear that the such a small amount was an insult to her.

"You've not heard from him in over a year and he's put a death warrant out on you?" asked Lilius McFerson in surprise.

"Yes, Councilor. He has death warrants out on both myself and my son at this point."

McFerron turned to Amhar. "Mr. Chairman, I don't understand. Did you not tell us that the witness was in contact with her husband only recently?"

"So my sources informed me, Councilor McFerron. Even if they are wrong, don't you find it suspicious that someone so closely related to the Malfoy line is involved, however indirectly, with the running of Haven and the war effort?" he replied smoothly.

McFerron leaned back on her chair and nodded thoughtfully.

Amhar smiled at the neutral Councilor, then turned back to Narcissa. "I understand, Madam, that you currently reside at Potter's manor house."

"Yes. Lord Potter invited me to stay up at the manor so I could be close to my son and daughter-in-law."

"And what do you do up there all day, Madam?" Amhar asked.

Narcissa sat for a moment. "For the most part, I study, Councilor. With the help of Lord Potter, I have been accepted as a Healer apprentice at the hospital. I've also been instructing both Lord and Lady Potter. It is common knowledge that neither of them grew up exposed to our ways."

"Yes, Lady Potter is muggle born. She wouldn't know of our traditions," Amhar said with a sneer.

"Lady Potter is not muggle born, Councilor. It is true that she lacks knowledge of our ways, but I can assure you, she is not muggle born."

"Madam, Lady Potter's parents are not on the roles of pure bloods in any Wizarding Ministry we've been able to check. Point of fact, Lady Potter's parents, according to her Hogwarts records, are muggles. Now how do you suppose a pair of muggles suddenly became magical?" Amhar asked, hoping something would slip out.

Narcissa looked up at Amhar, her expression completely innocent. "I don't know how it happened, Mr. Chairman. I only know that it did and the process is covered under the Secrets Act. For all I know, they used magic," she replied with an impish smile.

Trenton Largo barked out a laugh before he could contain it. He bent over and started to cough, while Lilius McFerron smiled at Narcissa. This witness was proving to be more entertaining than the others.

Amhar's face flushed with rage. He surged to his feet. "Perhaps it happened because you instructed them in a dark ritual, Madam!"

Narcissa looked up at Amhar as if he were some sort of bug that needed to be squished.

"I'm waiting for your answer, Madam," Amhar said icily.

"And I'm waiting for your apology, Mr. Chairman. I know full well what rules of behavior you can operate under and you have slandered me, sir. If I do not hear your apology, I am within my rights to take several actions against you. Or I can place the matter in the hands of my family head. I'm sure Lord Potter-Black would take a dim view of your accusations," she replied. Her blue eyes widened in amazement as an idea struck her. "He might even challenge you to duel, sir," she said, her expression one of mock horror at the very idea.

Several of the committee members turned to stare at Amhar in consternation. He had stepped over a line, again, and this time it might cost him more than just his ego.

Amhar struggled to get his anger in check. "I apologize, Madam. I was out of line with my comments. Now, to get back to the matters at hand. I understand that..."

Narcissa smiled smugly. Although she would never admit it to anyone, she had enjoyed putting the little shit in his place.

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## **Padfoot Manor...**

Narcissa walked into the grand foyer of the manor house, and closing the door behind her, breathed a sigh of relief.

An elf appeared a moment later, and helped her out of her cloak. She walked tiredly into the sitting room where she found Harry, Hermione, the Grangers and Draco. All were relaxing from the day. Harry and Draco seemed to be involved in some sort of game that required the levitation of stones over a ghostly board.

She sat in an arm chair and kicked off her shoes. A house elf appeared next to her chair and offered her a cup of tea, which she gratefully accepted. Harry glanced over at her and grinned, then turned back to glare angrily at Draco when the game buzzed loudly and half of his stones vanished from the board.

"Bad day?" asked Emma.

Narcissa closed her eyes briefly and nodded. "You have no idea. I know Amhar Coeur de Lion from way back and he's even more single minded now that he has an objective in mind. I rightly expect you two to be called next," she said, indicating Dan and Emma.

Harry frowned and he glanced at Draco, who nodded and waved his wand, canceling the game.

"Us? What would he want to talk to us about?" asked Dan.

Harry stood and walked over to stand behind Dan's chair. "It's me he wants, isn't it?"

Narcissa nodded. "Yes, Harry, it is. Right now he thinks that the Grangers may have become magical because of some dark ritual. But ultimately, he's looking to take you down, even if it means attacking those around you. He will call each of us, one by one, hoping that one of us will make a mistake and say something he can use against you.

"He accused me of being dark, of being in touch with Lucius, and of aiding you in dark rituals. I finally demanded an apology, and told him that if I did not receive one, I would leave the issue of my besmirched honor in the hands of my head of house, who just might challenge him to a duel."

Harry looked stunned. "You mean I could have challenged him to a duel and put him out of our misery? Why didn't anyone tell me this sooner?"

Hermione winced slightly. "You can't challenge him to a duel just because he annoys you, Harry. There are strict rules, which must be observed, before you can challenge someone like that. Besides, I would really prefer that you don't spend the rest of your life moving from one duel to another. I don't think my nerves could handle it."

"Hermione's right, Harry. You really don't have grounds to challenge him," Narcissa said with a laugh. "Although I do admit it would be one duel I would enjoy watching. I have known Amhar for twenty years now. He prides himself for his prowess on the dueling stage."

"Alright, so I can't duel him, but what are we going to do about him? Quite frankly, I don't like him accusing any part of my family of being dark. He's getting out of hand and it's beginning to annoy me. He all but refused to believe Remus was cured the other day," he said, scowling fiercely.

"Harry, this is part of what one faces in politics. I know you don't like hearing it, but it's something you need to grow accustomed to. In the meantime, the committee will be adjourning in a day or two for the holiday recess and we won't hear from them until after the holidays. As hard as Coeur de Lion pushes, there really is nothing he can find to use against you, or any of us, for that matter.

"His biggest complaint, the pure blood issue, won't wash here in Ireland. And it certainly won't wash under Amelia's administration," explained Narcissa.

Harry walked over to where Hermione was stretched out on a love seat. She pulled her legs off the cushions so he could sit, then she extended her feet over his lap. Almost instinctively he started to rub her feet while he thought about what Narcissa had told him.

Hermione snuggled a little deeper onto the couch and purred slightly.

Harry glanced at her, smiling for a moment, then turned back to Narcissa. "Alright, we have to live with it for now. But I'll tell you all, my days of putting up with bullying politicians is over. He if pushes me to far, I'm going to push back...and he won't like the results," he growled.

"If it comes to that, mate, we'll all help you push back," Draco said, echoing the thoughts of the others in the room.

Harry looked up at Draco, surprised by his icy tone. He was about to say something when the doors burst open and Neville ran into the room, looking pale.

"Hide me!" he moaned.

"What's wrong, Neville?" asked Draco, alarmed.

Neville opened his mouth to say something when they all heard a voice echoing through the manor.

"NEVILLE LONGBOTTOM, YOU STOP RUNNING FROM ME THIS INSTANT!"

Everyone winced and glanced at Neville in sympathy. Neville, however, was too busy cowering behind the love seat where Harry and Hermione sat to notice.

Ginny came tearing into the room, her chest heaving. In one hand she held a black shiny piece of cloth, in the other hand, her wand.

"Neville, you're not running away from me any more! I want answers!" she said, raising her wand.

Harry stood, knocking Hermione's feet to the floor as he blocked Ginny's wand. He shot her an apologetic look before turning to face Ginny once more.

"Put your wand down. You're not going to hex Neville," Harry said, trying hard not to smile.

"Get out of my way, Harry," she said between gritted teeth.

Harry frowned and his wrist twitched. He still hadn't mastered gesture-less casting, but he was coming closer. Ginny's arms snapped to her sides and she glared at Harry, struggling against the full body bind.

"Now, what in the name of Merlin is going on with you two?" Harry asked.

"I found this! In his closet!" Ginny snapped angrily. She couldn't move her arms, but her wrists and neck were free to move. She shook the black cloth.

Draco took it from her hand and held it up. It was a sheer black teddy. His eyes widened as he examined the skimpy outfit.

Dan Granger began to laugh, but most of the women in the room eyed Neville as if they were planning on helping Ginny.

Draco passed the outfit to Harry, who took it gingerly. He looked inside the garment and his expression turned mirthful.

"Say Ginny, did you notice the little tag on the inside of this?" Harry asked.

Ginny turned away from Neville and frowned at him.

He smirked and canceled the binding on her before handing her the negligee.

She looked at the tag, then blushed to the tips of her ears. Closing her eyes for a moment, she straightened her shoulders. With a deep breath, she opened her eyes and walked around the love seat to kneel down to her husband. "Nev, I'm sorry," she whispered.

Neville peered at her. "We really need to talk about your temper, Ginny. You didn't give me time to even explain," he told her softly. In the quiet room, his words were loud enough for all to hear.

"I know," she said, hanging her head.

"You know," Dan said innocently, "muggles have something called anger management. Maybe we can get Ginny into one of their classes."

Everyone but the Longbottoms spun around the glare at him, and he held up his hands as if to ward off a blow.

"It was just a suggestion," he protested.

Neville took Ginny's hand and stood, then he helped her to her feet. He started to lead her out of the room, but Harry stopped him.

"Go easy with her, mate. She's still reacting to the assault," he said, quietly.

Ginny smiled wanly at Harry and Neville nodded. "We'll be fine," he said.

"I know you will, both of you," Harry said. "Have the elves serve you dinner in your room tonight."

Neville's eyes lit up at the suggestion and he led his wife from the room. Harry turned to sit back down, but Hermione held his spot hostage.

"Alright, Potter, what was on the tag?" she asked. It was a question everyone wanted to ask.

He chuckled. "It seems Ginny was snooping for Christmas gifts. The outfit was for her, according to the tag. But all she saw was a skimpy, sexy outfit and her temper did the rest. Judging from her reaction, she didn't know about the name tag. I hope Neville got her more than that, though. Heck, even I know that kind of gift better not be the only one a man gives his wife."

Dan laughed loudly. "That kind of present is more for the husband than it is for the wife. The only worse gift you can give is a vacuum."

"No wonder she was mad at him," Hermione murmured.

Emma and Narcissa nodded in agreement. Hermione glanced at Harry and her eyes narrowed speculatively.

"*You didn't*," she sent him icily.

"*Well, not as the only gift*," he sent back, looking sheepish. "*Terry found the catalog, and I think we all bought at least one thing from it.*"

Hermione rolled her eyes and huffed at him. She also refused to move her feet from the love seat.

"*Can I help it if I like to see you wear something sexy? Besides, it is not the only thing I bought you, I promise*," he sent her.

"*We'll see*," she replied. She tried hard not to let her amusement leak through their bond, but knew she failed. Reluctantly she removed her feet from the cushion and let him sit back down. Once he'd gotten comfortable, she placed her feet back in his lap. After all, a foot rub was important, wasn't it?

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### **Padfoot Manor (Dec 19th)...**

Harry checked his watch one last time, then he rolled up the map and placed it in the small case along with several other items he was bringing with him.

"Dobby?"

Dobby appeared next to Harry a moment later. "Yous called, Master Harry?"

"Yes, Dobby. Would you ask everyone to assemble down in the foyer in ten minutes?"

Dobby nodded and vanished with a small pop.

Harry stood and looked around the office one last time. He was dressed in his finest muggle suit, which Hermione had insisted he buy back during the summer after fifth year. He leaned slightly on his staff. The two days off his feet had helped him a lot. The addition of the healing bath salts sent to the manor by the American healer, Sam, had also helped. The note included with the salts had said that they would help to reduce the everyday stress on his leg, and they did just that.

He made a mental note to find Sam a nice gift while in New York. He had several places to visit while there and some additional gifts to purchase.

He walked out of his study and down the stairs to the foyer, as the others began to arrive. He nodded approvingly, noting that everyone, even Susan, who was now noticeably pregnant, was dressed in muggle style clothing. House elves popped in with their luggage.

"Everyone clear on our story? If asked by a muggle, we work for Department M. His Majesty and the Prime Minister will know the truth about us, and so will several others. If you don't know the person, just assume they're muggles and keep to your cover story."

Harry pulled a long cord out of his pocket. Holding on to one end, he passed the rest to Hermione. "Make sure you have a hold on the portkey," he told them.

Remus grinned. "Next time we do this, we should be able to use your portals, Harry."

"You won't hear me complain. Anything is better than a portkey. Except maybe the floo," he murmured, flashing the older man a grin.

He shrunk his staff and holstered it, then laid a hand on the trunk he and Hermione were using. "Everyone ready? Got your passports?"

Everyone nodded. He looked up the stairs and spotted Narcissa, who had decided not to join them.

"You know how to get in touch with us should you need us?" he asked.

She nodded. "Safe journey, my lord," she said with an impish smile and a slight cutesy.

In a very un-lordish action, he stuck his tongue out at her. As the sound of her laughter rang through the foyer, the portkey activated and they vanished.

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## Hogwarts Castle...

The Dark Lord looked up from his scroll and scowled. Lucius had just entered the room and he rarely came to the castle except on his assigned days to report. *He must have something of interest for me*, mused Voldemort.

"Lucius!" he shouted. "Get over here!" He then handed the scroll to an underling. "Tell Mulciber I approve," he said.

The underling bowed and hurried from the room with the scroll in his hand.

"What news do you bring, Lucius?"

The blond bowed low. "I am uncertain, my lord, but I felt it worthy to come tell you about the latest report from our spy in Haven."

Voldemort nodded. Their spy was turning out to be more valuable than they had anticipated. He would have to think of a suitable reward for the child. "What news does she send?"

Lucius unfolded a parchment. "She reports that many of the senior members the Ministry, along with Potter and his companions, have left Haven for several days. She saw travel plans that placed them in New York City for the next few days."

"NEW YORK!" roared Voldemort. With a scowl, he summoned another servant. "Send an owl immediately to that bitch, Murphy. Tell her I want the attack postponed for at least ten days!" he snapped.

Lucius stepped back in alarm.

"Oh, do not worry, Lucius. Your warning came just at the right time. I had plans, you see. But if Potter is in New York, I need to delay them, for now."

Lucius breathed a sigh of relief.

"We must think of an adequate reward for Miss Joyner. Her work for us cannot go unrewarded, Lucius," Voldemort said.

"I shall give the matter my full consideration, my lord," he replied.

"What other news have you for me today?"

"Through our other sources we have confirmed that Potter is meeting with the King. I explored the possibility of trying to get an assassin into the Embassy, but concluded it would be too heavily guarded. And since Potter isn't using muggle transportation, there's no chance of taking down his plane," Lucius reported smoothly.

"Of course he's not using muggle transportation! He's a wizard! Leave the assassination attempts to me from here on, Lucius. I have the matter well in hand," Voldemort said with a scowl.

"It will be as you say, my lord."

"Well? Anything else?"



Yes, my lord. The unrest in the Manchester area has been put down. Also, I've been concerned about the lack of manpower. I've begun a program in our muggle camps that should result in an increase in the number of Inferi we have at our disposal."

The Dark Lord's interest was peaked by the news. "Yes, more Inferi would be useful. It's a shame we can't send them directly against Haven, but it would take too long and would be too difficult to move them all," Voldemort mused.

Lucius nodded. He'd had this conversation already with some of his lieutenants. Inferi were far too stupid to attack without direction. They could be set up to guard an area, but that was about all.

"Excellent, Lucius. Is there anything further?"

"No, my lord."

Voldemort nodded and made a dismissing gesture with one hand.

Lucius bowed and backed away from his throne before turning around to leave the Great Hall.

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### **JFK International Terminal, Arrivals Area...**

Hermione helped Harry to his feet. He was really starting to hate portkeys!

*"Did you hurt your leg?"* she asked him.

*"No. This time I got lucky,"* he replied, foolishly pleased to have survived the trip without further injury. Then his eyes narrowed as he watched a young woman in a business suit approach Dan and Remus.

"Excuse me, Mr. Potter?" she asked.

She was tall, blond and very attractive. Her skirt was slitted up one side to show a fair amount of thigh. Harry chuckled mentally when he noticed his father-in-law checking out the blond.

*"Look at your father,"* he sent to Hermione, amused.

She glanced at her dad.

*"Oh, he wouldn't,"* she growled mentally. *"I ought to tell Mum."*

*"Don't worry about it, love. He's windowshopping, not buying,"* he replied. He ignored her quiet snort of disgust.

Dan and Remus exchanged amused glances. Then, as one, they pointed a finger at Harry. The young woman blinked in surprise and she ran an appraising eye over his form as she approached him.

He filled his expensive suit impressively, according to Hermione. Apparently she wasn't the only one who thought so.

"Mr. Potter?" she asked, now uncertain. She couldn't be picking up a party led by a teenager, could she?

"That's right," Harry replied warily. He didn't like the hungry look this woman was giving him.

Tonks shot Hermione an amused glance and Hermione slipped her arm around Harry's possessively.

*"Don't you find her pretty?"* she asked him teasingly.

Harry had a flash of her hexing his bits off and he smiled at the woman.

*"Do I look stupid? Of course I don't find her attractive. She's a cow. There, does that make you feel better? If not, I can give her horns...and maybe a tail,"* he told her, his amusement obvious. Then he sent her a mental image that made her catch her breath and lean a little closer to him. His expression turned smug.

The woman smiled smoothly. "I'm Carolyn Masters from the U.S. State Department. I'm here to expedite your passage through customs and see that you get to your hotel safely. I've been briefed by our Department of Magic."

"Alright," Harry replied. "Show us the way."

"If I can have everyone's passport, please?" she asked.

Everyone passed their passports forward until she held all twelve. She was surprised to find that they were all diplomatic passports. That would make life a lot easier.

Masters quickly walked them through one of the customs gates, where she displayed all of the passports, along with her own identification card. The customs agent examined her ID, then waved her and her party through and out into the main terminal. Masters then led them to a group of limousines that waited at the curb. Once everyone was sorted into their cars, she joined Harry in the lead limo and gave him the group's passports.

Your government has asked that we smooth things over and make your arrival easier. There has been a few minor changes to your schedule, or so I've been told. The limos will be at your hotel at four tomorrow afternoon to pick up you and your party, Mr. Potter. They will take you to the Embassy for your meeting.

"In the meantime, I've taken the liberty of reserving a private dining room for your party tonight at Club 21 at eight o'clock," Masters said. "You'll have a few hours at the hotel to relax and change into something comfortable."

*"I'm sure she wants to see you in something comfortable,"* Hermione said, a bit of an edge to her tone.

Harry nodded at Masters and tried to ignore Hermione's comment. "I'm sure that will be fine, Ms. Masters," he replied. Looking out the back window, he was surprised to see the three limos pull away from the curb with two other cars in pursuit.

Masters noticed his look and she reached over and patted his knee, ignoring Hermione's frown. "Don't be concerned, Mr. Potter," she said. "That's just the Department of Magic security detail assigned to your party. Our D.O.M. and your M.O.M. have developed intelligence that suggests there may be problems with this meeting."

Harry frowned and turned to Draco. "Why didn't you tell me about this?" he asked. "I would have put this meeting off if there was a problem!"

Draco shrugged. "I'm sorry, Harry. The simple truth is, we never had enough information to say whether there was a problem or not. It's just a vague rumor, that's all. When I explained that to Amelia, she decided to inform the Yanks anyway."

Harry turned back to Masters. "You've been briefed by your Department of Magic, I take it?" he asked.

Masters nodded. She was confused why Harry was angry at the pale blond man and wondered what the big hoopla was about a bunch of teenagers. She was willing to admitted, privately anyway, that Mr. Potter was quite a dish, and his eyes were out of this world.

Harry flexed his wrist and his staff snapped into his hand, expanding to normal size. Then the crystal end cap flared for a moment.

Hermione, Draco and Luna checked their holsters and made sure their wands were easily accessible.

Masters' eyed widened and she swallowed nervously. Her charges looked less like a group of harmless teenagers now and she wondered just how dangerous they were.

Harry smiled briefly at her, then turned his attention to the scenery outside the window. The last time they had been to New York, they hadn't left Manhattan island. He was busy looking out the window when he heard, quiet clearly, a growl from Hermione over their bond.

*"Hermione? Just what is the problem? I get that you don't like Ms. Masters, I just don't understand why."*

*"She's flirting with you, Harry! And now she's staring at you. The nerve of her!"* she snarled mentally.

Harry chuckled and looked back to his wife. He reached out and laced his fingers in hers.

*"You have nothing to worry about, love. You never will."*

*"I know, but that's not the point. If she's as informed as she appears, she knows you're married and I don't like the idea of her flirting with you. And using that American accent of hers? I heard some of the girls in our company saying they thought the American accent was dead sexy."*

He looked at her and rolled his eyes, his exasperation with her obvious. *"I can't believe you're jealous!"*

*"I most certainly am not!"* she sent back in protest.

Bypassing their bond, Harry reached out and touched her aura with his. He sent a small wave of remembered pleasure rushing through the connection.

Hermione's eyelids fluttered and her breath hitched in sharply. She leaned against Harry and tried to pretend nothing was happening to her, but they both knew better.

*"Now do you understand? You will never have reason to be jealous, my heart,"* he sent her softly. Then he turned and looked at Ms. Masters who was looking at them both a bit warily. "Must be Portkey lag," he said with a smile.

Luna barked a laugh and Draco looked out the window, pretending not to snicker. Hermione closed her eyes and hugged Harry's arm in hers.

*"Portkey lag?"* she sent. *"You are truly evil, Mr. Potter and I love you for it. In fact, I can't wait to get you into our hotel room."*

*"Then I hope it's not a long ride,"* he sent.

*"Me too."*

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### **The Ritz-Carlton Hotel, New York City (Dec 20th)...**

Harry rolled out of the bed and looked around sleepily. It took him a moment to orient himself before he reached over and turned off the alarm on the bedside clock. The State Department representative had checked them into one of the fanciest and most expensive hotels in Manhattan. The fact

that they were staying on floors reserved for wealthy wizard clients made it all the more special, as the suites were a mix of wizard and muggle technology.

As it was still early, he thought a shower might help wake him up. His mind wandering a bit, he walked towards the bathroom.

Hermione had stumbled onto the use of featherlight charms during their lovemaking a few weeks back, and last night they had taken full advantage of the fact that the charm reduced the stress on Harry's leg considerably. Unfortunately, it wasn't something he could use in everyday life. The charm had a limited life span, and as Hermione explained, using it too often could result in damage to the rest of his body's muscles.

Entering the bathroom, Harry stopped and looked at the shower in surprise. The area was built to resemble a waterfall around a small garden. He chuckled and turned on the taps, sending water cascading over the rocks of his 'garden'. Undressing, he stepped under the waterfall and enjoyed the warm water beating against his body.

He felt the change in air pressure when the bathroom door opened. The mist thrown up by the waterfall made it difficult for him to see, but he recognized Hermione's outline. With a smile, she stepped into the shower, grabbed the bar of soap and began to lather his body.

When she reached between his legs, her eyes dancing, he leaned his forehead against hers and groaned.

"I thought you might want some company," she said over the sound of the water cascading into the shower. Overhead, an illusion charm gave the impression that the shower was outdoors and a flock of birds flew over.

"You're more than company, witch," he growled. He ran both hands down her sides until he reached her hips. Squeezing with one hand, he reached between her legs with the other and smiled softly.

Her eyes widened and she grinned impishly at him. He knew the look. It was one of their games and the goal was simply to see who would lose control first.

She sucked in her breath when his fingers brushed her clit and the pair grinned at each other.

He enjoyed these little games as much as she did. After all, there was never a real loser.

Several minutes later, he grabbed her and held on as an orgasm ripped through him. Her hot breath bushed his ear as she whispered to him, encouraging him.

It took him a moment to recover his senses.

"Witch, you have me under your spell," he said.

"I do?" she asked with an innocent smile.

She lost her smile a moment later and she backed up slightly. Harry's eyes began to sparkle, but it was a look she was used to seeing only when he was pranking someone.

When he suddenly bent over, picked her up by the waist and threw her half over his shoulder, she nearly screamed, though not in fear. Her eyes were dancing when he turned and walked out of the bathroom and back into the bedroom.

"Harry Potter, you put me down this instant!" she cried.

He chuckled wickedly.

He stood in front of the bed and quickly cast a few spells. Then, with a quick flip, he sent her flying towards the bed, though he managed to get more height than he'd hoped for.

Nearly bushing the ceiling, Hermione bellowed in outrage, then clamped her mouth shut and closed her eyes when she realized she was about to land on the bed. Only she never did.

Opening her eyes, she found herself hovering a foot above the bed and felt the very soft, warm cushion of air beneath her back and legs. Before she could do anything, however, Harry had reached her and was kissing her thigh...and moving steadily upward.

She sighed happily. It wasn't quite what she'd had in mind when she'd climbed into the shower, but who was she to complain?

She moaned and reached for his head when his tongue penetrated her, her original plan long forgotten.

Two hours later, the Potters met up with the others in the hotel lobby. Harry looked everyone over, making sure they were wearing appropriate clothing. He glanced at Luna, who looked back at him seriously for a moment before sticking her tongue out at him. For once she was wearing normal clothing.

Hermione held his hand tightly and she had a slightly dreamy expression on her face. Her appearance was noticed by Emma, who began to snicker.

"Right, then. We have to meet back here at fifteen hundred. The limousines will be back here at sixteen hundred. I know Hermione and the others want to do a bit of shopping. So do I, for that matter. Does everyone have the apparation coordinates for our suites?" Harry asked.

When they nodded affirmatively, he continued "Good enough. Use your portkey if you get into trouble," he told them serious. "Now, are you ladies wanting to come with me for some final Christmas shopping?"

After finding that the men of the Brotherhood would be joining him, he turned to Hermione. "Do you have enough money?" he asked.

"Plenty. I also have the Gringotts debit card," she replied, still a bit flushed. "I'm off to Dior. Are you ladies joining me?" she asked, knowing full well they were.

Harry had told her to make sure everyone had something suitable for their meeting and that he'd pick up the costs. She'd had a bit of a time explaining to all the women that Harry was picking up the cost of the gowns, but they'd eventually agreed.

Emma looked around and signaled the women to follow her. Once they were out of sight, the men turned to look at Harry. Draco leaned against Neville and started laughing. Even Neville looked at Harry with something akin to wonder on his face.

"Merciful Merlin, Harry! I don't know what you did to Hermione, but can you teach us that trick?" Neville exclaimed.

Draco slid to the floor laughing. Terry and Remus smirked, but Dan put his hands over his ears.

"I don't want to hear this! Kindly remember that Hermione is my daughter. I do not want to know about her sex life. As far as I'm concerned, she and Harry sleep in twin beds!" he exclaimed.

"Oh, come now, Dan," Remus replied, tugging the man's hands downward so he could hear. "You've been in their bedroom, so you know that's not true. Besides, you want grandchildren, remember? That won't happen if they don't have a sex life." He was trying to be logical and rational, but the snickering of the others, as well as his own wolfish grin, ruined the effect.

"Sod off, you gits," Harry muttered, his face flaming. "If you haven't learned how to do that, I'm not about to tell you. Now, come on. While the ladies are buying gowns, I think we better make sure we have decent gifts for Christmas."

"How do you expect to manage that, Harry?" asked Dan curiously as he shoved at Remus.

"Easily," Harry replied as he watched the two, supposedly mature, men jostle each other. "We have an appointment at Tiffany's. You can take your pick of the muggle or magical sections. I've arranged for a line of credit with them for everyone, so don't worry about price."

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### **The British Embassy, New York...**

Harry stepped out of the limo and turned to help Hermione out. He was positively stunned by her beauty tonight. Her dress was white with black trim. It hugged her body like a glove, but only showed a hint of cleavage. He had seen her in some very revealing outfits, thanks to her ability to transfigure and her playfulness in the bedroom, but nothing like this. She was the very picture of refined elegance.

She had spent the day with the other ladies, shopping for an appropriate dress for the evening. Her only complaint was that the dress left no room to hide her wand holster. As such, her wand was now concealed in her handbag and she wasn't happy with the arrangement. She envied Harry. His Armani suit allowed him the use of his holster, although he was using his staff tonight as a cane. She smiled gratefully and took his hand when he offered it. She hadn't told him, but she loved how he looked in his suit.

She stood and wobbled for a moment. She was wearing heels and she wasn't used to them at all.

Emma stepped out of the car behind her. "Walk slower, sweetie, and be sure of your footing before you take a step," she murmured.

Hermione shot a grateful look at her mother, then her expression darkened. "Who invented these things anyway? They are killing my toes!" she hissed.

Harry looked between the two of them, lost by the conversation. "I can cast a numbing charm on your feet if you want, love," he offered, not realizing he was stepping into female territory and would be seriously mauled for his transgression.

"Don't you dare, Harry!" Hermione said with a glare.

Harry quailed back in terror when Emma glared at him also.

"Just stay next to her and let her use your arm for balance. I swear, you men sometimes! If it weren't for us, the species would be extinct," his mother-in-law muttered

Dan walked around the limo and rejoined his family.

"Don't you start!" Emma hissed at him.

"What did I do?" Dan asked mildly.

"Don't ask," Harry muttered darkly, then offered his arm to Hermione. He was amazed when she flashed him a dazzling smile. She looked as though nothing was bothering her. Harry shrugged and led his wife and the others into the Embassy.

The group stopped in the lobby of the building and waited. A minute later, a rather harried looking man came to greet them.

Lord Potter? I am Geoffrey Bennett, Chargè d'Affaires here at the Embassy. If you and your party would follow me, the Prime Minister would like to speak with you all before you meet with His Majesty."

Harry nodded in greeting. "Lead on, please, Mr. Bennett."

Bennett led the group up a wide marble staircase and into a large office. Tony Blair, the British Prime Minister, stood by the window, staring out at the New York traffic on the street below. With him waited Amelia Bones, Arthur Weasley, Caleb Newman, his wife Carolyn, and to Harry's surprise, Melinda McKinney.

"Mr. Prime Minister, Lord Potter and his party have arrived," Bennett said, then he turned to Harry. "My Lord," he said with a slight bow and then he left the room, closing the doors behind him.

"Lord Potter! Please, come in," the Prime Minister said.

Harry blinked in surprise for a moment, then moved forward to shake the outstretched hand of the Prime Minister. He was surprised to find that the Minister was calling him by his Wizarding title. The muggles had stopped recognizing such titles three centuries ago!

"Prime Minister," Harry said with a slight smile. "Good to see you again, sir."

Amelia stepped forward and performed the introductions, something which Harry was eternally grateful for.

Mr. Blair surveyed the group with satisfaction. Other than Arthur Weasley, they were wearing suitable attire. It wasn't that Mr. Weasley was wearing anything outlandish, only that his suit was slightly out of date.

"If you will all follow me? His Majesty is most anxious to meet with you. This isn't a formal occasion, so introductions will be brief before we sit down to dinner. Afterwards, several of us will go off to a private conference," the Prime Minister said, leading the group through a pair of double doors.

Hermione slipped her hand into Harry's. He could feel her excitement bubbling over via their bond.

"*Are you bored yet?*" he sent her in a dry tone.

"*Oh, hush.*" she replied.

They entered a large, elegant room with a huge chandelier and a fancy dining service set out on the long table. His Majesty, King Charles III stood next to the fireplace. Harry's group stopped and he had to suppress his laughter. Even his magical friends seemed to be awed by the presence of the King.

The Prime Minister approached the King and motioned for Amelia to join him.

They spoke quietly for a few moments before Amelia signaled Harry and Hermione to step forward. Harry resisted the urge to tease Hermione, via their link. She was terribly excited about this meeting and he didn't want to spoil it for her. But he couldn't help his smile as random thoughts about British history kept filtering over their bond to him.

"Your Majesty, may I present Lord and Lady Potter?" asked Amelia, a smile playing about her mouth.

*Hermione's excitement is affecting us all*, Harry thought as he met the eyes of the King.

As Hermione dipped a small curtsy, Harry bowed from the neck. "It is an honor, Your Majesty. On behalf of the people of Haven, I'd like to offer our condolences on the deaths of your parents," he said quietly.

The King looked surprised for a moment, then nodded. "Thank you, my lord."

The couple stepped aside and stood watching as Amelia introduced all of the Brotherhood to the King, then they were ushered to the table, where Harry found himself seated on the King's right side, with Hermione two seats away, next to the Prime Minister.

"You seem to be uncomfortable with your title, my lord. Why is that?" asked the King.

Harry paused for a moment. "I was not raised as part of the aristocracy and the trappings of such makes me feel more than a little uncomfortable, sir. I was surprised to find the mugg... er I mean, the non-magical government using our Wizarding titles," he replied.

Charles looked around the room and at the sumptuous feast laid out before them on fine china. "It would be nice to be able to get away sometimes and just be a regular person, I suppose. But I'm afraid people of our station rarely have that luxury. I cannot begin to express my gratitude for what you have done for our people. You have given us hope, Mr. Potter. I have seen some of the photos of those terrible camps, and will be visiting the refugees in California next week."

The King paused for a moment and met his eyes. "How badly did this hurt our enemy?"

Harry leaned back on his chair and thought about the numbers. "Very badly, sir. It has reduced his numbers by just less than a third. In the meantime, we're still ramping our numbers upwards. We outnumber him now, but not sufficiently enough to guarantee victory. The Americans and Canadians have copied our training regime and have set up camps to train more wizards to fight. If all goes according to plan, we'll soon have what we need to assure victory over Voldemort's forces."

"Excellent. But enough talk of business. We'll save that for after dinner. You are probably aware that I was briefed about your group long before we

met, but I have to admit I'm still surprised to see so many young, married couples," the King said.

Harry blushed for a moment and glanced at Hermione. "When we resurrected the Brotherhood, we agreed to abide by the rules of that ancient and noble order. They preferred married couples because it provides stability and aids in some of our magics. For example, sir, my wife, Hermione, is an expert in Arithmancy. Arithmancy is an attempt to merge science and magic by associating a form of mathematics to the magic. She and I can share her knowledge, via a technique called communing. Most of our Brotherhood learn this way. One person studies a topic, then shares the knowledge via communing.

"The downside to all of this is that communing is very personal. Very personal, sir. I commune only with Hermione and the men in the Brotherhood. She communes only with me and the women. In that way, we form a unique pair and I do not have to invade the privacy of a woman I consider to be my sister and a part of my family."

Hermione and the Prime Minister had been watching the conversation carefully.

Seeing the King's puzzled expression, Hermione leaned forward. "Same sex communing is easy to keep to the topic, sir," she explained. "But between the sexes, it almost takes on an erotic quality. I won't say it's like sex, because it isn't. But the process of communing allows for physical sensations to be transferred. That isn't something you necessarily want to share with anyone in particular."

Harry nodded in agreement and started to say something when he noticed one of the security detail talking into a lapel microphone and looking around anxiously. The man walked over to another and said something to him in a hushed whisper and the man quickly left the room.

The first man then walked over and whispered something to the Prime Minister.

Blair's eyes widened and he nodded to the man.

Harry leaned closer to the Prime Minister. "Is there a problem, sir?"

"I'm not sure. There's some kind of disturbance downstairs. Security is checking on it right now."

Those at the table turned suddenly when they heard shouts coming from the outer room, followed quickly by the sound of gunfire.

"Damn," Harry swore as he stood up. His staff appeared in his hand and his eyes glowed ominously. "Ferrum Retardo," he chanted under his breath. The walls of the room started to sparkle and shimmer.

More gunfire and shouting was heard. Then someone pounded heavily on the doors, but they didn't move.

The King stood up, staring at Harry in consternation.

"Don't worry, sir," Hermione said calmly, her wand in her hand. "Harry has sealed the room. Nothing can enter until he releases the spell. Obviously something is happening outside, and your safety is vital."

Charles began to relax until he noticed that all of his magical guests had their wands drawn. He suddenly felt very naked and his guests seemed threatening.

"Neville," Harry called. "Can you find out what's going on outside the doors for us? Draco, you and the others protect the King and the Prime Minister at all costs. If you have to, grab them and activate the Brotherhood portkeys."

One of the doors began to splinter and fray as dozens of rounds were fired through it. When the bullets began to impact the shield, Harry grunted. He felt a little of their energy as they spent themselves harmlessly against it.

Neville stood and apparated away with a small crack. The King jumped and stared at the now empty spot.

More gunfire and shouts came from the outer room, then silence. A moment later, Neville reappeared.

"It's all clear now, Harry. The security detail has cleared the outer room. It looked like an assassination attempt on the King."

Harry nodded and dispelled the shield. He sat down as the door burst open and dozens of British Security men and New York police entered the room.

Melinda stepped over to Harry and poured a clear liquid into a glass and handed it to him. He looked up at her.

"It will help with the bruising. I know what that shield does," she said softly, while the Prime Minister talked with the police and his security.

Harry nodded and knocked back the drink.

Hermione sat next to him, staring into his eyes. "Are you alright?" she sent.

"I'm fine. That shield is rather nasty, though. Now I know why they don't recommend using it. It transfers a fraction of the energy to the caster whenever something hits the shield."

"Harry, you saved the King and the Prime Minister," she whispered to him.

"No, I didn't. All I did was buy us time by sealing the room. The security forces saved the King," he replied heatedly.

I beg to differ, my lord," Charles said quietly. "But that isn't the point at the moment. And while I was hoping to see a small demonstration of magic tonight, this wasn't exactly what I had in mind," he added with a small smile. "As our head of security can deal with the police, might I suggest we get to our meeting before anything else disrupts the evening?"

Harry nodded and allowed himself be led into another room with Amelia, Arthur and Caleb.

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## **Sibiu, Transylvania in Romania...**

Dumbledore leaned down next to the open well and cast a privacy charm. Inside the well, Nickolai did his best to stay afloat, his head barely above the water. The well was warded with anti-portkey and apparation wards, and Albus had silenced the area around it. Nickolai might be found in a couple of years, but he wouldn't be located anytime soon.

Dumbledore twirled Nickolai's wand in his fingers. "So, my friend, now it is time to say goodbye," he said cheerfully, then he giggled and his cheek twitched.

"Dumbledore, you bastard!" growled Nickolai. "You will never get away with this!"

"Oh, but my dear Nickolai, I already have! It's unlikely that you will be found in time. I have your wand and you cannot get out. In the meantime, I have all sixty of your men, trained and willing to work for me. All willing to work for the greater good of wizard kind," Dumbledore told him, his eyes shining with insanity.

"Albus, please, I beg of you, do not do this. I can pay you, I can get you girls, anything, you name it," Nickolai begged from the bottom of the well. He was treading water and the water was bitterly cold. Already his hands were cramping and there was nothing for him to grab hold of.

"Farewell, Nickolai. I don't think we'll meet again," Dumbledore said, almost sadly, before standing up and smiling to himself. He recast the silencing charm, then walked away with a slight skip in his step.

Down in the well, Nickolai watched helplessly as Dumbledore vanished from sight. "DUMBLEDORE!" he shouted. But no one could hear him scream.

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## **Author's Notes:**

Alyx runs up to the inside of your monitor and screams a chilling, soul tearing scream. You jump in surprise and do something to yourself that you haven't done since you were six and had that sleepaway with cousin Lurch.

Bob looks around in a panic. "What the hell was that?"

"It's the Author's Notes!" Alyx wails, then runs around in circles, waving her arms in complete panic.

Bob walks over to Alyx and pushes her into her seat, then turns and opens a window on your screen.

"I'm terribly sorry, she's a little excitable at the moment. Bare with me and I'll wing this on my own," he says, then looks over your system and downloads the images you took during your last vacation. You know, the ones involving the three nuns, the midget and the pony?

"For research, you understand," Bob tells you, seeing your puzzled look. Then he reaches out, tweaks your nose and shakes his head over your accident. "Really, I thought you were beyond diapers and such things."

Alright then, on with the notes. For the record, Luna's little friend is not a snorkack.

Oh, and we get it already. People hate Amhar. They loathe Amhar, they want to see him on the Jerry Springer show. Is it really necessary to explain in your review why you hate him and why you feel we must hate him as well? I mean, come on, we WROTE him to be hated.

Penguin13: Yes, you will see Dumbles soon. In fact, he showed up again in this chapter. By the way, are you a technicolor penguin? If so, we may have a job for you.

Chapter 19 was a difficult chapter to write with the very large and intensive battle scene. We're pleased that so many people enjoyed the action.

Manatheron: The assassin you are wondering about happened to come into Haven before the line was put up. We've given you a few hints about this person, not many, but they are there. Don't you just hate not knowing?

Mathias: For future reference, when you want to reply to a review I leave YOU, drop me an email. It's on this site. Good job on finishing up your last story arc. And I'm watching the sequel - looks good so far.

Kari: You were going to put this into your abandoned list? We're hurt. We're insulted. Shame on you! Shame on your family! Shame on your cow! But seriously. Look at our update schedule. We've been pumping out a new 16-19K word chapter every 12 to 15 days. And you're willing to mark us as abandoned?

Sorry, Spokaneman, Ron is truly and totally dead.

Antoine: While we're not ship nazis (for the most part) we do agree with you. Draco/Hermione is a ship that should NEVER sail. As for Ruskbyte, he

is another author and even though we share space on the server, we can't make him hurry up with his work. We suggest that you drop him an email and poke him yourself.

Mickey: Ginny was ordered to kill. But for her, this was her very first kill, and she did it in a up close and personal manner. Of course that is going to affect her. As to the reason why the Ministry doesn't use a time turner... well, go ask an author who writes a story revolving around time turners. The ones used in training the soldiers are twelve feet tall and weigh nearly 800 pounds and affect everyone in a very large room. It's not exactly something people can easily carry around.

Steve: If you want to see a Quidditch match, you'll have to look to another author. I absolutely refuse to write one. And don't worry, soon we'll see the camel calvary.

Seishi: Calm down. Take a deep breath. I'll answer one of your questions and that's more than I normally do. In reference to question number four. No.

Amaratherine: In our universe a Healer is the same as a Doctor. A Medi-Witch falls between the level of nurse and Doctor... Nurse-Practitioner maybe?

Musings: Thank you. And to everyone else. Read Musing's story. It's worth reading.

Jamie: Yes, No, no, no, Yes, twice now, Thursdays, Green, no, no, 12, yes, OH, GAWD, YES! And no.

### **BLOOPERS!!!**

And now for our Blooper Selection, we proudly offer the following bloopers.

**"Yes, I will. I want to chat with you about the current teaching roaster."**

I suppose it could be worse. Hogwarts could have a Teaching Rooster.

**Peragrain bowed again and with a pop, he disappeared. Mr. Weasley, Ginny and Harry were looking at each other *dump stuck* .**

I don't know, this statement sorta left me dumbstruck. I've heard about getting stuck at the dump, but this is silly.

**Attaching a letter to its leg, he told Hedwig not let anyone near it no matter what. Putting a *delusion* charm on her, he knew it would not last long but at least she should be half way there by then.**

I think this author got a little delusional with their charms. If I did something like this, I'd want to disillusion myself.



*Bobmin*  
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# Sunrise Over Britain

## Chapter 21 - Christmas in Haven

### Standard Disclaimer:

"What are you doing?" asked Alyx.

Bob looked up from his desk. He was surrounded by bits of paper. The desk groaned under the weight of his notes.

"What does it look like I'm doing? I'm filing the Environmental Impact Statement for this disclaimer," he grumbled.

Alyx blinked, then her eyes narrowed. "Why would we need an Environmental Impact Statement for the disclaimer?"

"It was the mutant penguins that finally tipped off the EPA. They didn't have any problems with the herd of hippogriffs, the dragons and the dancing elephants. They didn't mind the dozen cauldrons filled with toxic goo, they even laughed at the idea of a tutu wearing George W. Bush proclaiming he had won the war. No, all that they liked. It was the fifteen foot tall mutant penguins carrying machetes and living off live brains that bothered them."

"It would bother me too," Alyx muttered. "Can't you ever have a simple disclaimer and tell the people that we don't own the Potterverse and that all the characters are the property of JK Rowling and her horde of brief case carrying lawyers? And that we make no claim to any rights to these characters?"

Bob looked up at her, affronted. "Well, that would be boring, wouldn't it. Our readers want excitement! They want blood, guts, gore, explosions and sex! They want to see Amhar anally probed with a Saturn Five rocket! They want to see Dumbledore get his comeuppance. And you're planning on boring them? I don't think so!"

Alyx looked at him with pity as he filled out the forms for the Environmental Impact statement. She shook her head and turned to the readers. "I'm sorry, but this disclaimer will probably be delayed by at least twelve years as it works its way through the courts."

With a sigh, she turned away and walked off the stage.

Harry turned to Hermione. "I think this is starting to get to them."

"I think you're right. They didn't give us anything to do in this disclaimer," she replied with a pout.

"Well, Snape's sitting two rows ahead of us. Why don't we go annoy him?" Harry offered.

Hermione nodded happily and they left their seats.

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Sunrise Over Britain

### Chapter 21

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#### The Ritz-Carlton Hotel, New York City (Dec 21st)...

Harry rolled out of bed and tried to stifle a groan. His use of the Iron Obstruction spell the night before had left him stiff and sore. It was one of the few shielding spells designed to stop kinetic weapons, like bullets, but the caster paid the price for casting the spell because he felt a measure of the impacts.

"*Are you alright?*" Hermione sent sleepily from the bed.

"*I'm fine, just need a hot soak to work out some soreness,*" he replied, heading into the tub.

The 'tub' turned out to be built to resemble a pool at the base of the waterfall shower. It was immense! The entire Brotherhood could fit in the tub. Not that he wanted to bathe with them, of course. Shaking his head, he turned up the heat on the water and slipped into it with a relieved sigh.

"*Perhaps, love, but I don't share. And I don't think the other girls would like the idea very much, either,*" Hermione sent him.

"*You're eavesdropping again. Besides, I was just wondering about the tub, not planning a hot party for my friends,*" he retorted in amusement.

"*Then stop thinking so loudly,*" she complained.

Harry laughed. "*Oh, go back to sleep. We have to leave in another hour or so.*"

Hermione sent him a mental caress and then her presence in his mind diminished.

Chuckling to himself, he considered the results of last night's meeting with the King and the Prime Minister. Things had started off tensely because of the failed assassination plot. The last update he'd been given, the security forces were still unsure who the intended target of the attack was.

They had talked privately for several hours, discussing the war and various aspects of it. Harry stayed mostly in the background for most of the

discussions. He felt uncomfortable being present, but the King had insisted upon it.

Eventually a schedule was worked out and arrangements were made for additional meetings between the Ministry of Magic and the Prime Minister. Everything Harry had added to Amelia's wish list of items had been either agreed with or granted. As the meeting wore down, Amelia addressed the final item on her list.

*She stood and bowed before the King, acknowledging him. Then her eyes sparkled with suppressed mirth, confusing Harry a bit after such a serious meeting.*

*"My liege, the Ministry of Magic is yours to command," Amelia began, using an ancient and archaic formula. "Shouldst we prevail upon the field of battle, we beg of thee a boon. We ask for autonomy, Sire."*

*Charles' eyes lit up with amusement. "My lady, we are grateful for your efforts and know that in the coming months you will give us your very best, but a family divided cannot survive and we would be lost without you. We regret being unable to grant you this boon. Ask of us anything but that."*

*Amelia and Charles looked at each other for a long moment before beginning to laugh. The Prime Minister, Arthur and Caleb joined them a moment later, and the room was filled with the sound of laughter.*

*Harry looked at Amelia in horrified shock.*

*When he finished laughing, Charles looked over at Harry and his lips twitched. "Oh, my, Amelia. I think you need to explain to Harry exactly what that was all about."*

*Amelia took one look at Harry and started to laugh again. "Harry, do sit down and relax. His Majesty and I were merely doing something that has been a tradition between the Ministry and the Crown for over five hundred years."*

*Harry sat on the edge of his seat and looked between the King and Amelia, still unsure.*

*Amelia decided to have mercy on him. "About five hundred years ago we had a minister who asked the Crown for autonomy every year for nearly seventy five years. After that, it became a running joke between the Ministry and the Crown. Some actually think it will be mean bad luck if we didn't ask the Crown for autonomy."*

*"So this is just a tradition?" asked Harry cautiously.*

*"Some traditions are fun and frivolous, Harry," Arthur said gently. "Others have good reasons behind them."*

Harry sank down until just his neck and head were above the water and he thought about what Arthur had told him last night. Some traditions had a purpose. He had been surprised to see both the King and the Prime Minister so willing to discard some traditions last night. It was something he was happy to see had happened at their meeting.

He relaxed in the hot water and he was starting to drift slightly when Hermione entered the bathroom. She walked over to the tub and dipped one foot in, testing the water. Finding the temperature suitable, she grinned, slipped out of her robe and slid into the water.

"You look suitably smug," she told him.

He cracked one eye open and peered at her. "Well, I know we got in late last night and didn't talk about the meeting I had, but it went rather well..."

He paused for a moment, then opened the other eye and looked at her. "Did you know Amelia has to ask for autonomy once a year? Some kind of big joke that has been going on for centuries. She, the Prime Minister and the King got quite a blast from it. But I think I'm coming to understand why the Yanks don't understand our humor. Sodding thing has been going on for over five centuries and we're still laughing at it? Talk about an old joke."

Hermione simply nodded. She didn't want to get into an argument about traditions being a link to one's past. Harry normally didn't mind traditions; he freely accepted most of those Eocho imposed on them.

She reached for a large sponge and started to lather it while Harry laid his head back against the edge of the pool and closed his eyes again.

"So, what are your plans for today?" she asked him.

"I thought about visiting the Avenue of the Magii," he said. "I wanted to pick up some extra presents for the holiday."

"Aren't you done shopping yet?"

"I am, but these are special presents."

Hermione stopped lathering herself when she got an image of children sized brooms and wands.

"Harry! Olga will have your guts for garters if you give her kids brooms. And you know the rules! No wands until they turn eleven."

"Relax, love, these are children's wands. The Yanks have been using them for years to get their children ready. They're very limited in what they can cast and how much power they can use. I talked to Sam about them. They're quite safe and the Johansens can have Johan set the levels on them."

*"But why, Harry?"*

He sighed and opened his eyes again. "The Johansens have done so much for us, Hermione. And they never asked for a single thing in return except to be able to farm some land. That farm doesn't bring in nearly as much money as they need when you consider they have fourteen mouths to feed. They scrape by, but only barely."

He shook his head and his expression grew distant. "It's a terrible thing to know that everyone around you is celebrating Christmas but you aren't. I want the children to have some things that will help them. Besides, I'm not going to buy them all training brooms," he replied.

"I didn't know things were that bad for them," Hermione said contritely. She recognized that he was putting himself in their place and understood the feeling those children would have on Christmas day.

Harry's gaze focused on her. "It's not your fault, my heart. Arthur, Amelia and I should have insisted on Sven accepting a decent salary for the position of Mayor, but he refused when he learned it wasn't a full time position. Amelia has tried to offer him a salary since, but he still refuses to accept one.

"Their twins are getting well paid by Q branch and I understand they're giving a bulk of their money to their parents. But it's still not right, Hermione. What good is having all this money if I can't do some good with it?" he asked her plaintively.

"That's not the only reason and you know it, Harry. Would it hurt your super hero reputation if you admitted that you care what happens to a bunch of orphans, even after they've found a happy home?"

He looked at her sourly. "Hermione... I got my very first Christmas present during my first year. I was so happy that someone seemed to care about me. I don't want to see the Sven and Olga's family forced to scrimp on gifts just because they're caring for children."

She moved to sit next to him in the pool, and hugged his arm. "So we do some Christmas shopping for the Johansen children before we go to the Embassy," she said firmly.

He nodded and closed his eyes again, relaxing in the hot water.

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### **Later that same day...**

Harry stepped from the limo and turned to help Hermione out. There were no comments about high heels tonight. While they waited for the other limos to pull up and empty out, he looked over the front of the Embassy. The damage from yesterday's attack was superficial, on the outside at least. He caught a faint smell of fresh paint and assumed the repairs on the lobby were still underway.

He admired Hermione in her ball gown. The dress she wore yesterday was elegant, but this one made her look regal... and sexy as hell. The gown was a similar color to the gown she wore to the Yule ball back in fourth year, but it was cut differently.

Hermione stepped from the limo and smiled gratefully at Harry for his help. The full length ball gown wasn't something she was used to wearing. *Although*, she mused. *knowing Harry, I suppose I should get used to wearing these things.* She suppressed the temptation to giggle. She felt like a fairy princess from one of the stories her parents read to her when she was a child.

She looked at her husband and smiled. Harry was dashing in his tuxedo, the very picture of what she wanted her white knight to look like.

As they waited for the others, Harry looked around. The most noticeable change was the beefed up security. There were New York Police checking everyone coming onto the property. Once through the gates, however, a private security firm, as well as members of the Protection Service Detail, took over the duty of protecting those within the Embassy. He was pleased to note that several Aurors from the Ministry of Magic's PSD were also present. Amelia and Harry had urged the King and the Prime Minister to accept them. It had been one of the items he'd brought up at the meeting the night before.

When the last limos disgorged their passengers, he led the chattering group of people into the building. The lobby did show signs of hurried repair as he suspected it would. A set of speakers played Christmas music and a huge Douglas Fir stood in one corner. A line formed up at a security table manned by Royal Marines in full dress uniforms.

Harry led his group to the table and gave the marine his invitation.

He chuckled when Hermione gave up her handbag for x-ray. He knew that her wand was in it and that the muggles would never suspect a 'stick' of being a lethal weapon.

When she turned and looked at her husband, her lips twitched. While Harry was explaining his need for the 'cane', a marine was making a show of examining the shortened staff.

Amelia waited on the other side of the security gate, trying to hold in her own laughter.

Once everyone was finally through, she Amelia led them into a huge room. Another Christmas Tree decorated one corner and there were four fireplaces, each burning a large yule log. The Embassy had planned the night's entertainment, which included live music provided by several different groups.

Remus and Tonks joined Harry and Hermione, who were standing off to one side looking a little overwhelmed. Behind Remus, a liveried servant

held a tray with elegant crystal goblets. He took one and handed it to Harry, then grabbed another to give to Hermione, before taking one for himself and Tonks.

Harry sipped at the strange looking drink and his eyes widened in surprise.

"It's called Wassail, Harry. The first time I had it was when I visited Potter Manor, the Christmas before you were born. Your dad and mum were trying to make everyone feel at home. The war was still ramping up and the Order had taken a number of losses. I remember Sirius sitting in a corner, looking glum. Then James and Lily came out with this huge punch bowl of Wassail. I swear I could have taken a bath in that bowl, Harry, it was that huge.

"Anyway, your mum handed me a cup of the stuff, and I remember how bright and happy she looked. It was impossible to be depressed about the war around her that day. It was Christmas and she's found out she was pregnant only a few weeks earlier.

"Your dad, he wore this silly Christmas hat. He was dancing around the room handing out little gifts and every so often he'd stop to talk to you. You weren't even born yet! He had adopted a habit of talking to Lil's stomach. She loved when he did that, but he got carried away on a few occasions. Then she'd hex him with something silly. One time she hit him with a hex that made a pair of hands grow out of his head and cover his eyes. Another time she gave him antlers."

Harry smiled wistfully.

"*Someday, it will be our turn for that sort of thing,*" Hermione sent him.

"*I look forward to it more than I can say,*" he replied.

"Thanks, Remus," Harry replied. "Those little tidbits put life into what have always been just names."

Silence fell when the King arrived. He was followed by a group of children who moved off to one corner and proceeded to serenade the gathering with Christmas carols.

Harry smiled and held Hermione's hand. Slowly, the large crowd of people moved to gather around the choir, enjoying the sweet sound of their songs. Behind them, staff set up tables for dinner.

Harry felt a tap on his shoulder and he turned to see Amelia looking at him seriously. She gestured for him to follow.

He turned back to Hermione. As he moved closer, he whispered, "Duty calls, love. Amelia needs me for something. I'll be back."

She smiled and tilted her cheek slightly to accept his kiss. Melinda McKinney moved to take Harry's spot as he moved off. Amelia led him into a small office with Arthur, Caleb, the Prime Minister, and a man he didn't know.

"Alright, we'll all here," Amelia said tensely.

Harry, picking up on her tone, wondered what the problem was.

"According to my Chief of Security, the attack last night was related to our Irish troubles, and not related to anything going on back home. The leader of the attack was a known IRA thug," Blair said.

"Well, that puts a different spin on things. And it means we still have a valid threat warning," Harry murmured to Caleb, who nodded.

"A valid threat? What threat?" demanded the unidentified man.

The Prime Minister coughed and Harry turned to look at him. "I'm sorry, my lord. May I introduce you to Sir Basil? He's head of MI5."

Harry nodded and offered Sir Basil his hand.

Sir Basil was a scholarly looking gentleman with an intense, dark-eyed gaze. He was rather tall and he tended to use his height to his advantage. He tried to pin Harry with his gaze only to discover a gaze far more powerful than his own staring back at him, unblinkingly. He looked away for a moment.

"Now then, Mr. Potter, you were saying something about a threat?" asked Sir Basil, his eyes returning to the young man in front of him.

"Yes. We had a rumor of Voldemort trying some thing against the muggle... er... regular government. We didn't have any details, and to be honest, I assumed that last night's attack was it. Although, I was surprised there were no wizards involved."

Sir Basil pulled out a small device and tapped a few keys on it before pocketing it once again. "You say your head of Intelligence spoke with our Chief of the Diplomatic Protection Group?"

Harry nodded. "Shall I call him? He's in the other room enjoying the music."

"If you would, please," said Sir Basil.

Harry smiled, then his eyes glazed over a little. "*Love, find Draco and have him come to the first room just out in the hall. It's on the left. We need to talk to him.*"

*Is anything wrong?"*

*"No, I don't think so. It's just that it seems yesterday's attack wasn't the one we thought we knew about."*

*"Alright. I've told Draco, he's on his way now"*

*"Thanks,"* Harry sent, then he widened the bond and caressed her softly.

In the other room Hermione shivered deliciously and smiled to herself.

"Draco will be here in a moment," Harry said, his eyes focused once again.

Amelia shook her head in admiration. "I've seen you do that often, Harry, and it still amazes me."

"Doing what? He didn't appear to do anything," Blair said, looking confused.

"Harry has a unique link to his wife that allows them both to speak to each other, mentally, over distances. He asked his wife to send Draco in here," replied Amelia.

Harry refused to blush and he could feel Hermione questioning his emotions over their bond. Fortunately, he was distracted by the arrival of Draco.

"Draco Black, meet Sir Basil, head of MI5. It appears that yesterday's attack was not planned by old snake lips," Harry said dryly.

Amelia and Arthur choked back laughs. Draco, on the other hand, was not amused. He frowned and shook Sir Basil's hand.

"That means we still have a threat, Harry," Draco said quietly.

"I know, and we're worried about it," replied Harry.

"Has Sir Basil been briefed?" the blond asked.

Amelia nodded.

"Tobby!" Draco snapped, commandingly.

There was a moment of shocked silence from the Prime Minister and Sir Basil, then there was a pop as Tobby appeared.

The short elf wore a uniform that was reminiscent of the old World War II British Army desert uniforms. The short pants in particular looked quite fetching on the small elf.

Tobby looked around warily. Then, spotting Draco, Harry and Amelia, he snapped off a perfect salute.

"Tobby, please fetch me the threat files for the past two weeks," Draco said after returning the salute.

The elf vanished.

"What in the blazes was that thing and why was it wearing a uniform?" Sir Basil asked in alarm.

Harry chuckled and moved over to a comfortable chair where he sat and unconsciously kneaded his leg. "That, my lord, was a House Elf."

Seeing the uncomprehending looks, he decided it was time to educate his new friends. "The house elf is a sentient species, like humans. They're highly magical and extremely loyal to anyone who treats them with love and affection. They are just one of the many species who are helping in our war, sirs.

"In the case of the house elves, they are called such because they generally fall into the role of servant in our society. Somewhere, hundreds of years ago, their position became a form of formalized slavery. It is unfortunate that during this time the magic of the elves changed, forever locking them into this state of slavery. My wife is a strong advocate of elf rights, but even she admits it's impossible for us to free them as they currently are. Someday perhaps, but not today. An elf who's been free for too long slowly goes insane, and ultimately dies."

Seeing the shocked looks on the faces of the muggles, he shook his head. "You have more allies than you suspect, even if you don't see them. The elves are just one example. Over two hundred of them participated in diversionary raids during the assaults at Leeds and Wilmslow," he told them.

Tobby reappeared, carrying the file folder and gave it to Draco, who quickly flipped through it.

"Please stay a moment, Tobby," Draco said softly as he paged through the file.

Finally finding the pages he was looking for, he pulled them from the file and cast a quick, wandless, duplication charm.

"Show off," Harry muttered.

Draco snorted, then grinned. "Oh, please. You taught me wandless magic." He turned back to Sir Basil then and held out the pages he'd copied. "Here you go, sir. It's not much, but we think it's worth worrying about."

Sir Basil raised an eyebrow, feeling the rough surface of the parchment. He read through the pages, going back now and again to reread a section

or two.

When he was done, he glanced at Draco and reappraised the young man. "You have a fine mind, Mr. Black. I can see that you've picked up on all the right points in this. You'll go far. Do you mind if I keep these?" he asked, holding up the sheets of parchment.

Draco shook his head. "No, of course not, sir. That is why I duplicated them." Looking at Amelia, he raised an eyebrow. "With this new information, we need to see about putting some wizards on the security detail here for the King and the Prime Minister."

Amelia smiled. "We've already taken care of that. At Harry's insistence, we convinced the King and the Prime Minister to accept ten members of our Protective Service Detail. They're already on duty. With a little luck, we'll be able to double that number next month."

Draco looked relieved.

Harry placed a hand on Draco's shoulder and looked at the others. "Unless there is anything further, we'll return to the celebration," he said.

Blair nodded. "Quite. It wouldn't look good for so many of us to be absent for long. Besides, I think we've done just about all we can, for now."

Harry nodded and started to follow Amelia and the others to the door when he was held back.

"Lord Potter, would you stay one moment longer?" asked the Prime Minister.

Amelia stopped to look at Harry. When he nodded, she turned away and left the room.

"Sir?" he asked, rejoining the Prime Minister and Sir Basil.

"The King was extremely impressed by your actions yesterday, my lord. While he understands that the Crown has limited authority these days, and even less considering the circumstances, he wants me to pass along a message to you.

"It is the intent of the Crown to acknowledge your titles and those of your peers aiding you in our war effort. It has been three centuries since the Crown has recognized the titles of the Wizarding world. The King says he owes you a debt, my lord. For what it's worth, you have his thanks, and those of His Majesty's government, for your actions."

Harry stood for a moment, shocked, then nodded once. It was a minor detail in the grand scheme of things. The King knew he didn't hold much value for his title. But the thanks of the Crown was not something to be brushed off so lightly. He found himself deeply moved and could feel Hermione questioning the emotional surge she was feeling.

"Thank you, Sir," he replied, somewhat at a loss.

A moment later, he followed the Prime Minister and Sir Basil out of the room to join in the holiday celebration. Upon entering the ballroom, Hermione joined him. She wrapped one arm around his and dragged him off to corner.

"What is it, Harry?" she asked worriedly.

He smiled, and instead of answering, touched her cheek. Looking deeply into her eyes, he opened the channel they normally use for communing.

Hermione, recognizing the gesture, dropped her occlumency shields.

With the link established, he passed the entire memory to her in an instant. Linking in this way, rather than using the bond, allowed her to experience the moment as if she had been present.

Hermione looked up at her husband with pride. She knew he disliked the titles, but knowing that he had earned the personal thanks of the Crown still moved him, and her.

"Come," she said, breaking the connection. "Let's join the others."

Harry laughed as she pulled on his arm.

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## Hogwarts Castle...

"My Lord, Mulciber is here with several wizards. He's asking to see you," said the Death Eater.

"Send him in," Voldemort replied quietly. Then he reached down and stroked the head of Nagini.

Mulciber entered the Great Hall with two men nervously following him.

Horatio looked rather tired. He'd finally taken care of his family after Voldemort's actions earlier in the month.

When the Dark Lord had cast the Cruciatus curse on his wife it had left her insane. He had tried for several days to heal her before he put her out of her misery. That action had caused a major break between him and his children. His son had tried to kill him, but instead ended up being sent to the Ritual of Anthrokak. He was a little more lenient with his daughter. He'd taken away her wand and given her a choice: the Ritual or become one of his concubines.

She now warmed his bed at night, allowing him to indulge in one of his more twisted fantasies.

Voldemort looked at the two men following Mulciber. Both were foreign looking, but that didn't matter. What mattered was what they brought with them.

Mulciber hurried forward and bowed low. "My Lord, allow me to introduce Chen Wei Fong of the Iron Wand Tong out of Hong Kong, and Jabai Arm Mehi, leader of the Blood Jihad. These men have brought nearly one thousand wizards to join your cause."

Voldemort's eyes widened. His body was suddenly surrounded by a deep red, nearly black aura and he fought to regain control for a moment.

Mulciber and the two men took a step back in alarm.

A minute later, Voldemort had his aura under control and invisible again. He knew what was causing the problem. The influx of the power from the Ritual had boosted his power tremendously. Coming to grips with that power was not as easy as he had anticipated. He was having difficulty mastering it.

Heartened by his silence, Mulciber stepped forward.

"Master?" he asked in a tremulous voice.

Voldemort's attention snapped back to the men and his eyes flared redly. "Welcome gentlemen," he said smoothly. "The forces you bring will be of great value in our cause. I can assure you, when the time comes and we make ready to assault your lands, my full strength will back and support your efforts."

Wei Fong knelt and bowed so low his forehead touched the floor. "Honored Master," he murmured. "You give us hope and great honor with your words. We of the Iron Wand will stand at your side and fight for your honor."

Not to be outdone, Mehi stepped forward. He placed his hand over his heart and bowed. "Honored Leader. We of the Blood Jihad welcome the opportunity to join your crusade. Gladly will we live and fight for the greater glory."

Voldemort smiled thinly. "I welcome you both. Horatio will see to your needs. He'll also set up a training schedule that will allow us the opportunity to train your men to be better duelers. Speak to him if you need anything."

Bowing, the two men backed away and waited for Mulciber.

Voldemort looked at Mulciber expectantly, wondering what other news the man had. "Well? Speak up Mulciber. You obviously have something more to bring to my attention."

"My lord, we have heard from Marne Murphy. She has placed the planned attack on hold. She suggests something right around New Years as an alternate date," Mulciber said tentatively.

Voldemort leaned back on his throne and considered the request. "Yes, New Years day would be an excellent choice. Tell her she has my permission to proceed."

Mulciber nodded, then he straightened up for one more final piece of news. "My lord, we have finally determined how Potter's forces are confusing our magic detectors. The problem is we haven't managed to determine a counter for it."

"Oh? And how is he doing it?" Voldemort asked, his eyes narrowing.

"He's using house elves, my lord. Apparently, the little buggers have the ability to make their magic look like human magic. There is no way to tell the difference between human magic and a house elf using human magic," Mulciber said in a frightened tone.

Voldemort leaned his head against his hand. "I will consider this. Perhaps we can develop something. Tell your men I am pleased with their discovery, but angry that they haven't fixed it. It's a priority from here on out, Horatio. I want this solved."

"Yes, my lord," Mulciber said. He began to back away from the throne when the Dark Lord's hard, cruel voice stopped him cold.

"Oh, and Mulciber? From here on, kill every house elf we run across. Start with those here in the castle."

Mulciber bowed and shivered. "Yes, my lord."

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### **The Ritz-Carlton Hotel, New York City (Dec 22nd)...**

Harry walked into the room and looked around. He had packed all of his clothing already, but Hermione, from what he could hear, was still in the bathroom.

Pushing the bathroom door open, he shook his head. "I take it you enjoy this?" he asked his wife, smiling as she slipped down in the pool a bit further.

She smiled up at him. "You know we can do this at home, too, don't you? It's little more than some illusion spells and a few other effects. Right now we have a large tub and a shower. If we were to add a couple of illusions, it would radically alter our bathroom."



He leaned back against the sink and laughed. "Love, if you want to remodel the bathroom, be my guest. I admit I've come to enjoy the different style of tub, but as long as I can relax in it, I'm for it."

She nodded and began to make a mental list of changes she could make to their bathroom.

Harry checked his watch. "You better get a move on. We have three hours before the portkey goes off, and two hours before the cars are here to pick us up."

"Are you packed already?" she asked him.

"Yep. I had to do some careful rearranging to get everything into the trunk. I think we need to get a multi-compartment trunk if we're going to be doing much traveling like this, but we're pretty much packed at this point," he replied.

When she climbed out of the pool, he watched her every movement, his eyes glued to her naked form.

She blushed and looked at him. "If you keep having thoughts like that, we're going to be late, my lord."

He chuckled and handed her a towel. "In that case, I'll be outside while you go get dressed."

She nodded and wrapped the towel around herself. With a sigh, he left the bathroom, walked through the bedroom and into the sitting room.

Hermione went into the bedroom and was just beginning to dress when she heard voices in the sitting room.

*"Harry? Is someone with you?"*

*"Yes, Draco's here. so don't come out unless you're dressed. He was delivering some news."*

*"Is something wrong?"*

*"We think Voldemort has found out that we're using house elves,"* he replied in a guarded tone.

Her eyes narrowed. He was hedging and she knew it.

*"What aren't you telling me?"*

*"He's ordered the death of all the house elves in Britain, Hermione. And there isn't anything we can do right now to stop him, except to offer refuge to any who escape,"* he told her worriedly.

She closed her eyes and sighed heavily. She wasn't aware of all the details, but he didn't hide much from her. If he said there was little they could do, then there was little they could do.

*"My heart?"* he sent her after a few moments of silence.

Hermione winced, hearing his plea for her to say something. *"I'm sorry, love. All those elves..."*

*"I know. I think it's time for us to go home and see what we can do, if anything."*

*"I'll finish getting dressed,"* she replied.

*"I'm telling Draco to inform everyone that we'll have a meeting tonight at the manor to address this."*

*"Good idea."*

Hermione frowned and finished dressing quickly, her mind considering Harry's news.

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### **Ardersier , Scotland (Dec 22nd)...**

Colonel McHardy looked at the map. His men were on the main road heading into Fort George. The eighteenth century fort had been used by the British Army before the fall of the government and continued to operate under the rebel elements. At the moment, the fort contained the garrison that provided manpower to Inverness.

McHardy's orders were simple. The night's raid would be a harassment raid in force. Get in, blow up a few trucks, maybe a building if they were lucky, and get out again.

He frowned and looked at the imposing structure in the distance using a pair of binoculars. He had tried to convince command to attack the fort using aircraft, but they'd told him he would have to do it. All the available aircraft were being used in the south to pin down remnants of the rebel elements of the British Army.

McHardy had a bad feeling about the mission, so he was taking extra precautions. He had four escape routes scouted and ready for use, and three different safe houses he could go to ground in, if necessary. Command had informed him that a flight of NATO Tornado's would be available only if the mission went bust.

He looked at his lead 'specialist', Mathias Thrawkmort. He wasn't sure if he could call the man. Wizard? That wasn't part of McHardy's world and he was too busy fighting a guerrilla war to add it to his world view.

"My men are in place, Colonel," Thrawkmort said quietly. The fort entrance was barely one hundred yards up the road, and they could see that it was open and manned.

"Very well, then," McHardy whispered. He checked his watch and waited. First Sergeant Murphy was supposed to be leading a detail to prepare the road in case something went wrong. They couldn't begin until he had heard from Murphy.

He shivered in the December chill and reminded himself to ask command, again, for winter weight uniforms and coats. He started when he heard the trilling warble. Murphy insisted it was the call of the Snow Bunting, and McHardy didn't have the heart to tell him the truth.

McHardy whistled softly. From the high winter grass lining the road, two hundred men appeared and started to move towards the fort.

Hanover led his Royal Marines on a silent assault of the gates. In less than a minute they'd taken out the six men covering the gates and not a single sound was heard.

McHardy led his regiment up to the gates. They had been memorizing the map of the fort for the past two weeks. They knew which barracks they needed to place their mines at.

The regiment started to enter the fortress proper when the parade grounds facing the gates flooded with light. McHardy cringed and swore under his breath. It was a trap!

A voice sounded over a bullhorn. "Throw down your weapons and surrender!"

"Cover! Cover!" someone shouted.

A hundred men hit the ground, while others, still gathered around the gates, automatically fanned out to cover the men out in the open.

"Fall back," McHardy said tensely. He'd known the attack was a bad idea. Now it had become a death trap.

Not far away, several engines roared to life. Someone shouted and a machine gun began to fire. Several of the Royal Marines threw smoke grenades to obscure the battlefield. Around one of the buildings appeared a Saxon APC. Coming down the main road in the fortress were two Challenger tanks.

The three barrack buildings facing the gates suddenly lit up with small arms fire.

McHardy ran forward a few steps. "FALL BACK! PICK UP YOUR..." He grunted when the bullet hit him low in the stomach. He swayed for a moment, then collapsed to the ground without a sound.

Murphy ran up, lifted him firemen style, and carried him back to the gates.

Mathias and his men held the gates, shooting stunning spells and explosive hexes, as the Black Watch, 3rd Battalion, or Three Scots, filtered back through the gates and hopefully to an escape route.

Both Challengers stopped and their turrets traversed the parade grounds. One turret took aim at the gates with the men still trying to escape. The main gun barked once and the ground in front of the gates fountained with death.

A moment later the second tank fired.

Just outside the gates, Hanover watched in horror as men were torn to pieces. Then he grabbed for a radio. "Blackhawk flight, blackhawk flight, Three Scots three. Have two, repeat, two challenger tanks and unknown number of APCs in Georgetown. Authentication Alpha Oscar Delta Echo."

Hanover watched the radio unblinkingly, as if staring at it would make them respond faster. A half minute went by and he ducked as a tank round exploded several dozen yards outside the gates. He realized it had gone right through the gate area.

"Three Scots three, roger authentication. Blackhawk flight of six inbound. ETA three minutes," the radio blared.

Hanover blinked and looked at the men still in the parade grounds and winced. "COVER! COVER! Incoming air raid!" he shouted.

The soldiers of the Three Scots dove for any cover they could find. Several machine guns from the Royal Marines barked, throwing back the rebel army unit trying to force the gates. Two MILAN anti-tank missiles reached out from Hanover's men. One of the Challenger tanks shuddered to a halt, smoke pouring out of the small hole in the front. The tank crew bailed out into an environment laced with lethal fragments.

A Saxon APC fire-balled from another MILAN missile, spraying the nearby barracks building with burning fuel and fragments.

Hanover watched as they pulled back from the gates into the high winter grass. Everyone was avoiding the road, as ordered.

Sergeant Murphy skidded to a halt next to Hanover.

"Sir! Colonel McHardy is badly wounded. Captain Michaels is missing. That makes you senior officer," he said with a pant.

Hanover nodded. "Pass the word. Disperse after the air attack. Use one of the defined routes and meet back at the base within forty eight hours."

What about the wounded, sir? Some of them won't last long enough to make it back to base," protested Murphy.

Hanover nodded and looked around before he spotted Thrawkmort. He ran over to the Auror and grabbed him by the arm.

"We're bugging out, but we have critical wounded. Can you do anything? Some of these lads won't live long enough to get back to base."

Thrawkmort nodded, his eyes narrowing. "Where is the Colonel?" he asked.

"He's one of those that won't make it," Hanover said tensely.

Thrawkmort turned to one of his Aurors. "Autumn, grab some rope, create a Haven hospital portkey, then cut it up." he ordered.

Autumn nodded and slipped off her backpack, rooting around for rope.

Thrawkmort turned back to Hanover. "She's going to make a way to send the wounded to Haven Hospital. Take each piece of rope, give it a hard yank, then place it in the hand of the patient. Make sure to let go quickly, or you'll be going with them."

Hanover nodded and breathed a sigh of relief. Now if Lady Luck would grace them tonight, they just might get out of this after all.

"Disperse after the air attack! You know the drill! Pick up your mates and scatter!" Murphy shouted.

Overhead the first of two flights of Tornado's arrived. The gates and parade grounds exploded as the cluster bombs detonated. A cluster bomb wouldn't do much to the tank, but several of the Saxon APC's blew up under the onslaught.

Hanover stood and trotted through the high grass, following the road. Behind him, Autumn Dodson, ex-Auror, darted around, handing out small portkeys to anyone carrying wounded.

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### **Padfoot Manor...**

Harry landed hard and hissed as his leg wrenched under him. He skipped a step or two and quickly sat down on the stairs. Almost immediately Hermione was by his side.

Amelia and the rest of the Ministry personnel shared Harry's portkey and arrived at the Manor with the rest of the Brotherhood. Melinda McKinny swung her head sharply at the sound of Harry's landing and was moving almost instantly.

Narcissa swept into the room, smiling. Her family was back and now the manor wouldn't seem so empty. She stopped when she saw Melinda running a diagnostic on Harry's leg. His face was screwed up in pain and beads of perspiration collected on his forehead.

"I think, Harry, that you should stop using portkeys for a while," Melinda murmured. "You haven't damaged your leg any worse than it was, but this constant stressing isn't good for it."

Several people gathered around him. He winced, seeing Amelia and Caleb. He was sure he could tell what they were thinking. *How can he kill Voldemort if he can't handle a simple portkey landing?*

Hermione scowled and glared at him. *"Stop that!"* she snapped at him. *"They aren't thinking that. They're just concerned about you."*

Harry winced and looked up at her. He turned his gaze away, shamed to admit he was feeling a little sorry for himself.

Melinda cast a mild numbing charm on his leg, then she paused and pushed her sleeve up slightly to look at a watch strapped to her wrist. Her brow furrowed. "Harry, you'll be fine, just take it easy for today. I need to go. The hospital has sent out an emergency recall signal for all staff," she said, then she turned to Arthur. "Can you get my luggage home alright?"

Arthur nodded, looking at her worriedly. He'd had plans for the rest of the day and they just went out the window. He understood, of course. It was her job and she was very dedicated. But that didn't mean he wasn't disappointed.

Melinda turned away and all but ran from the manor, heading for the edge of the anti-apparation ward.

"Did we have an Op planned for today that no one told me about?" Harry asked Caleb.

The man shook his head. "None that I'm aware of, Harry. But that doesn't mean the muggles didn't have something planned. I'll go check the Operations Center."

"I'll check in at the Ministry, then meet you there, Caleb," offered Arthur.

"Draco, go see what's happening at the hospital. They wouldn't issue a recall unless it was something big," Harry said.

Draco nodded and followed Caleb and Arthur from the manor. Harry expanded his staff to full size and levered himself to his feet. "No sense sitting around in the foyer. At least in the sitting room we'll be comfortable," he murmured.

He limped into the sitting room with the others following. In the foyer, elves popped in and took their luggage to their rooms. Harry had barely sat down when Dobby appeared with several other elves.

Dobby watched the elves carefully as they distributed drinks and some light snacks.

"Dobby, can I talk to you?" Harry asked. He had been dreading this conversation all morning.

The elf stepped over to Harry, a shy smile on his face.

"You know what's happening in Britain right now, don't you?" he asked softly.

Dobby's ears drooped and he nodded sadly.

Harry leaned forward on his chair and took Dobby's hand in his own. "As much as we'd like to help, Dobby, the only way we could do anything would be to attack Voldemort directly, and we're just not strong enough yet. Hermione and I are very upset about it, but we just don't see a way to help."

Dobby nodded, looking up at Harry. He tried to smile, but every elf in Haven was upset. They knew what was happening in Britain and they knew there was little anyone could do about it.

"Dobby, any elves that manage to get away will be welcome here. If there are too many of them, then I'll open up some of my properties so they have a place to stay until they find a family to bond with. I want you to know that I... no, that we, all, share your sorrow and feel the loss of life most keenly. If nothing else, this will make us work that much harder to free our land for all of us," Harry told the little elf.

"Dobby understands. We knows Haven is not strong enough yet. Some wills get away, Not many, but some wills. They know to come to Haven."

"I don't like it any more than you do, Dobby. Wizards and witches have been dying every day since that monster took over our country," Harry said, starting to get angry with his inability to stop the madness. The room rumbled as his control slipped and his magic flared.

"*Carefully, my heart,*" Hermione sent to him then she widened the link so she could reach out and calm him. She stood and walked over to sit on the arm of Harry's chair, looking at the little elf.

Harry shot her a grateful glance, then he turned back. "Dobby, we'll do everything in our power to help those in need. But we've learned from bitter experience that we can't save everyone," he said in a whisper.

Dobby looked up at Harry in awe. His Harry Potter was grieving over the loss of elves. The race of elves had become accustomed to these occasional purges in Wizarding society. It was part of their lot in life.

"Dobby, I promise you, when this war is over, Harry and I will find a way to convince the Ministry to pass laws forcing better treatment for elves," Hermione said

Dobby glanced at Harry, who nodded. "You have our word, as Potters, and as members of the Brotherhood."

The others in the room glanced at him sharply, realizing that Harry was committing the Brotherhood to helping the elves. Dan and Emma were firmly behind the idea, having been raised as muggles. Remus thought it was a good idea also. He had experienced the prejudice of the Wizarding world first hand. But the others were unsure.

"Harry, that's going to be a long, uphill fight," Susan said, her voice filled with uncertainty.

"And destroying Voldemort is a walk in the park? Besides, it's the right thing to do, Susan. Look at Dobby and tell me he isn't a thinking creature. He isn't a pig raised to be pork chops, he's a living, breathing creature who has thoughts and feelings, dreams and hopes. If we can't figure out a way to free them, then the least we can do is figure out a way to improve their lot in life. He's my friend and part of my family."

"I'm not disagreeing with you, Harry. I like Dobby a lot. But this isn't an idea that's going to be well perceived by people," Susan countered.

"I never said it would be easy, but we're already involved in a war because of the prejudice of a handful. I think helping the elves can be done with a lot less bloodshed than we have now. It's worth doing."

Harry glanced apologetically at Hermione. "You know, I used to think S.P.E.W. was foolish. You recognized the problem and then you did something totally out of character by jumping to a solution without researching the problem.

"Your goal was admirable, if a bit unrealistic. The simple fact is, helping the elves is right! They're people like you and I, Susan, even if they look different than we do."

Hermione slid her hand into his. Her eyes were glistening with unshed tears and her expression was full of pride.

"Harry's right," Dan offered. "A society that relies upon slaves will stagnate. If we can improve their role in life, then we're really helping ourselves at the same time."

Dobby stood wide eyed, watching and listening to the conversation. *The Pappy should be told about this right way,* he thought. *He might even decide to inform the Grand Pappy.*

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## Haven Hospital...

Melinda McKinney arrived at the hospital and found organized chaos. She walked into the front entrance to find people running around all over the place. A Medi-witch hurried by carrying an arm load of potion bottles.

With a shake of her head, she ran to the emergency room, where everyone seemed to be congregating. One of the older Medi-witches spotted her and tossed her a green tunic to protect her fine robe. "Hurry. I don't know what's happening, but we have wounded coming in," said the witch.

Melinda pulled on the tunic and reached for a handy medikit. An alarm sounded in the waiting room.

"Here comes another!" someone shouted.

Suddenly a body appeared in the roped off area reserved for portkey emergencies from the field. Melinda rushed forward to assist. The patient was a man in his mid thirties and he was bleeding profusely from a wound to his abdominal area. She slapped a pressure bandage over the wound.

"I need blood replenishing potions here," she said commandingly.

A nearby witch turned to the potion cart and began plucking bottles from it. Melinda helped move their patient onto a stretcher and off to one side, out of the receiving area. As soon as they were clear another alarm sounded and another team of healers and witches prepared to receive a new patient.

Melinda began to cast diagnostic spells on her patient, trying to see what else might be wrong. "Damn... he's shocky. We need to stabilize him and send him to surgery. Are any surgeons available?" she asked.

"We're full up," a witch told her. "We need to stabilize and get them ready to move to St. Patrick's."

Melinda frowned. "He's not going to make it that long," she snapped.

"I'll check with the surgeons. If not, we may have to do it here," another witch told her.

Melinda nodded. "Do it, and get me a kit."

Around her other healers were working in a coordinated chaos. Orders were given and people rushed about to fill them.

Melinda ran a few final tests before she began casting a sterilization field around her patient. Wizarding society might be backward, but Wizarding medicine recognized the need to keep things clean as well as the muggles did.

"I get no reading from the HMI," she murmured to the older witch, who snorted and shook her head.

"You wouldn't. These are muggle soldiers. They apparently ran into an ambush and got mauled. The attached Wizarding unit decided to send them to us. It was either that or leave them behind to die," she informed her.

*Great, Melinda thought. Muggles? That's going to make things harder, since we'll have to power the healing entirely by ourselves.* Normally, Wizarding medicine relied on the patient's magical core to help power the healing. But muggles had no core, which meant a greater drain on the healers.

The older witch finished laying out the field surgical kit, then she turned and ran some tests on the man. Melinda watched her patient carefully, relying on visual observations to conserve her strength for when it was needed.

"He's going into shock," said the old witch.

"We can't wait anymore. Get some curtains erected around us. If we hope to have any chance of saving him, I have to start now."

Several witches jumped to follow her instructions and Melinda rolled up her sleeves. She hadn't performed any kind of surgery since attaining her mastery, but she didn't have a choice.

The old witch peeled back the pressure bandage and grimaced. Melinda whispered an incantation that lit up the end of her wand, then she began to cut.

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## **Ballincollig, County Cork, Ireland...**

Dumbledore watched the owl fly from his window with a satisfaction. Although his time inside Haven had been brief, cut off by his confrontation with Harry, he had managed to pick up quite a bit of information about the town and the wards surrounding it.

He was fairly sure he couldn't directly attack Harry, unless he could somehow bypass the wards. That was the final piece he needed and for that he went to his Sicilian contacts to see if they could obtain the Arch of Solomon. The Arch was an ancient artifact, built using magics and spells long since lost. The advantage of the Arch was that it could be pushed into a warded area, effectively making a door in the ward that they could pass through safely.

The downside of the Arch, and why it was unusable to someone like Voldemort, was that it had to be in contact with the ground to work, and Harry's death ward around Britain never touched land. Also, the Arch was said to be cursed. Some even said it had been cursed by God. Solomon was a powerful wizard, and King of the Israelites in ancient times, who had discovered wealth in Africa. His mines would become legend, both for their wealth and for the curses and protections that guarded them.

Dumbledore giggled quietly as he watched his owl disappear in the distance. The last time the Arch turned up, it had been in the hands of a

criminal syndicate in Italy, hence his reason for contacting his Sicilian representative. He wanted to purchase, or at least lease, the Arch. If that failed, he already had another plan in place that would lure Harry out of his little haven.

His cheek twitched uncontrollably and one hand trembled. His force of mercenaries, all sixty of them, were hidden away in little hotels and boarding houses all across Cork, waiting for his signal to assemble.

"I'm coming, Harry, and you will bow before me like you should have," Dumbledore muttered, then he turned away from the window and cackled before performing a small jig around the room.

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### **Haven Hospital, Early Morning (Dec 24th)...**

McHardy blinked and slowly opened his eyes. He frowned. He was in a bed, and there was a slow burning pain in his belly, and he had no clue where he was. The room was darkened, and the curtains were closed blocking any view from the windows.

He turned and winced when a door opened, admitting two people.

"Torca ignis," muttered a female voice.

The room lit up as several wall sconces flared to life. He could see one man wearing an RAF uniform, and a auburn haired young woman wearing strange green pajamas.

"Colonel McHardy, I'm Group Captain Anderson," said the man in the uniform. "I'm here to explain to you where you are and why. First, however, please let Healer McKinney check you over."

The woman stepped up to the bed and looked him over with a practiced eye. "Are you in any pain?" she asked. Then she pulled out a stick and muttered a few words. Numbers and pictures floated above McHardy and he gasped in shock.

"Yes, my stomach hurts," he stammered.

"Well, that's to be expected, Colonel. You were shot in the stomach, but we managed to put you back together," Melinda said, pleased. She reached into a pocket and pulled out a small vial. "Here, drink this," she said, then she lifted his head and put the vial to his mouth.

McHardy drank the potion and grimace. Then his eyes widened as the pain receded.

"You're healing well, Colonel," she told him. "You have a slight temperature, so we'll add a potion to reduce the possibility of infection. If all goes well, we'll have you out of here and back to your men by the day after Christmas."

Melinda turned to Group Captain Anderson and nodded, then she walked out of the room.

"Where in the blazes am I and how can I be ready to be released after being shot in the gut?" demanded McHardy.

Anderson raised a hand placatingly. "Relax, Colonel. Do you remember what happened?"

McHardy paused and frowned. "We were assaulting Fort George and we ran into armor we didn't expect."

Anderson sat down on a nearby chair. "You ran into two Challenger tanks and several APC's. It was a trap. You took a round to the belly while trying to fight your way out. Once you were wounded, your men fell back and called in air support.

"You and your wounded were evacuated to Haven, which is... Well, let's say it's a special operations unit run by Department M and covered by the Official Secrets Act. They have abilities here in Haven..."

McHardy's eyes widened and he nodded. He didn't know where this Haven base was, but he had heard Thrawkmort's group talk about it.

"How many of my men were injured?"

Anderson's expression darkened. "Quite a few, I'm afraid. We received seventy six injured, including yourself. From what we've heard from your Lieutenant Hanover, you have another twenty eight missing, forty two killed."

McHardy closed his eyes and faced away from Anderson. More than a third of his command injured or killed in a single mission!

"The good news is that all of your injured men, including yourself, will be capable of returning to active service before the first of the year, and that command has decided to reinforce your unit again. We've already begun to expand your base to house everyone, thanks to department M.

"Your location is key to our plans, Colonel. That's why command is beefing up your force. Your reinforcements will include elements from American and Canadian units, as well as another contingent of Royal Marines.

"As for what happened at Fort George, I'm afraid that's part of the uncertainty of war. We had no intelligence that there was any armor in that location. Even your own scouts didn't see any evidence of it. We've pounded Fort George several times with airstrikes at this point, but I'm afraid we're going to have to get some people on the ground to scout the area. And that is where you come in.

"Traditionally, with an injury like yours, command would send you to the rear and assign another officer. However, you have built up quite a following with the upper brass, old boy. They want you back in the field, where you can do some good," Anderson concluded with a feral smile.

"They want us to check out Fort George again, don't they?"

Anderson's smile drooped. "Yes, I'm afraid so."

"A scouting party in force?"

Anderson looked up. "No, just a small recon team. If there's still a significant force holding Fort George, command will decide what to do. They want that fort cleared."

McHardy closed his eyes for a moment, reviewing what he knew. Fort George jutted significantly into the Moray Firth. If the enemy held that position, they could use it to oppose a...

He gasped and looked at Anderson. "You're planning a landing at Inverness! Why else would you care about a fort that's blocking the Firth!"

Anderson stiffened, and smiled thinly. "Colonel, you and I both know that guessing about future operations, or the motives of the higher brass, is a futile gesture. It's not our place to question and I'm not going to talk about anything I haven't been briefed on."

McHardy nodded and closed his eyes again.

Anderson noted McHardy's condition nodded to himself. "Rest, Colonel. You'll be back with your own men soon," he said softly. Standing, he turned and left the room quietly.

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### **Melinda McKinny's Cottage, Midmorning...**

"Dilly, are you sure they don't mind this?" Melinda asked. It was midmorning and she'd been watching the elf decorate the Christmas tree for the last twenty minutes. Dilly had banished her to the couch, not allowing her to help.

"It do be fine, Melinda. If they did not be wanting to help, they would not be here," the elf told her as she frowned at the tree. "No, you must be moving one branch up," she added, speaking to something on one of the branches.

Melinda smiled when a small fairy tossed her hands into the air and gestured.

"No, you will be trusting Dilly with this," the elf said. "It will be looking better if you do be moving one branch up."

The fairy shrugged, then did as she was asked.

Dilly clapped her hands. "Perfect!" she exclaimed.

Melinda shook her head and examined the five foot pine. It looked like a typical Christmas tree, covered in ornaments and tinsel. On closer inspection, however, the twinkling lights were actually fairies.

Dilly had informed her that the creatures were normally shy of humans, but were attracted to the joy people felt during the season and liked to be part of it. If they were treated kindly, given sweet ginger tea and small bits of fruit on occasion, they would stay. If angered or mistreated, they would leave, though only after making their displeasure known.

Backing away from the tree, the elf looked it over carefully. She motioned for Melinda to join her, then slipped her hand into her friend's and smiled.

Melinda examined the tree, feeling a bit overwhelmed. She looked down at the elf and smiled. "Thank you, Dilly." Turning back to the tree, she shifted a bit, feeling rather foolish, but wanting to express her gratitude. "And thank you, all of you, for joining us for Christmas," she told the fairies.

The lights on the tree brightened slightly, accompanied by the musical sound of bells.

"Oh! They be singing!" Dilly cried, bouncing on her toes. "They do be happy, Melinda!"

Laughing, Melinda knelt down and hugged Dilly, who crowed with delight and wrapped her small arms around her friend's neck, returning the hug.

"You will be sitting back down now," the elf told her as she moved away slightly. "Dilly do be having a gift for you."

"I have one for you, too," Melinda said. "It's in my bedroom. I'll just go and get it." Standing, she walked away to get her friend's present.

Several minutes later, they were both ensconced on the couch, each holding a gift for the other.

Dilly, unable to contain her excitement, thrust her gift towards Melinda with cries of, "Open it! Hurry!"

Laughing, Melinda ripped the paper as Dilly clapped happily. Opening the box under the paper, she found a pair of white shoes, the same type she wore to work. Before she could comment, Dilly had jumped off the couch and was pulling off the slippers she currently wore.

"They do be special," the elf told her as she put the new shoes on Melinda's feet, ignoring the woman's protests that she could dress herself. "Dilly does be knowing how much your feet hurt after work. Dilly did be copying your work shoes and charming them to keep your feet from being sore." Tying the laces, she backed away. "Up! Stand up and see!"

Putting her gift for Dilly on the table, she stood up and nearly moaned in pleasure. "Oh, Merlin!" she whispered, walking around the room. "It's like

walking on clouds," she exclaimed. The shoes were soft, but also seemed to massage her feet with every step. "Gods, Dilly, you could make a fortune with these!"

The elf frowned. "Dilly does not be wanting money. Dilly be wanting Melinda to to be happy and comfortable," she said seriously.

"It's hard to be unhappy when you're here," Melinda told said distractedly, still unable to get over how wonderful her feet felt.

She looked up a few moments later to see the elf gazing at her with tears running down her cheeks. She sat back down, alarmed. "What's wrong, Dilly?"

"Nothing be wrong," the elf cried as she flung herself at Melinda and hugged her. "You do be making Dilly very happy!"

With a puzzled shake of her head, she patted the elf on the back, then reached for her gift. "Well, I hope you like this," she told her, smiling.

Taking the small, wrapped box, Dilly examined it anxiously.

"What's wrong?" Melinda asked.

"Dilly be wondering if Melinda's Mister Minister did be telling her about the gift of clothing" she said, looking up worriedly.

Melinda smiled, understanding now. "It's not clothing, Dilly," she said quietly.

With a happy smile, the elf tore the paper and opened the box, then gasped. Inside lay a small, golden necklace with a heart shaped pendant, upon which Dilly's name had been engraved.

Melinda reached over, removed the necklace from the small box and held it up so that it sparkled in the light from the tree. "I wanted to get you something that would always remind you that you're a part of my family, not a servant. I know it was hard for you to accept at first, but I'm very glad you did."

Unhooking the clasp, she placed it around Dilly's neck. Closing it, she gently turned the elf around and smiled.

Dilly snapped her fingers and a mirror appeared in her hand. Examining her reflection, she tilted her head slightly. "It do be beautiful," she said quietly. A moment later, she dropped the mirror with a wail, lunged at Melinda and hugged her. "Dobby did be saying that there be good people like his Harry Potter and he was right," she said, weeping on the woman's shoulder. "Dilly be so very happy to be part of Melinda's family!"

Melinda hadn't known that house elves were so emotional, but she was becoming accustomed to it. With a small laugh, she patted the elf's back gently. "So am I, Dilly."

Hours later, the house was full of the warm smells of the season. The scent of pine mixed with that of the Christmas meal Dilly was preparing.

The elf had decided that because Melinda had to work on Christmas day they would celebrate early. As her friend's Mister Minister would be joining them, Dilly had already made plans to absent herself once the meal was served.

When the knock came at the front door, Dilly rushed to answer it, chiding Melinda to sit back down. Moments later, she lead Arthur into the living room. With a smile, she told both humans to relax, then served them tea.

Scurrying back into the kitchen, she peeked around the corner, then smiled into her hand when Melinda and Arthur embraced. Turning away, she danced towards the table and put out the place settings. With a frown and a snap of her fingers, she changed the everyday dishes into something a bit more festive, making sure to include wine glasses and candles.

Minutes later, she had the meal on the table and a bottle of chilled wine within reach. With another snap of her fingers, she lit the candles, then stood back and examined her work for a moment. It wasn't dark outside yet, so the candles weren't as dramatic as she'd hoped, but there was nothing she could do about it. Turning, she reached up to the counter, pulled down an open magazine and looked over the image splashed across both pages, comparing it to her work.

She didn't know a lot about what humans called romance, but using the suggestions from the magazine article entitled "Putting Romance Back Into The Holidays!" she felt she'd captured the spirit of the thing. With a nod, she closed the magazine and placed it in a drawer near the sink.

Leaving the kitchen, she entered the living room and announced that dinner was ready.

Once Melinda and her Mister Minister were seated, she made a few last second adjustments to the place settings, then backed away from the table. "Dilly do be leaving now. If you do be needing anything, you will be calling out and Dilly will come," she told them firmly.

"But Dilly, I thought you were going to join us," Melinda said.

"We'd enjoy your company," Arthur added.

"You do be needing time alone," Dilly said, yanking on one ear. "There be no use in arguing," she added with a scowl when Melinda looked ready to do just that. "Dilly will not be listening!" Grasping an ear in each hand, she began to mutter to herself just before she disappeared with a rather loud pop.

"Bossy, isn't she?" Arthur asked mildly. In truth, he was glad to be alone with Melinda.



"You've no idea," Melinda replied, rolling her eyes. "She's also incredibly emotional."

"Most elves are when they're happy," Arthur told her as he filled their wine glasses. "A toast," he said, raising his glass and smiling at Melinda. "To Dilly, and the fine looking meal she's prepared."

"To Dilly," she said, touching her glass to his and sipping her wine.

After dinner, they moved into the living room, noting that Dilly had lit a fire in the hearth and placed a tea service on the table in front of the couch.

"Sneaky," Arthur commented as he passed a cup of tea to Melinda.

"She's like that sometimes," Melinda said, smiling. She toyed with her cup for a moment before putting it down on the table. "I got you a gift," she blurted suddenly. "Three, actually. Would you like them?"

He blinked. "Um, alright."

Standing quickly, she rushed toward the tree and bent to pick up two packages. "I hope you like them. I never know what to buy people. My family used to tease me about that quite often when I was younger." Straightening, she turned around and nearly ran into Arthur, who'd followed quietly behind her.

"Oh!" she gasped. "I'm sorry."

He frowned for a moment, looking at the tree. "Melinda, are those... They are! You have fairies!" he exclaimed.

"What?" She glanced at the tree. "Oh, yes. Dilly coaxed them in. She said they enjoy the season."

"They do. This is wonderful." He leaned closer to the tree and smiled. "And you are all quite lovely," he told the fairies, who watched him warily.

The lights from the tree brightened as the fairies responded to the compliment.

"Here," Melinda said suddenly as she thrust the larger of the two packages into his hand. "I hope you like it. If not, I'm sure you can return it. Although that might take a bit of doing, now that I think about it."

Arthur frowned down at the package in his hand, then looked at her. "What's wrong?"

"Nothing," she replied, biting her lip nervously. "It's just that, when I bought the gift, I'd only recently learned how important you were. I thought it would make a perfect gift, you see? But now I'm not so sure."

Reaching out, he caressed her cheek lightly, his eyes bright. "Important? To who?"

"To everybody," she said, waving a hand about. "Not just here in Haven, but internationally, as well. I saw what your position means when we were in New York. That's when it hit me, you see. I hadn't quite realized it until then."

He dropped his hand and looked away. "I see. So, you're afraid your gift isn't worthy of someone of my... station?" he asked for clarification.

"Exactly!"

Scowling, he dropped the package on the floor rather carelessly and reached out to grab her shoulders. "You're daft, woman. Do you know that? Of course you don't. The insane rarely do."

When she only gaped at him, he shook her slightly. "Do you know what I did before the war? No, you probably don't. I worked for the Ministry, but in the Misuse of Muggle Artifacts Office. I spent my days tracking down or cleaning up after muggles who'd been sold, given, or otherwise come into possession of enchanted items."

He let go of her and began to pace. "It wasn't a glamorous post, it didn't pay well, and sometimes the hours were horrid. Despite all that, I enjoyed my job. I rather like muggles and it made me angry when some boneheaded witch or wizard tormented them with biting tea cups, watches that prematurely aged the wearer, cars enchanted to run on the wrong side of the road or other ridiculous things."

"But when the Ministry fell," he continued, turning to face her, "most of the staff was either killed or scattered. We've found very few Department Heads or managers alive. When Amelia was appointed Minister, she asked for my help. And not because I was the best qualified, I'll have you know. No, it was because I was the only person who could take the job. We had exactly four qualified people from the Ministry still with us at that point; Amelia, Miles Pickerton, Caleb Newman and me.

"Miles was an Unspeakable and could have done the job, but we needed someone to run the Operations Center, something I'm not qualified for. And while Caleb was a fine auror, and has done a fine job in taking over for Miles, but he's never lead a department."

"I think you're selling yourself short," she began, frowning at him.

Arthur rolled his eyes. "Let's get something perfectly clear, Melinda. My position at the Ministry was given to me for a few simple reasons. First, I'm breathing. Second, Amelia knows me and, thanks to Harry Potter, trusts me. And the third, and probably most important reason is that I'm a Ministry employee and know how the government works and how it interacts with other agencies."

"So you don't think you're important?" she asked, shaking her head in disbelief.

"The Office is important, not the man. If something happened to me, there are now several qualified people who would be able to fill my role and continue with the work."

"And you call me daft!" she said, tossing her hands up in frustration. She stalked toward him, a scowl on her face. "You listen to me, Arthur Weasley," she growled, grabbing a fist full of his shirt and trying to shake him. "There's no one who could take your place with your family or with me. That makes you an important person! And nothing better happen to you, or I'll never forgive you."

He shook his head in confusion. "I thought we were talking about my job at the Ministry?" he asked, bemused.

"We were, but now it's become personal," she told him. Releasing his shirt, she poked him in the chest. "Your importance isn't measured by your job, Arthur, it's measured by those who love you."

He opened his mouth, ready to point out the how irrational her argument was becoming when her words finally sunk home. "Wait. Love?" he asked, his eyes wide.

"Yes, love! Don't you think your children love you?"

"I know they do. I just thought that you meant that you..." He trailed off and shrugged helplessly.

"Oh, for goodness sake. Of course I love you, you dolt!" she exclaimed, poking him in the chest again.

Realizing there was no way to win the ridiculous argument, he grabbed her hand and kissed her palm. Tightening his grip, he then dragged her back to the Christmas tree and sat down on the floor, forcing her to follow him down. "Well, then, let's see what you got me," he told her cheerfully, reaching for the package he'd dropped earlier.

Ripping the paper off revealed a box, which he opened. Inside he found a black leather attaché case.

When he didn't say anything, she began to fidget. "I thought you could use something like this at work," she told him. "I thought it might be more secure than that old haversack you're currently using. The case is mostly muggle in design, but I did have a feather-light charm added to it, as well as one to increase the holding capacity of the case. And see? It has its own built-in muggle security device."

Reaching over, she pulled the case out of the box, and showed him the small thumb print scanner under the handle. Then, taking his thumb, she ran it over the scanner and smiled when the unit beeped. "Now it will recognize only your thumb print and open."

"Muggles think of everything," he murmured, his eyes bright with excitement. Look up from the case, he smiled and touched her cheek. "It's perfect, Melinda. Thank you." Leaning down, he brushed his lips across hers.

"I'm so glad you like it. While it's true you could have returned it, you'd have to go back to New York to do so," she told him, a bit sheepishly.

When he laughed, she reached for her second, smaller gift and gave it to him. "I wanted to give you something a bit more personal, but I'm not very good at this sort of thing."

Because she was getting nervous again, he opened the package without comment. Inside was a silver framed photograph of them together in Central Park. They'd had it taken their first full day in the city after running across a strolling photographer. That the man was also a wizard had been a nice surprise.

"I'd wondered about that," he said quietly, running a finger across the photograph and smiling when his image scowled at him. "When we didn't get the picture later that day, I figured the fellow had forgotten."

"I made arrangements for him to deliver it the next day," she told him.

"When?" he asked

"While you were busy examining that muggle food cart and peppering the poor vendor with questions."

"Oh, yes! The man with the warm canines. I'd almost forgotten about him."

"Um, hot dogs, Arthur. They were called hot dogs," she corrected him, trying not to laugh.

"Right, hot dogs!" He leaned down and kissed her more deeply this time. "Thank you, Melinda. The gifts are wonderful."

"There's one more. Open the case," she said, her eyes dancing.

Putting the picture down, he ran his thumb over the scanner, then opened the case. Inside was a long, black, plastic object. It was narrow, and the surface was covered in buttons. He tightened his grip on it when she reached for it.

Laughing, she shook her head and put her hand on his thigh. "The clerk said it was called a 'Universal Remote Control'," she explained, stumbling a bit over the words. "It can be programmed to control all sorts of muggle things. Oh, and it came with batteries."

"Batteries!" he exclaimed. "How wonderful! Did I ever tell you about my collection of plugs and batteries?"

"You did, yes." She controlled her laughter with some effort. "That's one of the reasons I insisted that the clerk include them."

Laughing, he put the muggle device down and dragged her into his lap. He kissed her soundly, only stopping when she began to tremble in his arms. "And you said you were no good at picking out gifts," he teased.

"You really like them?" she asked nervously.

"I really like them," he replied seriously.

When he wrapped his arms around her, she sighed happily. She'd gotten it right for a change.

"But wait a minute," he said, pulling away. "You haven't opened your gifts yet."

"I'd almost forgotten." When she tried to climb out of his lap, he pulled her back down. "You want me to open them here, then?" she asked teasingly.

Reaching under the tree, he picked up her first gift and nodded. "I think it's appropriate. And no, I won't explain what that means. You'll understand soon enough." He held out the small package and smiled.

She took it from him and promptly shook it, listening carefully for any sound.

He groaned. "What is it with you gift shakers? Don't you people realize you could break something that way?"

"Of course. But we also know that smart people cast cushioning charms on their gifts to prevent accidents!"

When he huffed in mock-annoyance, she stuck her tongue out at him, then ripped the wrapping paper to shreds. Finding a small box, she opened it and her eyes widened. The fairy light from the tree gleamed off the silver hair combs nestled in tissue paper. "Oh, Arthur," she breathed. "They're beautiful."

"I saw them in the window of one of the hotel shops and thought of you," he said quietly.

"Thank you," she whispered. "Let me go put..."

"No," he interrupted, tightening his arm around her waist to hold her in place.. "You can try them on later. You've still your second gift to open." Plucking a slightly larger package from under the tree, he took the box of combs from her hand and replaced it with his second gift.

"Go on, open it," he told her, putting the combs back under the tree.

A little surprised by how serious he'd become, she looked closely at the gift in her hand. It was round, whatever it was. With a mental shrug, she tore the paper off and frowned slightly in confusion. It was a small, ball shaped crystal. It was a vibrant blue and seemed to pulse gently in her hand.

"It's pretty," she offered, looking up at him.

Grinning, he shook his head. Taking the ball from her, he told her to cup her hands, then deposited the ball in them. Leaning down, he kissed her neck. "Close your eyes and think of me," he whispered.

Doing as he instructed, she jolted slightly as waves of emotions washed gently through her. Desire, humor, anticipation and trust. And strongest of all, love. They were his emotions, she realized. Stunned, her eyes flew open to meet his.

"You'll never have to wonder about my feelings for you," he said softly. "If you're ever in doubt, hold the crystal and think of me."

When she began to weep, he took the crystal from her hands and set it aside. Then, gently clasping her face in his hands, he wiped away the tears spilling down her cheeks. "I love you," he told her, then brushed his lips against hers.

Moments later, they were stretched out on the floor, bathed in the lights from the tree. When the bell song of the fairies filled the cottage, they were too lost in each other to notice.

Not far away, Dilly smiled happily and vanished.

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### **Padfoot Manor, much later that day...**

Harry was in his study trying to wrap his gifts. Dobby was helping, but between the two they used far too much wrapping paper and tape.

"Next time we start this earlier, Dobby."

Dobby's ears drooped. "I don't think earlier would help much, Master Harry."

Harry leaned back on his chair to survey the pile, then he sighed. "No, I suppose it wouldn't," he admitted. "Did you get something for Winky?"

"I made her some socks," Dobby said proudly, then he deflated again. "But she not likes clothes."

"I thought that might be the case. I bought something in New York. Would you like to give it to Winky?"

Dobby looked at him and his lower lip trembled. "Master Harry should not be doing that."

Harry waved his hand dismissively. "No, Dobby, your family and family helps each other. I got you something for you to give your sweetheart," he

said, handing him a small, velvet box.

Dobby's eyes widened and he opened the box. He gasped seeing a delicate gold heart on a small gold chain.

Harry smiled to himself. It wasn't much, but if he could convince Dobby to give it to Winky, he was sure she'd love it. Hermione gave Winky a lot of her old costume jewelery, which she loved to wear.

"I can't give this to Winky, Master Harry. It cost too much. I don't have galleons for that and you shouldn't have bought it," Dobby protested.

He leaned forward and looked at the elf. "If you could afford it, would you give it Winky?" he asked.

Dobby nodded unhappily. He knew he couldn't afford such a beautiful item.

"Well, it wasn't expensive. But if you insist on paying for it, how about if I dock your pay one sickle per month until it's paid for."

Dobby smiled shyly. "Master Harry do that for me?"

"Of course. I would have given it to you, Dobby, but you drive a hard bargain," Harry said with a straight face.

Dobby grinned toothily. Then, reaching for the wrapping paper, he unrolled nearly eight feet of it and began to wrap his gift to Winky, a blissful smile on his face.

"*What has you so smug?*" Hermione asked from the bedroom.

"*Dobby,*" he replied. *"I finally got him to agree to accept the heart necklace. He insisted on paying for it."*

"*That's what we expected. I know Winky will love it, though. Are you almost done in there?*"

"*Yes, I'm finished. Dobby will bring down the gifts to put under the tree, except for those I intend to give privately or elsewhere,*" he replied.

"*That's what you get for buying those toys for the Johansen children,*" she sent teasingly.

"*Oh, come on. You're going to enjoy watching them open their presents as much as I will,*" he shot back.

She didn't reply. He was right and she knew it.

Harry picked up one present and left the room. Dobby knew which gifts went where and would take care of the rest.

Hermione looked up from her book when Harry entered the room. In his hand he held one poorly wrapped gift. She shook her head at him. "Did you use all the wrapping paper?" she teased.

"Hey! I didn't do all that bad," he protested. "Besides, wait til you see how Dobby wraps."

"Is that for me?"

"Well, yeah..."

Hermione marked her place in the book and closed it before putting it on the table. "Let me guess. Judging by the size, it's small and it's from that catalog that Terry found?"

Harry flushed. "It's not exactly what you think it is," he mumbled.

"Oh? Let's see then," she said, her eyes dancing merrily at his discomfort.

Harry blinked in surprise. He had suddenly pictured a very young Hermione on the Hogwarts Express. It was one of the first things she had said to him and Ron. The image of giving this present to an eleven year old Hermione made him shudder slightly.

Hermione glance up at him sharply. Their bond was just passing emotions at the moment and she caught his embarrassment and distaste.

He handed her the package and she arched an eyebrow over it's weight. It weighed more than any lingerie she'd ever bought.

"I suppose I should tell you that all of the guys ordered something. We were having lunch and when I didn't show that much interest they started ragging on me. So I ordered something," he told her, blushing. "We can pitch it in the bin if you like."

"You bought me a Christmas present and now you want to throw it out?" she asked.

"Well... umm... It's just a thought," he replied lamely, then wondered if he would be sleeping on the couch downstairs tonight.

Hermione gave him a strange look and started peeling away the layers of paper and tape. Finally she got down to the box and stopped. "Edible body paints?" she whispered to herself, then she giggled a little. *This is what he had been afraid to give me?* she thought.

"Harry, this isn't as bad as I thought it was going to be," she said hesitantly.

He breathed a sigh of relief.

"When I saw the lingerie Neville bought for Ginny, I figured you'd gotten something similar for me. This, at least, can be used by both of us. The other is merely eye candy for the husband."

Harry looked at her, mortified. "I'd never buy you something like that, Hermione. It's too... personal," he replied. "Besides, you're always pretty to me, no matter what you wear."

She smiled sweetly at him, then she opened the box and pulled out one jar. Opening it, she dipped a finger in and tasted. "Hmm, strawberry."

She walked over to him and ran a finger along his neck, leaving a bright red smear. Then she stood on her toes and licked his neck lightly.

"So, you'd never want to see me in something like what Neville bought?" she asked in a whisper.

Harry shivered, closed his eyes and wrapped his arms around her. "*You know I would,*" he growled mentally. Then he reached out and touched her aura, feeding his sensations back to her. She shivered in his arms and attacked his neck with determination.

"*It's going to be a good Christmas,*" he thought to himself before he picked her up in his arms and carried her to the bed.

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## Hogwarts Castle (December 25th)...

Severus Snape moaned as his climax shuddered through him at the same moment the woman hanging from the dungeon ceiling shrieked one last time as her soul was ripped away.

Pushing the girl at his feet away, he tucked himself back into his pants and looked down at her. "Happy Christmas, pet. Did you enjoy my present?" he asked silkily, running a finger over her cheek. When she grimaced, he backhanded her, sending her sprawling to the floor. "Now, clean up this mess. I want the room ready for the next," he growled.

"Careful, Severus," a voiced hissed from the doorway. "I won't allow you another toy if you break that one." The Dark Lord entered the room, several Death Eaters behind him.

"My lord," Severus stammered as he knelt. "I had not expected you today."

Voldemort approached the kneeling man and ran one skeletal finger down his cheek, parodying the caress Snape had just given the girl. "And why should you? I go where I please, Severus. It is you who must ask permission to leave the dungeon," he replied, almost mildly. "Another failure?" he asked, turning to look at the obviously dead woman hanging from the chains.

"Yes, my lord, though she lasted much longer than I expected," Snape told him.

"And you let your pet watch your experiments? Is that wise, Severus?" the Dark Lord asked.

"Watch?" Mulciber murmured not so quietly to the men near him. "More like service him as the woman dies. It's the only way he can get off anymore."

The snickering from the men died when Voldemort's glance flicked towards them.

"The girl, my lord?" Snape asked, puzzled. "She is harmless."

"What is to stop her from escaping these rooms? Or from interfering with your work?" Voldemort asked, watching the girl as she cringed away.

"She doesn't interfere because she knows she'll die in the chains if she does. And she cannot leave the dungeon, my lord, because I asked Mulciber to ward the doorway to prevent her passing." *And the bastard agreed, but only after bugging me. How a sodomite like him ever fathered a family is beyond me,* Snape snarled to himself.

Tired of the subject, Voldemort walked around the dead woman, examining the body. "How is your research coming?"

"It's going slower than I'd hoped, my lord, but I am making progress," Snape told him. "That one," he said, nodding to the hanging woman, "lasted almost five minutes longer than I'd predicted."

"Interesting. Do you know why?" the Dark Lord asked, poking the body with a finger until it began to sway.

"I believe so, my lord. The last potion included a small infusion of unicorn blood. My research indicated that it might tie the soul to the body longer. I'll need to test it again, of course, to be sure it wasn't a fluke."

"Excellent, Severus." He waved his hand towards Mulciber, and the man quickly moved forward and summoned a chair directly in front of the kneeling Snape. "You may leave," the Dark Lord told him as he sat down. "I wish to speak to Severus alone."

Mulciber bowed, then motioned for the men to follow him from the room.

"Severus, put your toy away for now. I do not want her listening to our conversation." Voldemort's red eyes bored into the girl.

"Of course, my lord." Turning on his knees, he glared at the girl and motioned sharply for her to withdraw into his private quarters. Once she's scurried through the door and closed it behind her, he turned back to face his master. "How can I serve you, my lord?"

Voldemort withdrew his wand and explained the problem he'd had casting the Cruciatius curse on Mulciber's wife. "Obviously my power has grown, but I had not expected to overpower my wand. I need a solution to this, Severus."

Snape frowned. "The simplest solution would be to cast without the wand, my lord."

"Fool!" he hissed, slapping Snape. "Do you think such an obvious solution did not occur to me? It would take too long to learn to cast without a wand!"

When Snape's eyes widened in sudden understanding, Voldemort grabbed his chin roughly and squeezed. "Just so. I cannot cast wandlessly, and you will keep that information to yourself. If even a hint of my deficiency escapes this room, it will be you hanging from the chains, screaming as your soul is torn from your flesh!"

"Of course, my lord," Snape whispered, shuddering.

Releasing the man's chin, Voldemort leaned back. "Now then, I need a solution, and I need one quickly. This ritual has been performed before, so this problem cannot be an uncommon occurrence among the Rite's participants. You will research this problem. If you need books, you are to ask your guard. I will instruct him to bring you anything you need, within reason."

"You are most generous, my lord," Snape said with a straight face.

The Dark Lord's smile was all teeth. "When I get what I want," he agreed.

In Snape's private quarters, the girl moved away from the door, having heard enough.

*So, the Pale Creature is too powerful for his wand, she thought, her eyes darting around the room. And the Dark Man is making progress on extending the ritual.*

She froze when she saw the potion ingredients cabinet on the far wall.

Was there enough time? She wasn't normally allowed in Snape's private quarters alone. She'd have to chance it.

Rushing towards the cabinet, she yanked on the door and nearly laughed out loud when it swung open. The man's arrogant assurance that she would never touch his belongings would be his downfall!

Sorting quickly through the ingredients, she found what she was looking for. Grabbing the bottle labeled *Datura Africanus*, she twisted off the lid and carefully removed one of the thorny fruit and dropped it into the pocket of her ragged robe. Replacing the lid, she slid the jar back into place and closed the door to the cabinet.

Hearing noises in the outer room, she jumped. Spinning around, she moved quickly to the center of the room, dropped to her knees and bowed her head. Seconds later, the door was thrown open and Snape entered.

Severus started when he saw the girl kneeling on the floor. Scowling, he took three gliding steps toward her and yanked her up by her hair. "Well? What are you waiting for? Get in there and clean up the mess!" he thundered, all but throwing her towards the door. "The next subject won't arrive until tomorrow, but I want that room spotless!"

Stumbling, she fetched up against the door jam and grimaced. When he took a step towards her, she ran from the room. When the door slammed closed a moment later, she risked a backward glance and breathed a sigh of relief to see he hadn't followed her. Checking the lab and finding no one, she scurried over to her bed – a pile of discarded robes, blankets and rags – and pulled out the thorn apple she'd stolen. Examining it closely for damage and finding none, she hid it away under her bedding.

Patting the pile of cloth gently, she turned away and smiled at the dead woman, still hanging from the ceiling.

Dragging a chair behind her, she approached the corpse, humming. Standing on the chair, she released the body from the chains and giggled when it fell to the floor with a meaty thump. Climbing down once more, she grabbed the corpse's wrist and began to drag her towards a trap door in the corner.

"You're a test subject, did you know that?" she asked the corpse. "I called your type a victim once, but the Dark Man corrected me most savagely." She stopped for a moment, puffing slightly from the exertion.

"You're all 'test subjects'," she continued cheerfully, staring down at the lifeless eyes. "That's what he likes to call you. It's incorrect, of course, but it would be worth my hide to point that out. No, you're not a test subject, you're dead."

Tightening her grip, she began to drag the corpse once more. "I don't mean now, of course. Anyone can see that you're dead. What you don't know is that you're dead the moment they drag you through that doorway over there," she told the dead woman, pointing at the door with her chin.

Reaching the trap door, she let go of the woman and opened it. Turning back, she knelt down beside the body and smiled. "It's better this way, really. You don't have to deal with the Dark Man and his perversions. And you don't have to worry about the Pale Creature's gaze boring into your soul, since you don't have one anymore."

She smiled again when she saw a tentacle reach up through the trap door. "Oh, good. He's here. I do so hate to drop you through all alone. Don't worry, he'll know how to take care of you," she said as the tentacle wrapped around the arm of the corpse and slowly dragged it down through the hole. "There are others down there, and more will join you soon. You won't be lonely," she offered comfortingly.

When the body disappeared, she closed the door and sat back with a pleased sigh.

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## The Johansens (Dec 25th)...

Harry and Hermione decided to walk the distance from the manor to the Johansens. It really wasn't that far and the day had turned out to be sunny and chilly, but free of rain. They didn't plan on staying long with the Johansens, as they still had their own Christmas dinner to attend back at the manor.

Hermione snuggled a little closer to Harry. It had been a good morning as far as she was concerned. He had woken her early so they could get breakfast ready for everyone, including the elves attached to the manor. Dobby and Winky had warned the other elves about the Master's strange ideas, but they were still shocked when Harry started baking the buns and cooking up bacon and sausages.

Hermione, to her own credit, had helped with the cooking, but Harry kept a watchful eye on her. She had come to the regretful conclusion that she was not meant to be a good cook. She'd told him so rather grumpily when he'd awakened, but he'd only smiled his lopsided smile and dragged her out of bed anyway.

Slowly people came down from their rooms to find breakfast ready, and the kitchen table expanded to include the dozen elves who stayed full time at the manor. With the exception of Dobby and Winky, every elf looked very uncomfortable.

After breakfast, Harry and Hermione had given the elves small medallions with the Potter crest and the name of each elf engraved on it. Then they retired to the parlor where the Christmas tree stood.

Hermione smiled and hugged Harry's arm as they walked. She knew he could afford to buy all sorts of things for her, but that wasn't what she wanted. She wasn't interested in things, but what he did give her, moved her to tears. He had made a substantial donation to the Library of Alexandria in her name. And he had purchased a small silver tea service from Tiffany's that was charmed to always be ready to serve hot tea. He knew of her midnight tea runs. She refused to ask an elf to bring her a cup, and now she wouldn't have to get it herself.

Harry smiled when she hugged his arm. It had been an excellent day and he thought it was only bound to get better when they visited the Johansens. Hermione loved her tea set, and the donation he had made. He was surprised by Sheik Alim's response, but it intrigued him and he couldn't wait to try it out.

The Sheik had sent a special reply to his donation that he'd timed to arrive yesterday. Dobby had placed it under the tree, so it turned out to be a complete surprise to both Harry and Hermione. Harry had made a donation of one hundred thousand galleons to the Library's reconstruction efforts and promised a similar donation, in name of Hermione Potter, for the next ten years. He set up a special account at Gringotts to cover it. The Sheik's reply was to name Hermione an official Librarian with rights and access to the Library anytime she visited. She'd acted like a child who'd been given the keys to the candy store when she'd seen the reply.

More interesting to Harry was the flying carpet the Sheik had sent to him. He couldn't wait to try it out and from the look on Remus and Draco's faces, they, too, were itching to give it a try.

He stepped up to the front door at the Johansens and knocked.

Inga opened the door and looked surprised. "Oh my. Come in, come in out of the cold. Let me call Mama, she will be so pleased to see you both!" she gushed.

In the living room was a small tree with some home made ornaments on it. Fred and George Weasley were busy adding new decorations as the children directed their efforts. Fred turned and waved when he spotted the pair.

"It's Harry Potter!" shouted Robert.

A dozen heads turned to stare at Harry, and Hermione suppressed the urge to laugh.

Olga bustled into the room, drying her hands on a towel. "Happy Christmas!" she said, rushing over to them. "Would you stay for dinner?"

Harry smiled and shook his head. "We can't, but we have some news, and some gifts we wanted to drop off. For the children," he said in a whispered.

Olga's eyes misted and she dabbed at them with her towel. "Oh, you shouldn't have..."

Hermione put her hand on Olga's arm. "We know, but it's for the children. Please?"

Olga stared at them for a moment, then she nodded. "Thank you," she whispered. She turned and clapped her hands, getting everyone's attention. "Children, Lord Potter and his lovely wife have shown up with some presents!"

"PRESENTS!" screamed the kids.

Olga led Harry and Hermione over to a love seat, then she sat down on a nearby chair. Sven walked into the room and sat down in a beat up looking recliner. He reached over and picked up his pipe, watching with a smile.

Harry reached into his pocket and pulled out a canvas sack, which quickly expanded.

"How about the littlest to the oldest?" Harry asked to the crowd of hopeful children. "Wait, where's Johan?"

A strapping blond boy stepped forward. For a second year, he was very tall. "I'm Johan," he said quietly.

Harry took a book from the bag and gave it to him. "That's the instructions for one of the gifts in here. Since you're the wizard, you'll have to read that and set them up for your parents."

Johan looked at the book and nodded. He was still coming to grips with his enlarged family and this would make him more important to all of them.

"I'm sure Fred and George will be happy to help as well," offered Hermione.

Harry pulled out a large red box next and opened it, revealing twelve wands painted bright red. "These are training wands just like the Yanks use," he said to Olga and Sven. "Each child gets a wand, and Johan will be able to set what the wand can and can't do. They really are quite limited, but it's a good learning aid for the young witch or wizard."

Robert reached into the box and pulled out a wand. He swished it and it spewed bright sparkles. That was all that was needed to create a stampede for the box. Suddenly the room was filled with bright sparkles and laughter. Harry wasn't sure who was having more fun, the children or Fred and George, who conjured balloons, which exploded when hit by a sparkle.

Olga smiled as little Linda waved her wand for her.

Harry pulled a large square box from the bag and handed to Hermione. She looked at him curiously, then walked over to Linda and knelt down.

"Linda, Mrs. Potter has something for you," Olga said.

The little girl turned and looked at Hermione with wide eyes. She looked at Olga for confirmation, then she shyly took the box from Hermione. She placed the box on the floor and started to tear at the wrappings. She got down to the box and looked up at Hermione questioningly. The side of the box had a picture of a dragon on it.

The box shook and Linda took a step backwards, but with everyone smiling at her, she gathered her courage and stepped forward again. She grabbed one side and pulled the box open. There was a puff of smoke from within the box and out stepped a stuffed, purple dragon.

The dragon looked around the room, puffing smoke. Then he spotted Linda, who sat down in front of him. He unfurled his wings and flew up to land on her shoulder. She giggled and turned to Hermione, throwing her arms around her neck.

Harry chuckled and motioned to George, who carefully stepped over the children. "Hand out the rest of this stuff, George. Each item is labeled and you'll find six training broom at the bottom that they can share. I need to talk to Sven."

George nodded and took the bag from Harry.

Harry stood and looked at Mr. Johansen. "Can I speak with you in the kitchen for a moment, Sven?"

"Ya, sure, Mr. Potter," he said, standing and leading Harry from the room

Once in the kitchen, he turned to Harry. "I want to thank you. The little ones are so happy now. Olga and I did what we could, but it was hard," he said with a shrug.

"Yes, and that's what I need to speak with you about, Sven. You see, Amelia found an old law on the books. It's over six hundred years old and it's never been repealed. The law was a result of one of the many Goblin uprisings. The long and short of it is, the Ministry, starting in January, is going to give you a credit of twenty five galleons per child, per month, Sven," Harry said softly.

The door swung open and a wide-eyed Olga, who'd obviously been eavesdropping, entered. "Is this true? Why would a law say such a thing?"

Harry leaned against the counter. "The law is quite old, like I said, but it passed after a war in which many orphans were left homeless and the Ministry wanted people to take the children into their homes. It was meant to help offset the cost of raising them."

Sven looked at Harry carefully. "This law is real? You are not making this up, like when you tried to get me to accept a salary for being Mayor?"

"I give you my word, Sven, it's a real law," Harry said fervently. He wasn't going to tell him that Amelia had people search the records for mention of the law. She had been ready to issue a ministerial decree, if necessary. Harry was glad the law had been found. Sure, they'd stretched it a bit, but it was for a good cause and the Johansens would not fight against a law.

"It's the law, Mama," Sven said seriously to Olga. "Mr. Potter would not fool us."

Olga nodded and dabbed her eyes with her towel again.

"Well, that's the news I had. Hermione and I are due back at the manor soon."

"Oh no, not yet you don't," Olga muttered. Bustling to a cupboard, she pulled out a plate, upon which she placed a generous portion of her hot strudel for Harry to take back with them. When he took the plate from her, she smiled and held the door open for him.

Entering the sitting room once more, he resisted the urge to roll his eyes.

Fred and George were busy playing Harry Potter and the Death Eaters. Robert and Brendan were sitting on floating brooms, trying to shoot



sparkles at Fred and George, who had stolen their robes into black cloaks. Several of the younger kids sat off to one side, watching a game of Wizard's chess.

Hermione laughed at Harry's response.

Little Linda was trying to convince her dragon to attack the black cloaked figures. It paced back and forth in front of her, ready to protect her from the red headed Death Eaters. Every so often the dragon would snort and a puff of smoke would shoot in their direction.

Shaking his head with laughter, Harry gathered up Hermione so they could return to the manor and their own Christmas dinner.

Stepping out onto the porch at the Johansens Harry noticed Hermione shiver slightly. The temperature had dropped again the clouds were rolling in.

"Cold?"

She nodded and pulled her cloak around her tightly. He stepped over to her and wrapped his arms around her. She looked up at him and before she could meet his gaze they were standing in the foyer of the manor. She blinked in surprise and he winked at her, then leaned down to kiss her forehead. "Love you," he whispered to her.

She snuggled a little closer to him, even though they were back in the warm manor. A pop behind them heralded the arrival of a house elf, who stood patiently waiting to help them remove their cloaks.

"Master and Misses be back at the right time. Dinner will be ready soon. Most of the family be in the sitting room waiting for your returns," said the little elf.

Harry released Hermione reluctantly, then he helped her remove her cloak before taking off his own. He handed both to the elf, then headed towards the sitting room.

"So how did it go?" asked Emma excitedly.

"Very well," Hermione replied with a huge grin. "They were so adorable, and the little girl loved her dragon."

Harry nodded and sat in a high backed armchair facing the fire.

"Harry? Did Sven give you much of a fight? You never said," Hermione asked.

"No, Amelia was right. Finding that law did the trick and it will solve their problem. I am just kicking myself. We should have done that much earlier. It never occurred to me, though."

"You can't see, or solve, all the problems in the world, Harry," Emma chided. "Just be thankful that this is one problem you could help solve."

Harry nodded thoughtfully.

"So," Dan said teasingly. "How did Harry do playing Santa Claus?"

"He did quite well for a first time," Hermione said, her eyes sparkling. "I think he'll do even better when it's his own children."

Harry blushed and looked at her appraisingly. He opened his mouth to retort, but Dobby appeared with a pop.

"Master Harry, dinner is being ready in the main dining room."

"Thank you, Dobby. Shall we go have dinner?" he asked the others.

Everyone stood and followed him into the dining room, where they took their seats. Neville and Ginny were over at her father's cottage and Terry and Susan were eating at Amelia's, but there were still nine of them at the table.

Once they sat down, four elves scurried around putting food on the table and pouring drinks. Dobby stood off to one side, watching them carefully to make sure nothing went wrong.

Dan lifted a crystal champagne flute that had just been filled. "Happy Christmas everyone," he toasted.

Harry lifted his glass to the toast and sipped. He still avoided alcoholic drinks as much as possible.

"*One drink won't hurt, you know.*" Hermione sent him.

"*You're probably right, but I remember last year very well. I really didn't like that out of control feeling,*" he replied, reminding her that her own father had gotten him drunk around the holidays last year.

He picked up the platter of meat and held it while Hermione took a slice and put it on her plate. He was reaching for a few slices with his fork when a house elf popped in next to his chair.

"Master Harry, Master Hairyhead is at the front door asking to see Miss Luna," said the elf.

Luna giggled.

Harry looked at Luna, who smiled dreamily at his confused expression. "She means Professor Hagrid," she told him softly.

Hermione choked on her drink and scrambled to find her napkin before she sprayed those at the table. Harry patted her back until the coughing fit had passed.

"Master Hairyhead? They call Hagrid Hairyhead?" she asked incredulously.

Luna frowned at the brunette. "It could have been worse, Hermione, and it's a little unkind of you to say anything bad about Hagrid. Before you got together with Harry, the elves had a most unkind name for you."

Hermione dropped her eyes. She knew Luna was probably right. Before she began to date Harry, she had spent most of her free time trying to trick elves into freedom. "I'm sorry, Luna. You're right," she whispered. Harry reached and caressed her aura comfortingly and she shivered slightly. His presence and actions comforted her. She had grown up a lot in the past year, but it hadn't been without cost.

"Please ask Hagrid to join us," Harry said to the elf, then he conjured a chair strong enough to hold Hagrid's weight and placed it at the table.

"Hagrid," Harry said, standing and smiling when the big man entered the room. "Happy Christmas!"

"Hello everyone, Happy Christmas Harry, Hermione. I wasn' plannin' on droppin' by today, but a bit o' an emergency made me change my plans fer today."

Harry walked over and guided Hagrid to his seat. "Nonsense, you'll join us won't you? We have plenty and you're more than welcome here anytime, you know that."

Hagrid stood over the table, eyeing the food hungrily. He had missed the Christmas feast at the school. "Oh why not," he said. "I could stand a hot meal today. It's right chilly outside today." He sat and an elf immediately popped in and placed a plate and tableware in front of him, then another elf arrived with a large goblet and a platter with drumsticks.

Harry blinked and wondered why they had ten drumsticks. He shook his head and wondered about the Wizarding world. He took his seat with a happy smile. He counted Hagrid as his first friend in the Wizarding world and was very pleased to have him over for Christmas dinner.

"You said something about an emergency, Hagrid?" asked Hermione.

"Oh, I clear forgot! Professor Sprout contacted me early this mornin' to tell me about a break in to greenhouse number two. She had examined the greenhouse completely an' she was sure it wasn' a student at fault. The only thin' missin' was some fluxweed."

As he spoke, everyone stopped eating to watch the large man. His tale was interesting, but it was his great coat that had caught their attention. Every so often his coat would move all by itself and it make a soft whirring noise, like a mechanical drill on low speed.

"Anyway, I spent the day lookin' over the area an' settin' a few traps to catch the culprit. When I did, I immediately thought o' Miss Luna. She be the only one capable o' carin' fer this little criminal, ya see."

Hagrid started patting down his pockets and the whirring sound increased in intensity. Finally finding the right pocket, he pulled out the strangest looking creature. It looked like a white lamb, except that it was only six inches long. It had a prehensile tail that added another foot to its length and a single gnarled horn jutted up from between its eyes.

Luna took one look at it and bolted up from her chair, knocking it over. The chair fell with a loud crash and the little creature made a mewling sound and vanished from sight.

"Where did it go?" asked Dan in alarm.

"Still there. Half a moment," Hagrid replied. "Come on, little fellow, no one's gonna hurt yeh. I'm goin' to give yeh to someone tha' will take good care o' yeh from here on out."

A pair of eyes blinked and looked at Hagrid. From its position it was obvious that it was hanging upside down from one of Hagrid's fingers. The eyes were the only thing visible on the creature.

"Meep whirr?" It sounded like a question, and it took a moment for those in the room to realize it had come from the creature.

Luna approached it slowly. She made a soft cooing sound and the eyes turned to look at her. There was a popping sound and the creature appeared on Luna's neck, fully visible again. Luna cuddled and whispered to it, a tear running down her cheek.

"Hagrid, what is it?" asked Hermione, her eyes wide. She had never heard of such a strange creature before.

Hagrid blinked and looked down at Hermione with a slight frown. "Now Hermione, had yeh only stayed in my class, yeh would've discovered tha's a Crumpled Horned Snorkack. Mighty rare they are, too. Make fer good familiars an' companions, if one chooses yeh. Their ability to apparate an' go invisible make 'em highly prized as a potion ingredient too," he replied, his frown deepening.

Luna shot Hermione a smug, 'I told you so' look and went back to cuddling her Snorkack. She walked back to her seat and a house elf fixed her chair. The elf spotted the creature and popped away. A moment later it returned with what looked like a bowl of popcorn for it.

With another meeping whirr, the Snorkack dropped off Luna's neck and approached the bowl, examining it greedily.

The little Snorkack tore into the bowl of popcorn ravenously. As it did, the whirring sound increased in pitch and volume.

Luna laughed and caressed the little creature.

“What will you name him? Or is it a her?” asked Harry.

“It’s a her, Harry,” Luna said in a serious tone. The little Snorkack looked up from her bowl and meeped before going back to eating.

“I was calling it Fuzzball,” murmured Hagrid.

Luna turned to Hagrid and beamed at him. “Fuzz! That’s a wonderful name! Fuzz it is.”

Hermione simply stared at Luna and the creature she’d never believed in. She could vaguely feel Harry’s amusement bubbling over their bond. Finally she turned a gimlet eye on her husband. He was watching her and grinning broadly. In fact, he wasn’t the only one watching her. She shook her head and stared at her plate. She couldn’t deal with all of them at once. But there was one she could deal with right now.

*“If you want to spend the rest of the week sleeping on the love seat in our bedroom, keep smiling, mister. So, I made a mistake and didn’t believe in Luna.”*

Harry’s expression immediately changed. “Sorry,” he replied all trace of amusement gone.

Dan snickered. He was all too familiar with the look on Harry’s face, having worn it a few times himself. His expression had ‘busted’ written all over it.

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### **Ballincollig, County Cork, Ireland (Dec 31st)...**

Albus Dumbledore opened the window and stepped back, allowing the large bird to enter, carrying a small parcel. The bird landed on the small desk and he removed the package, freeing the animal to leave. He ignored the bird as it flew out his window, too busy casting several powerful detection charms on the package to notice its departure.

He frowned when he came up positive for a curse, but he couldn’t tell what kind. Scowling, he levitated the attached letter away from the package and recast his detection charms. The letter came up clean. Smiling, he holstered his wand and opened the letter.

*Albus,  
No doubt by now you know that the package is cursed, though not by my hand. I have found the item that you asked for and it’s inside the package. Mind you, the Arch has always tested positive for a curse, although no one knows what curse it contains.*

*The Arch was in the possession of the Zabini family, a powerful and influential family here in Sicily. How they got their hands on it is unclear, but they had been holding onto the Arch ever since the Nazi occupation of the island. It’s reputation was well known. Because of that, they were quite willing to part with the Arch for a very reasonable price.*

*Albus, I don’t need to remind you that this is a dangerous artifact. If you are to believe the Israelis, the Arch is cursed by Divine magic. I have found it for you, my friend, but I would recommend being cautious using it.  
Luigi Flimflamari*

Dumbledore smiled and waved his wand at the package. The wrapping fell away, revealing a small golden square that seemed to glow in the afternoon sun. Albus giggled and nodded to himself. Now he wouldn’t have to resort to his backup plan to lure Harry out of Haven. He would use the Arch to go to him.

He danced a little jig over to his desk. Next to his Arch was a small crystal, which he tapped three times with his wand. The crystal started to chime, sending the alert signal to his mercenaries.

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### **Haven (Jan 1st)...**

Dumbledore led his men up to the edge of the wards surrounding the region. He looked at them carefully. What people didn’t know was that his spectacles were charmed to allow him to see things like invisibility cloaks, or wards. He was able to locate the ward edge without a problem and bring his men up to just shy of the edge.

“Bring up the Arch,” he hissed, frowning. The Arch was fairly wide, but it wouldn’t cover all of the wards.

Slowly the Arch was pushed into the wards, making a hole. He had his men carefully place the Arch so that the bulk of the wards were breeched, with only a few minor wards existed outside of it. He was sure the remainder of the wards were only minor ones. He was positive that they wouldn’t trigger them.

He was wrong.

Once it was in place, Dumbledore strode through. He felt a strange tingle and wondered once again about the curse of the Arch and what it was capable of. He waved and his men followed him through.

They had placed the Arch so that they were closer to the manor house than they were to the town. Dumbledore, during his brief stay in Haven, had

scouted out the area so he knew where he wanted to go.

He took one looked around and then led his mercenaries up the road towards the manor in the distance.

In the town of Haven, an alarm rang, startling the duty constable. He bolted to his feet and looked up at a large map that was blinking an ominous red. The map showed a ward breach at a point close to Lord Potter's manor.

The rules for this were simple. The constable turned and faced a large board. He muttered a charm and the board lit up like a Christmas tree as it activated and began sending automated alerts to the Irish Aurory, the hospital and the Operations Center. In the distance, a siren sounded, waking people. Block wardens quickly donned their uniforms and rushed outside. It was their job to get the families to the shelters.

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### **Padfoot Manor...**

At the manor, Harry was just climbing into bed. Hermione had been asleep for over an hour, but he had stayed awake dealing with some correspondence he had fallen behind on. He had just pulled the covers up and laid down when Padfoot broke from his arm and started pacing the room, growling.

Harry rolled over. "Wake up, Hermione," he said urgently.

"Hunh... whazdamatta?" she asked sleepily.

*"Wake up, I think we're under attack."* he sent her.

"Dobby!" he called next.

Dobby appeared with a pop, blinking sleepily at Harry, then he frowned, seeing Padfoot pacing and growling menacingly.

"There's no time to explain, Dobby. Wake up everyone and have them meet at the master stairway. I think the manor is about to be attacked," the young man told him quietly.

Dobby's eyes widened and he vanished.

Harry rolled out of bed and transfigured his clothing into the combat fatigues he was used to. Without thinking, he did the same for Hermione. She blinked in surprise and rolled out of the bed.

He walked over to the window cautiously and looked out.

*"Shit! Hermione, it looks like we have fifty or more people creeping up on the manor. Go get your parents and stay with them."*

*"No! I'll get them to portkey to the Operations Center. I'm not leaving you!"*

Out on the lawn, the men spread out in a skirmish line. They were barely a hundred yards away from the manor.

The large house rocked with the force of an explosion and Harry staggered before recovering.

"Fine. Get with your parents and be safe," he hissed, then he rushed from the room. As he left, he let the tightly held leash on his power slip free and his body exploded with aural light. Padfoot trotted at his heels, hackles up and teeth bared.

If the men attacking his home were looking for a fight, he was in just the mood to give them one.

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### **Haven Operations Center...**

The alarm echoed through the empty halls of the Operations Center. The duty officer in the war room glanced up at map of Haven and the surrounding area. He could see the spot where the wards had been breached, and Lord Potter's manor blinking a bright orange.

He frowned. "Is that confirmed?"

"Yes, it's confirmed. The constables are evacuating the families even as we speak," said one of the aides, glancing up from her portable floo.

"Contact Deputy Minister Newman. Inform him of the situation and tell him I'm sending..." the Duty officer paused and looked over a large board listing which units were assembled at the moment. "The Saudis. Yes, tell him I'm sending the Saudis. Ask for permission to issue a unit recall."

The aide nodded and turned to mumble into her floo again.

In another part of the building, the unit of Saudi cavalry were abruptly awoken. Told that Lord Potter's home was being attacked, they were given orders to repel the attackers at all costs.

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### **Padfoot Manor...**

Harry stumbled again on the stairway and he clung to the banister for support. From the foyer below he could hear Remus casting curse after curse and he quickened his pace, not caring if he damaged his leg getting down the stairs.

Before he reached the foyer, there was a bright flash and an explosion. He blinked his eyes and tried to readjust his vision. After-images danced like spots in his vision, but he was sure there was someone laying on the floor in the foyer. He could still hear Remus casting though.

He reached the foyer and crouched down before moving forward. The body was that of one of the house elves. He scowled and joined Remus.

"Nice of you to join us," Remus said between gritted teeth.

"Are you alright?" Harry asked.

"I am, but I'm not sure about Tonks," Remus replied brokenly, then he pointed to a still form on the porch. Remus and Tonks had been out visiting and enjoying the New Years eve parties being thrown in the village. Obviously they had picked the wrong time to come home.

Harry growled and leaned around the door jamb, launching a bludgeoning spell at a figure. The figure saw the spell and immediately cast a shield.

Harry's spell crashed through it, sending the man shooting backwards and up. As he flew skyward, screaming, the combatants all paused to watch. Later, his body would be found more than eight miles from the scene of the battle.

Spells began to rain down on the attackers from the upper windows, yanking the attention of those below back to the fight at hand.

To the surprise of the defenders, several elves joined in the fight, hurtling household objects at the attackers.

From around the back of the house came a ululating cry and flashes of light. The Saudis stormed around the building, their fire breathing camels at full gallop.

Dumbledore's mercenaries recoiled in surprise and shock. It was bad enough that the odds had swung against them. But dealing with fire breathing camels carrying wizards who were brandishing scimitars was a bit much.

"Allahu Akbar!" cried the commander of the Saudi forces, standing in his saddle and waving his scimitar. "Death to the invaders! For Allah and Lord Potter!"

Harry growled to himself and he moved out onto the porch. "Remus, get Tonks out of here, now." he snapped, stepping over her body.

He cast a wide field stunner taking down ten men and Remus lifted his wife into his arms and ducked back into the manor.

And then Harry saw him. One man with a soft visible aura fighting among the others.

The Saudis hit the flank of the mercenaries and their scimitars flashed red with spilled blood. Camels snorted flame and men screamed as they burned.

"DUMBLEDORE!" Harry shouted thunderously.

Dumbledore turned from the cavalry. Spotting Harry, he stepped forward, his eyes gleaming insanelly. "Potter, my dear boy. So nice to have you join us tonight," he said in a grandfatherly tone. Then his eyes narrowed. "Sectumsempra!" he snarled.

Spell light arced across the distance and Harry negligently batted it away with his staff. "Plumbeus latuseris," he murmured contemptuously, point his staff.

Dumbledore's eyes widened and he shielded before flinging himself to the ground. The curse shattered his shield and grazed him slightly. He climbed to his feet unsteadily and glared at Harry. He coughed once and wiped the blood from his lips.

A second wand appeared in the old man's free hand and he smiled madly. "Diffendo! Flipuendo!" he shouted, casting from both wands.

Harry sidestepped both curses and fired back with a *Reducto* r that exploded at his enemy's feet.

Albus staggered backwards a good five feet and fell, bleeding heavily from one leg.

"Surrender, Dumbledore!" shouted Harry. He hated the man, but he didn't want to kill him. It would be better to bring him to justice.

When Dumbledore climbed to his feet, giggling like a lunatic, Harry stood, dumbstruck. Was the man mad?

The very idea so shocked him that he stood in place while Dumbledore fired off a cutting hex, aimed for his chest.

Harry dodged at the last minute, but was still clipped on the arm by the edge of the hex.

While Harry and Dumbledore dueled, other people from the manor entered the fight.

Narcissa worked frantically on Tonks, with a distraught Remus standing nearby, guarding them both.

Draco and Luna rushed outside.

Hermione had decided to use one of the upper floor windows. Her curses were slamming down on the mercenaries like rain. This was no duel and

She knew it. What she aimed at, she killed.

Padfoot roamed through the ranks of the mercenaries, hamstringing his victims before tearing out their throats.

Other animal assistance came, surprisingly, from Luna's Snorkack. Fuzz exploded from around her neck with a high pitched whine, and the creature grew to an enormous size before landing. The Snorkack hit the ground running, tearing up a furrow in the manicured lawn that fountained behind it. It hit one mercenary and the man went down with a gargled scream.

With the man down, the creature paused, then whirred it's way to another.

So busy were Dumbledore and Harry, neither noticed that the mercenaries were being effectively driven back by the Saudis, Padfoot, and a Snorkack named Fuzz. Another group of soldiers coming up from town would soon have them trapped against the wards.

"*Reducto*," Harry shouted.

Dumbledore swept his wand, causing one of his mercenaries to fly through the air, intercepting Harry's curse.

The old headmaster responded with a bludgeoning spell aimed at Harry's leg. The younger man dodged and sent a rock hurtling towards Dumbledore at supersonic velocities. The crack of the sonic boom knocked everyone off their feet.

Instinctively, Harry rolled and looked up. Dumbledore was climbing to his feet. As he did, he cast a healing spell on his shoulder using a piece of field healing that Harry knew to be extremely painful. Dumbledore stared at Harry with a maniacal gleam in his eyes.

"If I can't have you, no one will!" he shouted. "Avada Kedavra!"

Harry rolled desperately, trying to get out of the spell's path, but Dumbledore wasn't giving him a chance. He kept casting the killing curse at Harry, keeping him on the ground as he rolled this way and that, frantically trying to avoid being hit.

Angry and tired, Harry vanished from sight mid-roll and Dumbledore stopped, confused.

Then ground at Albus' feet exploded, throwing him back. He came down hard on his back and he blinked in confusion, wondering what had happened and where he was. He tried to shake the grogginess from his head, but it was getting worse.

Harry's explosive hex had torn away his right leg at the knee and he was bleeding out quickly. Dumbledore raised his wand and cast a cauterizing charm, stemming the flow of blood, then he fell back weakly on the grass.

A strange shape moved over him, great yellow eyes staring down at him.

"MEEP WHIRR!"

"Fuzz!" Luna screamed.

Harry stepped from the treeline, exhausted. The fight would have been a simple thing if he'd only wanted to kill the former headmaster. But he wanted to capture the man and let him stand trial for his crimes. That placed restrictions on him and drew out the duel.

He looked at where Dumbledore lay and blinked in surprise. Then he rushed to the old man's side.

Fuzz had already dealt the death blow and now crouched nearby, watching her victim with bright, glowing eyes.

Dumbledore lay choking on his own blood, his throat torn open. Two pairs of eyes met, one green and hardened by combat, the other blue and drowning in insanity and death.

Harry knelt down next to him. "You should have surrendered, old fool," he whispered. "I never wanted you to go out this way."

Dumbledore's eyes flickered and his lips moved silently for a moment, then he lay still, his eyes slowly glazing over with death.

Harry looked up to see that the Saudis had corralled the remaining mercenaries, all twenty of them, and were disarming them. Padfoot walked among them, growling. Nearby, Luna was soundly scolding a Snorkack that looked to be nearly as big as she was. As she scolded Fuzz, it mewled and quickly shrank back to normal size, looking ashamed and, oddly, a bit sheepish.

She bent over and scooped up the little creature in one hand. "That's it. No more battles for you! Look at you! You need a bath, you're covered in mercenary blood and entrails. What have I told you about that? When will you learn? Don't you know you might get hurt?"

Luna walked back to the manor and out of hearing, still clutching her precious Snorkack.

Harry turned and spotted his wife and father-in-law approaching. Hermione averted her eyes from the corpse of her former headmaster.

"Is everyone alright? No one else hurt besides Tonks?" he asked anxiously.

"Kitty was killed. And another elf, Feeder I think, was injured, but he'll be fine. Tonk was hit with a organ shattering curse. They rushed her to the hospital and managed to counter it in time. She'll be laid up for a few days. What about you? You're bleeding." Dan pointed out.

Harry shivered and glanced at his arm. "It's just a scratch," he murmured, then he looked down at Dumbledore and shivered again. "I didn't want to kill him. I tried to get him to surrender."

Hermione took his hand. "Come, love. Let's get you inside and warmed up. O'Dalley will be here soon and he'll want to talk to you," she said quietly.

Harry nodded and let his wife lead him back towards the manor, where elves were already gathering to repair the front of the building.

Dan looked around at the large front lawn littered with bodies and torn up grass thrown up by Fuzz. Padfoot broke off from the mercenaries and trotted over to Harry and Hermione. Dan looked down at Dumbledore then. He hadn't known the man, except through the reports of others and a few, very brief, encounters. He bent over and closed the old wizard's eyes, then he turned to join his daughter and her husband.

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### **Author's Notes:**

Alyx stared hard at Bob and put her hands on her hips. "What the hell are you doing?"

Bob looked up from digging the hole in Alyx's flowerbeds. "What?"

"Why are you digging a hole in my garden?"

Bob looked back and forth a few times before he motioned her closer. "It's a secret," he whispered when she leaned down.

Alyx ground her teeth and clenched her fists. "Tell me now or I'll bring out my FPIA!"

Bob cringed. All husbands knew about the FPIA and feared it. A wife with a Frying Pan of Infinite Attacks was an unstoppable force.

Sighing, his shoulders slumped in defeat. "I'm digging a mass grave. I'm gonna kill all those people who seem to think we're gonna bring back Ron or Molly or any of the other characters we've gone to the trouble of killing off!"

Thinking quickly, she nodded in agreement and holstered her FPIA. "Move over. You're not doing this right," she murmured, then she jumped down into the hole with Bob.

We're pleased to bring back Dumbledore in this chapter... but this is also the last anyone will see of him.

Crys: There's a considerable difference between what someone thinks and what they say. Amhar's internal dialog can get quite crude at times. It's enough to make me shudder. Also, I'm not sure Jeconais's use of the word obliterate was a mistake. It smacked too much of a good and deliberate word switch to me.

For the record, and if you haven't figured it out yet, the attack that occurred last chapter on the King and Prime Minister had nothing to do with Voldemort.

Jamie: If you ask for DA and SC to be reposting here one more time, you'll get your wish. Alyx and I will stop working on Sunrise and spend all our time reediting DA and SC, something that's bound to take several weeks. Then we'll give your email address to all the people who want to complain about the lack of updates to Sunrise. Isn't that nice of us? We thought so. Seriously though folks, for the last time, DA and SC MIGHT get posted over here if we ever find the time to go back and edit it. In it's current condition, it's not fit for this site. Now, please stop asking.

Musings: We took Harry from the room because we wanted to drive home the idea that while everyone may orbit Harry, they are people unto themselves. Harry may be the main character in the story, but he isn't the only character. Showing characters apart from the main allows an author to flesh out the characters and breath life into them.

Patches: Trenton Largo is one of the Wizengamot members who is firmly backing the Ministry and the war effort.

Matthew: Harry's self esteem issues have gotten a lot better over the course of this series, but will still occasionally come back to bite him in the ass. This is one of those times where he can say he believes one thing, and his heart believes another. I don't think someone who has lived through the abuse like Harry has (in our story, let's not start a canon debate over this issue!), will ever be fully over it. He'll come close, but never fully recover.

Jackattack: The Bare was intentional. And if you think we're being presumptuous you are welcome to take your opinions to another story. We started off the blooper series with one from our own work, after all.

AlleyKittyKitty: It's good to wonder. People should exercise their brain more often!

DAUFahnder: We're sorry that this story has gotten too difficult for you to follow. We hope you find a story you can enjoy!

Princess Fictoria: Now that would be telling, wouldn't it?

### **BLOOPERS!!!!**

**He had faced Voldemort, Tom Riddle, a whole party of death eaters and all kinds of other danger before, but Ginny Weasley's words *shared* the shit out of him.**

Do I really need to point out the error here? This one sounds messy.

**Moments later he felt at least twenty Killing Curses being thrown at him and all of the *furry* behind each of them.**

God, I love furry curses! Must be because of ferret boy.

**"Hey," he said in reply before leaning in and *claming* her lips.**

Now this sounds totally gross. Hey, any girls out there that want their lips clammed? What's next? Lobstering a butt? (Alyx here: Oh lord, the visuals on that one make me want to gouge out my eyes!)



*Bobmin*  
*FanficAuthors.net*

# Sunrise Over Britain

## Chapter 22 - Pregnancy, Snorkacks and Luna rocks

### Standard Disclaimer:

Amhar Coeur de Lion walked onto the stage with pride. Dumbledore was dead and therefore no longer useful for the disclaimers. Snape was on strike and we had killed off Ron Weasley.

He blinked and spotted the two beautiful women wearing string bikinis sitting in the large hot tub. Both women beckoned to him and one seductively peeled off her bikini top revealing an impressive, but perky set of amazing tatas. They had to be at least a D cup!

Amhar drooled and peeled out of his robe revealing an amazing speedo with the British Union Jack emblem imprinted on the bum. He started to walk towards the hot tub when Bob intercepted him. Bob handed him a Microphone and a slip of paper.

Amhar read the slip and scowled. "This is beneath my dignity! Don't you know who I am? I am Amhar Coeur de Lion, I am related to royalty!"

Bob whispered something in Amhar's ear and the man paled and started to tremble.

"Fine, I'll do it!" he snapped before turning towards the audience.

"The authors of this fiction deny any claims of ownership to Harry Potter, and the Harry Potter Universe. All characters from the Harry Potter universe are the property of JK Rowling. The only thing these authors lay claim to are the technicolor penguins," Amhar said.

Bob smiled at the man and backed away, granting him access to the hot tub.

Amhar slid joyfully into the water and smiled at the two women who immediately morphed into Crocodiles. Amhar screamed and the water turned red with blood.

"Reverse Boggart Crocs," whispered Bob to Alyx. "They turn into what you want the most before they eat you."

Alyx stared at the hot tub and paled seeing a white arm try to reach for the edge before being pulled back.

"You're twisted, you know that, don't you? Why did I marry you? And listen buster, I know from experience a D cup is anything but perky! The only perky D cup is a fake D cup. And just what is it with you men and your obsession with breasts? Do you see us girls obsessing over testicles? Do you?"

Bob looked up from staring at Alyx's chest. "Umm no?"

Alyx threw up her hands and stalked off stage muttering vile curses at her husband.

Harry looked confused by the whole matter. He turned to Hermione who was only a generous C cup and still perky. "Why don't you girls wonder about testicles? It would only be fair."

Hermione frowned. "Maybe if you shave them first Harry. Now let's get on with the story," she replied.

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### Sunrise over Britain

#### Chapter 22

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#### Naumburg Bandshell, Central Park South, New York City (Jan 1st), 7am Eastern...

Prime Minister Tony Blair stepped from the armored limousine and waved. Despite their hardened reputation, the people of New York City were not as callous as they were portrayed by the media. The mayor of New York had graciously organized a telethon in support of Britain and people braved the bitterly cold temperatures to offer what support they could.

Americans were behind the President in his belief that America could not allow Britain to suffer much longer. The media paraded experts and military pundits across the nation's television screens explaining the process and the problems involved.

One thing was known. The American military was still gearing up to take an active role. Few knew that behind the scenes the government had already stated that they, along with other allied nations, would be prepared to step in once the Wizarding problem had been resolved. No nation wanted to mix muggle armies with those capable of wielding magic.

While it was all excellent news for Mr. Blair, it left him with several undeniable facts. The first was that the fact of his country rested in the hands of a group of wizards and, in particular, one boy barely of age to be in the military. The second, and more important fact, and the one that brought him here today, was that the British Ministry in Exile was barely holding it's own.

Enough of Britain's gold stocks had been shipped out of the country before the fall to allow them to pay the salaries of those military forces still under British control, but that was about it. Blair knew that once Britain was free, the country would require vast amounts of aid to simply feed their own people once more, let alone rebuild the nation.

Britain had been regressed to the status of a third world nation nearly overnight. Blair knew the Americans and the United Nations stood ready to offer massive loans and material aid, but the more he could get people to donate, the less Britain would have to pay back. And that was the reason he was up at this ungodly hour.

The Prime Minister blinked several times as camera flashes fired off, creating a strobe light effect. The telethon had been going on for several hours now and he was astounded by the size of the crowd. Even with the near freezing temperatures, he estimated that there was nearly twenty thousand people present. He blinked again and shook his head. While Britain and American had a close, and rather unique relationship, this type of overwhelming support was something he hadn't expected.

Up on the stage, several British performers who had been working on Broadway when the country fell were doing a musical number.

Blair managed to take one step before his guard surrounded him and began to lead him to the back entrance to the bandshell.

One of the Prime Minister's men spoke into a lapel microphone, then frowned.

"Minister, the King's detail is reporting a delay caused by traffic. They don't expect to arrive for nearly an hour," said Carson, the chief of his protective detail.

Blair nodded in acknowledgment. The King had been loaned the use of a mansion in upstate New York and while it was suitable for his needs, it was a two hour drive to the city. They had looked into adding a helicopter landing pad, but the King had vetoed the idea. The people who'd loaned him use of their property were friends and he didn't want to ruin their property.

"Inform our hosts that the King will be delayed in his arrival, but that I can go on when they are ready," Blair replied.

The man nodded and spoke softly into his microphone.

Blair sat on a small stool, listening to the Master of Ceremonies, a young British Actor name Michael something or other. He had made a name for himself on Broadway in the last four years.

"Folks! It seems that, despite our best efforts, His Majesty is being delayed by another New York phenomenon, traffic!"

Blair chuckled along with the audience and shook his head.

"His Majesty will join us shortly. In the meantime, however, we're proud to bring out the Prime Minister, who will speak about the efforts required to rebuild the country after the war," said the MC.

The crowd murmured appreciatively and a stage manager waved frantically at Blair.

He stood and walked forward briskly. It was a slightly different venue than he was used to. The telethon experience was something he hadn't been involved with before.

He walked onto the stage with a wave. The MC sat on a stool and he waved for Blair to join him on another.. Behind them a huge screen lowered, showing photographs smuggled out of Britain.

Blair breathed a sigh of relief. Up until that moment, he hadn't been sure that someone wasn't going to make him do something embarrassing to entertain the people. No, from the look of it, all he was going to do was answer questions asked to him by the MC.

His security detail spread out around him, covering the front and back of the stage. Standing in the wings were four different men, ready to tackle their principle in order to keep him safe.

"Mr. Prime Minister, it is good to see you. First off, on the behalf of the people of New York, I want to thank you for taking the time from your busy schedule to talk with us today."

"Thank you, Michael, and thank you New York," Blair said with a wave at the crowd.

The crowd roared its approval.

"Mr. Blair, can you describe the current conditions under which our fellow subjects are enduring?"

Inwardly, Blair smiled. Actor or not, the man seemed to be intent on asking questions which would have people reaching for their wallets.

"Michael, the conditions our people are living under are terrible. There are only a few working power plants and most of that goes to the major cities. Many are scrambling for food and medicines. There are no basic services and a dawn to dusk curfew is in effect. Martial law has resulted in the summary execution of thousands..."

"AVADA KEDAVRA!" a hoarse voice rang out from the crowd.

Blair blinked in shock as a green beam hit Michael, the man slumped bonelessly to the stage. In an instant, his security detail sprang into action. Gunshots rang out. The noise was caught by the bandshell and echoed out to the crowd which recoiled in fear.

Blair saw another beam of green light heading towards him before he was hurled to the floor with a heavy mass laying on top of him. Then the world swirled and he was sure he was going to be violently ill.

A few who were on the stage at the time and looking in the right direction claimed that the Prime Minister vanished from sight when he hit the floor. But there was no time to analyze what they saw right then. Gunfire erupted as the Prime Minister's security detail, half muggle and half wizard, fought with the hit squad sent by Marne Murphy.

The crowd surged back in a complete panic. New York City police units placed calls for assistance and over the radios the sound of gunfire was clearly heard. The Prime Minister's driver, a member of Scotland Yard's Diplomatic Protection Group, placed a radio call, diverting the King to the nearest state police barracks, alerting the American government of the attack.

Up near the stage, five bodyguards and four wizards fought against six hit wizards. The bandshell had taken a number of explosive hexes and was in serious danger of collapse. It didn't help matters that two of the wizards would occasionally fire on the stampeding crowd in order to add to the panic. The crowd was pushing the police back, keeping them from reaching the stage.

The stalemate at the bandshell lasted only a minute or two, then one of the DPG men got in a good burst from his UZI, killing two of the wizards.

The team leader for the hit squad glanced around and made his decision. His target was gone, two of his men were dead. There was no point in staying around. He wasn't a Death Eater, but his orders were clear.

"MOSMORDRE!" he shouted over the bandshell, then he apparated. The three remaining wizards followed him, leaving carnage and chaos behind. Voldemort's attack against the muggle government had failed.

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### **Haven Hospital...**

Melinda looked up from the end of shift paperwork she was filing as the alarm of an emergency incoming portkey shocked the calm silence of the emergency room.

Seeing that enough staff had assembled to handle just about any situation, she slid off her stool and moved a bit closer. It had been a slow night, with no known operations planned, so she was curious.

A moment later there was a whooshing sound of the arriving portkey. The volume of the sound indicated it had covered considerable distance. Melinda only caught a glimpse of two men on the floor before the staff surged forward. One man was levitated onto a stretcher, where a medi-witch placed a sheet over him. He was dead on arrival.

The second man stood and answered some of the questions being asked him in a voice which quavered slightly. Then he became violently ill. Several people ran diagnostic spells on him and came to the same conclusion; portkey vertigo.

The staff went back to their duties, leaving one healer with the man to ask the necessary questions and fill out the paperwork. As the crowd melted away, Melinda got her first real look at the man and gasped.

"Mr. Prime Minister?" she asked, rushing to his side. She had been introduced to him, but hadn't really had a chance to speak with him.

"Mrs... Mrs?"

"McKinney. Mrs. McKinney, sir. I don't know how you ended up here, but let me contact someone that can help." Turning away slightly, she called for Dilly, a little sharper than she'd intended.

Dilly appeared, looking nervous. She wasn't used to coming to the hospital, except to bring Melinda a meal or two. And Melinda had never called her like this before!

"Dilly do be here," she said anxiously. The little elf tugged nervously on the dress Melinda had convinced her to wear.

Melinda smiled at her. "Dilly, I need you to find Arthur. It's an emergency. He's to come to the hospital right away."

Dilly nodded and vanished with a pop.

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### **Padfoot Manor...**

Harry crawled into bed, tired and dirty. He didn't even have the energy to cast a quick cleaning charm. Hermione had fallen asleep a short while ago in a similar state.

He winced and waved a hand, closing the curtains on the afternoon sun that was starting to stream into the bedroom.

It had been a long night at the manor and no one had gotten any sleep. Following the fight with Dumbledore and his mercenaries, Harry had spent hours dealing with Michael O'Dalley and his Irish counterpart, a taciturn man named Bannon O'Keefe.

The attack had happened shortly after one in the morning, and thanks to the investigators, no one had been released or been able to get to bed until after eleven. Over nine hours of questioning was enough to try the patience of anyone, especially when they were exhausted.

Harry had been the last one released by the Aurors, having provided verbal testimony, as well as pensieve memories. O'Dalley had mentioned the strange device found which had opened a hole in the wards, but hadn't been able to provide Harry with an explanation.

Now, in the quiet peace of the bedroom, he closed his eyes and sighed in contentment.

"Master Harry! Master Harry! You need to be waking up please, Master Harry!"

Harry cracked one eye open, looked at the clock on the wall and nearly growled. He'd been asleep for just over an hour and his head felt as if it were stuffed with cotton. "Dobby, what's the emergency?" he mumbled, trying hard not to sound irritated.

"Master Harry, Minister Amelia is here with a special guest. She is asking if the guest can stay here, in one of your rooms, until tomorrow," Dobby replied, looking at him with wide, earnest eyes. He twisted his shirt in his hands, a gesture Harry knew came from his nervousness.

"Does Amelia want to talk to me?"

"I don't think so, Master Harry."

He yawned hugely, then turned over on his side. "Excellent," he murmured. "Put Amelia's guest in the blue room and make sure they're well cared for. Wake me in four hours and I'll check on them then."

Dobby nodded. "Yes, sir! Dobby take care of Prime Minister good for Master Harry. You see!" he cried, then he vanished with a pop.

He grunted in reply, not realizing the elf had left.

"Harry, what was that all about?" Hermione mumbled.

"Something about us putting the Prime Minister up for the night. It's nothing important. Go back to sleep," he replied sleepily.

When she moved closer to him and wrapped an arm around him, he smiled and mumbled something unintelligible before drifting off to sleep.

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## Haven...

Mr. Lovegood scanned the front page of The Paper one last time and nodded in satisfaction. The morning addition had been delivered a little late, due to last night's attack, but they'd gotten it out. It was a headline he was proud of.

### ***Wanted Fugitive Killed in Assault on Lord Potter. Albus Dumbledore killed by Snorkack!***

*This morning, in a daring raid by more than fifty wizards on Lord Potter's home, the internationally wanted fugitive, Albus Dumbledore, was killed when he encountered a Snorkack protecting it's family.*

*The attack occurred around one o'clock this morning. Michael O'Dalley, head of the Haven Constabulary, said that Dumbledore had hired a large group of mercenaries to assist him in assaulting the Manor house. They used an ancient and little known object called the Arch of Solomon to breach the wards. The Arch has been turned over to the Irish Department of Mysteries for analysis.*

*Once through the wards, the group attacked Lord Potter's manor, killing one house elf and wounding several others. During the fight, Harry Potter dueled with Dumbledore, wounding him severely. According to O'Dalley, Lord Potter was trying to maneuver Dumbledore into a situation that would force him to surrender. But no surrender was forthcoming. Lord Potter was lightly injured in the duel, receiving a mild cut to his arm, which was healed at the scene.*

*Albus Dumbledore was mortally injured in the duel, but had managed to cast a healing spell that might have allowed him to live if he received medical aid in time. But then he was killed by a Snorkack named Fuzz.*

*Snorkacks are very rare creatures of the light. Unlike some light creatures however, a Snorkack will use lethal force when protecting it's companion wizard. In this particular case, the Snorkack in question is bonded with Mrs. Luna Black, the daughter of the publisher of The Paper.*

*During last night's attack, Mrs. Black, along with Lord Potter and members of his household, defended the manor from assault by Dumbledore and his mercenaries. They successfully held off the larger group of attackers until help arrived in the form of the Saudi fire breathing cavalry...*

*The crimes of Albus Dumbledore, Page 2.*

*Harry Potter, separating the facts from the legend, Pages 3,4,5*

*Snorkacks! The truth the Ministry doesn't want you to know! Page 7*

*Snorgriiffs! The attempt by Voldemort to breed Hippogriffs and Snorkacks. Page 8*

*Centerfold pullout, A Snorkack named Fuzz. Four Page color spread!*

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## Office of the Minister for Magic, Haven...

"I don't care where the Minister is, you ignorant cow, I demand to see her! I am Councilor Coeur de Lion!" Amhar shouted angrily. In one hand he held a copy of The Paper, which he waved like a baton under the nose of the secretary.

Amelia was out of the office, leaving the witch to keep watch over matters.

Amhar turned and forth angrily. This was not a good thing to make a pregnant witch angry. Coeur de Lion found himself picked up and thrown through the door in a burst of accidental magic that broke every pane of glass in the building.

Amhar turned and leaned over the secretary's desk. "You will tell me where the Minister has gone, or you will regret it."

"Councilor, those words could be considered a threat," a chilly voice said from behind him.

Amhar spun around to find Amelia's niece staring at him coldly and his eyes narrowed. He wasn't going to take anything from the little bitch! She was part of Potter's Brotherhood.

"You will learn to keep your place, young lady, I don't know what kind of upbringing you've had, but clearly the Minister has not done right by you. Look at you! Pregnant like a common street whore. You couldn't even find yourself a decent husband. No, you had to sully your blood with a muggle born! You're a disgrace. A filthy, disgusting..."

Susan had been having a particularly difficult day, and she had reached the stage of her pregnancy where her magic was becoming unreliable. Thankfully, the stage didn't last long. However, for the duration of the two to three weeks it lasted, a pregnant witch found that her magic was largely out of her control.

Unfortunately for the councilor, Susan was just entering that stage in her pregnancy. Hearing his words, her eyes narrowed, and for a brief moment, her control slipped.

Amhar discovered the hard way what so many others knew. It was not a good thing to make a pregnant witch angry. Coeur de Lion found himself picked up and thrown through the door in a burst of accidental magic that broke every pane of glass in the building.

An alarm sounded somewhere nearby and Susan stared at Amelia's secretary in horror. Then her eyes filled with tears.

"I didn't... I mean... he was... I couldn't..." she babbled.

The middle aged secretary stood up and ran around her desk. She embraced Susan, trying to calm her. Waves of magic poured off the pregnant woman and the room groaned. Clouds of dust shifted down from the ceiling.

Immediately following her outburst, Harry and Hermione appeared. Harry had apparated them both, still in their pajamas, from the manor to the Ministry building.

Harry crouched low, his staff extended and glowing brightly. It took him a moment to realize he was standing in Amelia's office, dressed in only his boxers, and Hermione was wearing clothing only slightly more concealing. Harry concentrated for a moment, transfiguring Hermione's pajamas into a simple outfit and his boxers into jeans and a t-shirt that read: "*Did the aliens forget to remove Voldemort's anal probe?*"

Hermione, seeing Susan, rushed over to help the distraught woman. Harry looked around and spotted Amhar laying in a crumpled heap partially in the far wall, out in the corridor. He fought the impulse to grin but failed.

A moment later, Terry came hobbling through the door, his cane in one hand and his wand in the other. Behind him came most of the Brotherhood. He noted sourly that they had delayed long enough to throw on some clothing. *Why didn't I think of that?* he grumbled to himself.

Tonks probably would have shown up, but she was still in Haven Hospital. As it was, every other Brotherhood member had arrived, summoned inadvertently by Susan.

"What happened here?" Harry asked.

Amelia's secretary looked up. "It was councilor Coeur de Lion. He said some hateful things to Mrs. Boot, who was trying to protect me. The Minister is at the Operations Center dealing with an emergency, so it was just me in the office until Susan arrived. The councilor turned on Susan, calling her a whore, and said some other ugly things about her husband and his heritage. Susan lost control at that point."

Harry glanced to Susan, who Hermione, Ginny and Luna seemed to have managed to calm, then he glanced at Coeur de Lion, who was still partially embedded in the wall, though a healer was now examining him.

"*Will she be alright?*" Harry sent to Hermione.

"*I think so. She's just upset. She's reached the stage where her the control over her magic is a bit wonky. It doesn't last long, but it's a difficult time for a witch.*"

"*This is common? You knew about this?*" he asked incredulously, looking around the room with new eyes. He had never heard anything about this before.

"*Of course I knew about it!*" she snapped. "*Madam Pomfrey gave a lecture to all the girls near the end of our third year, explaining what happens to a witch during pregnancy. It's one of the reasons why it's so rare to find a witch pregnant out of wedlock. They need the support of a husband and family to help them through the time when they lose control of their magic.*"

"*I'm sorry, I never heard of such a thing,*" he replied contritely. "*What can we do for Susan?*"

"*Right now? She could do with a calming draught and Terry should take her home to the manor.*"

*I'll see about getting a draught from the healer who's dealing with our dear councilor,"* he told her.

She shuddered from the imagery Harry inadvertently sent her.

*"Harry! Don't kill him!"*

Harry winced. *"Yes, dear."*

He stepped from the office just seconds before Amelia rushed in. He limped over to the healer.

"Will he live?"

The healer looked up to see a pair of hard green eyes staring back at him. "Yes, he'll survive. He's just stunned."

"Pity that. He provoked a pregnant woman until her magic struck back at him. Do you have a calming draught on you? She could use it."

The healer's expression darkened. "Yes, I have one," he replied fumbling in his case. "Have her drink the whole thing, but keep her here until I can look her over. That was a powerful magical blast."

The healer pulled out a small brown vial and handed it to Harry, who nodded in thanks before leaving him with Amhar again.

Harry walked back into the outer office and over to Susan, who was now seated next to her husband, weeping softly. Terry held her hands, murmuring comfortingly to her.

Crouching down, Harry gave the vial to Terry, then looked at Susan. "No one blames you for what happened, you know. It was an accident. Terry has a potion that will help you. Drink it down and relax. The healer outside wants to make sure you haven't hurt yourself."

Susan smiled weakly at Harry and he patted her shoulder.

"Harry, Amelia wants to talk to us in her office."

Harry looked up to catch Hermione's eye. She was turning to follow Amelia and motioned for him to follow.

"Will you be alright?" he asked Susan as he stood up.

She sniffled a little and nodded. Terry was holding up the calming draught for her to drink. Luna, Emma and Ginny stood beside her. The men surrounded them all, bristling with suppressed anger and looking dangerous enough that no one risked getting too close.

Giving her shoulder a gentle squeeze, he turned away and followed Hermione into Amelia's office.

"Shut the door, Harry, please." Amelia said as she walked around her desk and sat down.

Harry shut the door, then collapsed into a chair next to Hermione. So far they had managed to get only a few hours sleep.

"You two look exhausted." Amelia observed.

"We are," Hermione replied, answering for them both. "I'm not sure what time Harry got to bed, but I know it was after me and I didn't get to bed until after eleven this morning. The Aurors and constables had a lot of questions about last night."

"I was a half hour or so behind you," Harry said tiredly. He glanced up at a wall clock and shook his head. It was just after four in the afternoon.

"I take it your guest is still sleeping?"

The Potter's exchanged a look.

"Guest?" asked Harry in confusion.

Amelia frowned. "Yes. I dropped him off around one this afternoon. The Prime Minister? Surely you remember?"

"I didn't dream that?" Harry asked himself in wonder. "Oh, bugger me."

"Harry, language!" Hermione admonished softly.

"Dobby!" Harry called, ignoring his wife.

Dobby appeared with a small pop. "Yous call, Master Harry?"

"Yes, Dobby. Erm, did we put someone up at the manor today?"

"Yes, Master Harry. You told me to send the Minister Man to the blue room. He's sleeping right now. We being watching him since Minister Amelia says he's a very important fellow," replied Dobby.

Harry leaned back on the chair in relief. "Alright, the Prime Minister is safe for the moment. Dobby and the others will protect him, if necessary. But I'll send a few of the Brotherhood back to the manor, just in case."

Standing, he walked back to the door and opened it. He motioned to someone unseen, then Draco came into view. He whispered something to the blond and his gray eyes widened for a moment. Then he nodded and moved away, motioning to someone else.

Harry watched for a moment, then turned and closed the door again. He moved to stand behind Hermione.

"Susan is going to be fine, Amelia. I don't think there will be any problems with the Prime Minister, but I've sent Draco and Neville back to the manor to watch over him. I think we both know why you called us in here. Councilor Coeur de Lion is going to be insane with anger following this incident. If I know the idiot, he was already angry about Dumbledore, despite the fact that he hated the man."

Hermione tried to hide a smile. As much as he claimed to hate politics, he was quickly coming to grips with the topic.

"Yes, Amhar will be incensed. I fear for Susan, though. Her outburst was far beyond any normal magical outburst for a pregnant woman..."

Harry snorted. "Of course it was. Amelia, she's Brotherhood. We haven't made an issue of it, but with the exception of two of us, every Brotherhood member got a power or focus boost. Some of us got both, like Susan. A few even had special abilities awakened within them."

Amelia looked at Harry for a moment. "Did you get a power boost?"

He chuckled and shook his head. "No, what I got was help in controlling my powers. Luna is in the same boat as I am; access to enormous power, but difficulty in controlling it. Unlike the others, we were gifted more with control assistance. The last thing I need was more power, or more focus."

Hermione turned and stared at Harry. "You know what each of us got and haven't told me?"

"It never came up in conversation and it seemed sort of private. Do you really want to know that Neville has an unawakened talent for nullifying certain potions? Or that if it does awaken, Ginny is going to pop out children like clockwork? Or that Ginny's only barely scratched the surface of her gift? Or that Draco could, if he knew about it, learn to do elf magic?" He frowned for a moment, then shrugged. "I don't know where that ability came from, but I always knew the Malfoy's were a twisted lot."

Hermione narrowed her eyes and looked at her husband. This conversation wasn't over, not by a long shot.

"So, what are we to do about Amhar?" he asked, looking back at Amelia.

"I'm not sure anything can be done right now. He's going to... Councilor Coeur de Lion! What a pleasant surprise," Amelia said, pasting a bright smile on her face.

Amhar stood in the doorway, looking very ruffled. His face was white from plaster dust and a small cut was slowly closing on his forehead.

Harry moved to take the seat next to Hermione. She reached out and took his hand as he sat down.

Amhar stepped into the office, he was nearly shaking with rage. "I want to know what you are planning to do to that bitch..." His rant was cut off as he began to choke and gasp.

Harry looked at him coldly. "I would caution you, Councilor. You are addressing the Minister of Magic and referring to her married niece. Protocol dictates a certain amount of decorum in your speech. If that isn't enough for you to modify your tone, I will remind you that my wife is in the room and I will not allow such crudity to be spoken in front of her. Now, nod if you intend to converse in a civilized tone."

Amhar tried to glare at him, but his vision was beginning to tunnel and his face was turning blue. Realizing that no one was going to lift a finger to stop Potter from whatever he was doing, he nodded quickly.

Harry smiled and waved one hand airily.

The Councilor fell to his knees and gulped in a great gasp of air, then coughed several times. After he'd caught his breath, he stood up slowly, glaring at Harry and clenching his fists.

"You had something you wished to say to me, Councilor?" Amelia asked coldly. "Please be brief. I have been dealing with an unexpected emergency today, which resulted in our receiving the Prime Minister."

Amhar turned away from glaring at Harry to look at Amelia. "Here? The Prime Minister of the muggle government is here in Haven? Today?"

"Yes, Councilor. His party was attacked early this morning in New York City. Several of his body guards were wizards, trained by us. He arrived via emergency portkey shortly before noon today," Amelia informed him. It was obvious from her tone that she really wasn't interested in talking about the matter.

"Well? Where is he? I would be interested in meeting with the Prime Minister," Amhar declared loftily.

Harry chuckled and Amhar gave him a poisonous look.

"Right now the Prime Minister is sleeping in one of our guest rooms, Councilor Coeur de Lion," Hermione said sweetly.

Harry looked at the frustrated councilor, making no attempt to hide his smirk.

"I see," Amhar said icily, then he turned back to Amelia. "I would remind the Minister that the Wizengamot is supposed to be informed of it's dealings with the muggle government."



Amelia bristled at his tone.

"But she has, Councilor," Harry said softly. "The good Minister informed me of the Prime Minister's arrival this afternoon, I just haven't had a chance to inform the rest of the Wizengamot. Between the attack last night, and then your unprovoked assault on one of my Brotherhood members, it went clear out of my head. If you'd like, you can consider this your official notification." He smiled pleasantly knowing full well that he was hitting Amhar hard.

Standing, he offered his hand to Hermione, then turned to Amelia, who seemed to be trying to hold in her laughter. "Minister, I think, for the safety of all, it would be best if Susan return to the manor for a few weeks. I will send you notice when the Prime Minister is ready to return to New York. I think an escort should be arranged and we should use the portal to Gringotts New York," he said pleasantly.

Amelia nodded at Harry, who then turned and placed an arm around his wife's shoulders. They stood there for a moment, smiling cheerfully at the Councilor. Then they disappeared.

The pop Harry's apparation made was nothing compared to the shudder the building made when he punched through the wards.

Amelia smiled to herself and again silently thanked the gods that Harry was on her side. Then she turned her attention to the fuming Wizengamot member in her office. It was at times like this that she wished she wasn't Minister. Harry had wound Amhar up and left her to deal with him. To make matters worse, she knew Harry had done it deliberately as a way of reminding her, he hated politics.

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### **Padfoot Manor...**

Harry and Hermione appeared in their bedroom and he looked longingly at the bed and sighed.

"I guess it's too late to crawl into bed. Maybe Narcissa has a pepper-up potion we can take for now," he murmured, then he turned to his dresser to pull out some decent clothes.

"I suppose you're right," Hermione replied, then she paused and looked at her own clothing and smiled.

*"Love, could you transfigure my nightgown back? I don't have many nightgowns like that. The blouse and pants you transfigured are nice, but I think you'd like the nightgown better."*

He blinked and smiled lopsidedly. He waved his staff at her and her clothing shifted back into her nightgown. He eyed her and licked his lips for a moment, then he shook his head before pulling off his shirt to put another on.

Hermione walked over to her dresser to select something suitable for herself. She smiled, feeling the disappointment radiating from Harry. He knew that they both had things they needed to do today, and making love wasn't on the list. For now, at least.

She watched him in her mirror. Whenever she considered their relationship, she could only marvel at the changes that had been wrought in both of them. Harry was learning the ins and outs of politics and estate management, as well as making a name for himself as a keen battlefield commander. Privately they had a love life that was magical. He seemed to know how to draw her out by turning it into a game for both of them. It was something she greatly enjoyed. If someone had asked her two years ago if she considered herself a sexual being, she probably would have laughed at them.

Harry finished dressing, then he stopped by her chair in front of her dressing table. "Deep thoughts," he murmured, then he bent over and kissed the top of her head.

She looked at him in the mirror. He could tell she was thinking hard, but the bond wasn't wide enough at the moment to allow him to know what she was thinking.

"Just thinking about how much we've changed and how much I love you," she told him.

He bent over and kissed her on the back of the neck, causing her to shiver delightfully. "I love you, too," he whispered before straightening up. "I'll be in my study. I have some dispatches I need to go over. Dobby will inform us both when the Minister awakens. From what I understand, that should be soon. They gave him a light sleeping draught at the hospital, as a precaution."

"Do you think he'd like to dine with us before returning?"

"He might. I'll make the offer," Harry replied with a shrug, then he left the room.

Hermione smiled, then she lifted the charmed brush that she used to help tame her hair and started to brush.

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### **Stonewall Lane, Dublin Ireland...**

"Come in, Mr. Korwin. We've been expecting you," said a voice.

Andrew Korwin stepped nervously into the nondescript room. There was an ordinary looking metal desk, behind which sat a man, puffing on a cigarette. The man motioned for Korwin to sit down on the chair before the desk.

Korwin couldn't tell anything about the man. His face was obscured by a charm which constantly shifted his features. The man's voice was also

magically altered, but there was no mistaking the French accent.

"What have you to tell me today, Mr. Korwin?"

Andrew slumped on the chair and shivered. "I don't know how long I can keep this up. Amhar is getting out of control and he's beginning to frighten me. Murphy contacted me again. She wants me to help take down Potter.

"Amhar told me he's been receiving lessons from someone about dueling. I'm beginning to think he's planning to challenge someone. He's a fairly good dueler, but I don't know who he could possibly want to challenge. This is going too far... Can't you put a stop to this? Talk to your superiors. I've been cooperating," he whined.

The man stabbed his cigarette out in an ashtray. "I remind you, Mr. Korwin, you came to us looking for help. We offered you a deal and you accepted."

"I know what I did, dammit," Andrew snarled. "But it's getting to be too much. My healer says I'm developing an ulcer... From the pressure..."

"The terms of the deal have yet to be met, Mr. Korwin. If you back out now, you know what will happen," the man said coldly.

Korwin lowered his face into his hands and shuddered.

The man reached into a drawer and pulled out a watch. "Here," he said, sliding the watch forward. "Wear this. It's a portkey that will bring you to us if you are injured. It also contains a tracer charm. Should anything happen, we will be able to find you."

Korwin reached for the watch with a trembling hand and looked gratefully at the man.

The man behind the desk decided not to tell him about the built in auto-pensieve, which would record and hold twenty four hours worth of memories. Korwin didn't need to know about that.

"You may leave, Mr. Korwin," said the man. "I expect to hear from you at the appointed time and place."

Andrew stood up and left the room. Moving quickly down the hallway, he opened the back door of the building and stepped out. Closing the door, he looked up and down the dank alley he'd entered, pulled his heavy robe tighter around himself and strode off.

Back inside the room, the man sneered at the retreating back of the Wizengamot member. He hated dealing with cowards.

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### **Padfoot Manor (Jan 2nd)...**

Amelia, Caleb and Remus filed into Harry's study for the morning briefing. Hermione sat next to Harry's desk, sorting through his mail, placing the important items on a pile for him to go through at a later time.

"Good morning," Harry said quietly. Several house elves appeared, setting out tea and coffee services and some light snacks.

"Thank you for what you did yesterday with Councilor Coeur de Lion," Amelia said dryly.

Harry grinned unabashedly. "I'm sorry, Amelia, but he just gets under my skin. It was better that you dealt with him, anyway. I lack your finesse."

She snorted and stirred her tea for a moment. "Finesse? Harry, a rampaging hippogriff has more finesse than you displayed yesterday," she said with a smile. "Did the Prime Minister get home alright?"

"Yes. We had a quiet dinner, just the PM and a few others, then we escorted him to Potter's Portals. Caleb was gracious enough to lend us ten men to provide bodyguard services long enough to get the Minister back to the Embassy and his own protective detail," Harry told her.

"Speaking of that, I've been told that by mid month we'll be able to double the detail assigned to His Majesty and the Prime Minister. Also, tomorrow we'll be holding a memorial service for Cyril. He'd managed to activate the portkey just before the killing curse struck him," Caleb said quietly.

The room fell silent.

Harry looked down at his desk, then up at Caleb. "Did we ever find out the details of what happened?"

"Apparently, the King and the Prime Minister were due to attend something they called a telethon," Amelia told him. "The King was delayed by traffic. When the Prime Minister took the stage, the attack began. From what we've gathered, the wizards involved were Irish nationals, part of the drug syndicate run by a witch named Marne Murphy.

"Murphy and her drug business are believed to be funneling money and supplies to Voldemort's forces, using muggle smugglers. According to the head of the Prime Minister's security detail, had we not insisted on adding wizards to the mix, it's likely the Prime Minister would have been killed. As it stands, we lost a member of the protective detail. Cyril Vander, age twenty eight, unmarried, no children," she added.

She paused for a moment. "Also, more than fifty muggles were killed and over three hundred injured. The American Department of Magic is scrambling to oblivate, but they expect to have everything under control soon. The biggest problem came from the disappearance of the Minister, but we solved that using a polyjuiced body double."

Harry leaned forward, placed his elbows on the desk and rubbed his temples tiredly. He'd woke up with a slight headache and the briefing wasn't

making it any better.

"We need to finish this soon. Every day that it continues we risk exposure," he muttered.

Hermione, sensing his pain, reached out and rubbed his back gently.

"Well, I have some news in that regard," Caleb offered.

Harry looked at him hopefully.

"As you know, we've trained up our own army here in Haven. We currently have fifteen hundred trained soldiers." Caleb paused and looked at everyone. "Yes, soldiers. It's no longer right to call them Aurors, even if that is what they started as. We have two units of seven hundred men each, with another hundred awaiting assignments.

"The Canadians have set up a camp in northern British Columbia, where they're training forces from Australia, New Zealand, and India, as well as their own people. All total, that's another two thousand soldiers in the making from Canada.

"The Yanks have set up a training facility in the southern United States, where they are working on building two new divisions. Now, mind you, a magical division is no where near the size of a muggle one, but we're talking about another four thousand soldiers."

Harry quickly did the math. "Seventy five hundred troops?" he asked incredulously.

Caleb nodded. "It's needed. We figure Voldemort to have around two thousand Death Eaters, another two thousand vampires and werewolves. We have no idea how many Dementors remain, but from what we're heard, the Angels have been feeding heavily. It's only a rough guess, but we figure Voldemort will be able to field nearly five thousand. And you don't want to know how many he can field if we count in the British Army."

Harry frowned at the numbers. He glanced at the map on the wall, then back to Caleb. "Has there ever been any sign of muggle activity in Diagon Alley or in Hogsmeade?"

"No, never. But if you want, we'll try to send a scouting mission to those locations," Caleb offered.

Harry nodded pensively. "We need to know, Caleb. Set up the mission."

Eocho drifted through the wall, catching everyone by surprise. "You are troubled, Maglios?"

Harry looked at his mentor, a bit startled. He never joined the morning briefings. "I am, honored teacher. We need to attack soon, but our numbers are closely matched. That suggests that a direct attack is not the way to go."

Everyone present knew of Eocho and what role he served. Amelia and Caleb remained silent, watching the conversation between Harry and the ancient specter.

"So, what does it suggest to you, Maglios?" Eocho asked approvingly.

"We must use deception and stealth. Our opening blow must be hard and decisive. It must be a surprise that significantly alters the numbers in our favor."

Eocho and Caleb nodded approvingly.

Harry stood and walked over to a map of Britain staring at it and frowning.

"Harry?" asked Remus in a worried tone.

Harry waved him to silence. "Caleb, how much time will we have until all the units are ready?"

"At least three months," Caleb replied.

"When can we assemble the unit commanders?"

Caleb frowned and thumbed through a file. "Some of the units don't have a command staff yet. I could push the Yanks to assign them, but that's at least a month away. Why? Do you have an idea?"

Harry turned away from the map, his eyes were back-lit by both his magic and his excitement. "I do. I think I know a way to surprise old snake lips and catch him out. Give me a few days to work out some details, then I'll share it with you and we can kick it around some more."

Caleb nodded while Harry returned to his chair.

"Hermione, can you talk to the twins for me?" he asked.

"About what, Harry? What have they done now?"

He chuckled. "No, it's nothing like that. I need you to explain sunlight to them."

She blinked and frowned in confusion. "Sunlight? If they don't know what sunlight is by now..."

He rubbed his temples. "No, I'm explaining this wrong. I remember muggle science in school. They said sunlight was made up of several kinds of light," he said, hoping that she would understand what he was thinking about, even if he couldn't remember.

Her eyes brightened. "Yes! I think I know where you're heading. They could do it."

"Will someone explain what you two are talking about?" Amelia asked peevishly. She hated not understanding.

*"You do it, love, I have only vague memories of what I learned,"* he sent her.

Hermione smiled at the Minister. "I'm sorry, Amelia. I know it annoys people when I say we can stand to learn from the muggles, but it's true and this is one of those cases. Harry reminded me of something I learned in muggle school before Hogwarts. The muggles know that sunlight isn't made up of just one kind of light, but several kinds of light.

"What my husband suggested is that it's possible that one of these kinds of light could be why vampires shun sunlight. If we can find out which kind of light and make a lot of it, we could destroy vampires quickly," she explained.

Amelia leaned back on her chair. The idea was alien to her, but if it could be turned into a weapon, she was all for it.

Hermione turned back to Harry. "I'll talk to Fred and George today. Maybe Inga and Helga, as well. They would understand it better than the Weasleys and could help me explain it to them."

He nodded. "Alright, that's settled. What's next then?"

"I'm afraid I'm next, Harry," Amelia said seriously, "and it's not good news. Our friend, Councilor Coeur de Lion, is quite upset over yesterday. The healer and the constables informed him that he cannot press charges against Susan, especially now that she's receiving the support she needs. From what our records say, the last pregnant witch charged with illegal magic while pregnant happened in 1107. He doesn't have a leg to stand on in that regard, which is only making him angrier.

"The good Councilor is currently lining up summonses for people involved in the New Year's attack on the manor. He is particularly incensed over the death of Dumbledore, and the fact that an animal killed him. I fear he intends to move against Mrs. Black sometime this month.

"Also the Irish are asking if we want Dumbledore's body back. Personally, I'm of two minds on this. He was once a great man and deserves to be honored. In his later years, however, he became something twisted and evil." Amelia trailed off, looking pointedly at Harry.

"I think..." Harry stopped and sighed, bowing his head for a moment. "I don't wish to martyr the man by giving him a big ceremony. Why don't we accept the body and put it someplace safe until he can be buried in the Dumbledore ancestral cemetery? I didn't want to kill him. In fact, had he only allowed me to live my life, little of what followed would have happened."

"That's a very generous gesture, Harry," Remus said softly.

"I suppose, but the man is dead, Remus. Unlike Snape, I cannot hold any anger for a dead man."

"Still, it's a magnanimous gesture, Harry. Your parents would be proud of you for it."

Harry smiled wistfully at his friend, then turned back to Amelia when she began to speak again.

"Alright, I'll tell the Irish we'll accept the body once their forensic healers are done with it. From what we've learned from the surviving mercenaries, Dumbledore went far afield to find them. Most came from the Baltic Sea region.

"That strange device they used to breach the wards is called 'The Arch of Solomon'. It's more than two thousand years old. Little is known about it except that it tests positive for a curse. The Irish Department of Mysteries has asked to be allowed to keep it. I gave them permission, figuring you wouldn't want it, Harry."

Harry looked up from his desk and nodded. He had no use for ancient objects, especially cursed ones.

"The Irish have reviewed the pensieve memories and verbal testimonies. Barring any new evidence, they are officially ruling that all of the Haven people acted in self defense.

"I do need to add that the involvement of the spectral dog from your tattoo and the Snorkack is complicating matters. Snorkacks are light creatures and highly protected. Very few people are allowed access to one. To have Mrs. Black bond with one as her familiar is unheard of and causing several departments of the Irish Ministry to fight among themselves," Amelia explained.

"Don't they understand what Luna is?" asked Hermione in outrage.

Harry leaned forward, touched her on the arm and shook his head.

"Why ever not?"

"Luna's abilities have been kept under wraps. We haven't spread that information around, just like we've rarely told people about Ginny's abilities, or yours. The less people know about what we can do, the more we'll be able to surprise them. It's not officially classed as being secret, but we haven't advertised her abilities either," Harry told her.

"He's right, Lady Potter," Caleb added. "It's called operational security. Although, in this case, it might be wise to clue the Irish in."

Harry turned to the Minister. "Amelia?"

She sipped her tea for a moment, thinking quickly. "I'll contact Brogan Mallory and let him know. In the interests of Anglo-Irish relations, I'm sure he'll cooperate."

"Right then, is there anything else?" Harry asked, looking around.

"I have a few minor points, my lord," Caleb said. "All of the muggles from their military have been returned to their unit. The few too ill to return, or those permanently disabled, have been sent on to a muggle hospital facility in Canada."

Harry nodded, pleased that they had been able to help the muggles.

"Also, this comes from Michael O'Dalley, via Commander Stanton. It seems the presence of so many Aurors has scared our murderer into hiding. There was a possible attack two weeks ago, but no one is quite sure. A student was accosted by Memorial Lake, but the assailant ran off before anything could happen."

"Did anything come of that idea of Remus'?"

Caleb looked at Harry in confusion. "I don't know..."

"I can answer that, Harry," Amelia said. "Caleb wouldn't ordinarily be privy to that sort of information, unless it affected military matters. According to O'Dalley, he passed the information to the Irish Department of Mysteries. They managed to identify a type of dagger which was imbued with the essence of a Dementor. It was created by an Eastern European Dark Lord several centuries ago. I forget the name of the Dark Lord, but if you want, I'll ask Michael to stop by and give you an update."

Harry shook his head. "No, I don't think that will be necessary. I was just curious." He stood and looked around with a smile. "I think we're done for today."

Realizing a dismissal when they heard it, people began to gather up their papers and exit the office.

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### **Padfoot Manor, later that day...**

Harry blinked rapidly as sweat dripped into his eyes, causing them to burn. He sat motionless in the basement training room. Around him, more than a dozen glowing balls were flying about, trying to go through a hoop. A black ball defended it, however, colliding with any ball that attempted to go through the hoop.

Eocho drifted through a wall and watched Harry for a moment, frowning. The young man sat on the floor, his back to the wall, watching the balls. All of them were bouncing up and down, except for the occasional ball that would attempt to go through the hoop.

Eocho drifted a little closer and one of the glowing balls floated right through him. Harry blinked in surprise and his concentration broke. All of the balls ceased to glow and fell to the floor. He turned to face his mentor and stood up.

"I did not expect you to be playing games, Maglios," Eocho chided.

"It was a game, honored teacher, but not what you think. Tell me, did you see me make any gestures or hear any incantations?" Harry asked, conjuring a towel to wipe his face.

Eocho stared at him for a moment, then smiled. "You have been hiding abilities from me, Maglios."

"I suppose I have, honored teacher. But I wanted to be sure of the results before I showed them to you. What you saw is a game American children play with their training wands. It's simple, fast paced and was exactly what I needed to break my block on gesturing." He looked up at Eocho a bit sheepishly. "It became fun, after while. I guess I got carried away."

Eocho laughed. "Whatever the reason, the method worked, Maglios. It seems to me, however, that you have managed more than just simple gestureless casting. Am I right in assuming that every ball required a spell that had to be continuously renewed?"

Harry nodded.

"Very interesting, Maglios. You have an ability I had not thought you would present. You were casting multiple spells, nearly simultaneously. Come, let us explore this ability in terms of combat. Even casting two spells at once would be a tremendous advantage."

Harry nodded and banished all of the pitchy balls to a box in the corner of the room.

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### **Haven School of Witchcraft and Wizardry (Jan 5th)...**

It was after curfew and the library was dark, but it was the only place she could think of to hide. She'd put several rows of books between herself and the door, hoping she'd have enough warning, should someone enter.

She knelt on the stone floor, glaring down at the object she'd dropped there. She had every intention of ridding herself of it tonight, no matter how it fought her.

"I won't do it," she hissed. "I'm done!"

*"But you enjoy it, you know you do. The thrill of the stalk, the strike, the killing thrust. The feel of the hot blood bathing your hands."*

Slapping her hands uselessly over her ears, she tried desperately to block the sibilant voice in her head. "I won't listen. I won't, I won't, I won't," she chanted, rocking back and forth on her knees.

*"You must. You are my creature now. There is no escape. You crave the kill, the blood, the death. I am a part of you and I shall never let you go."*

"But I feel it!" she moaned, dropping her hands from her ears. "When they die, I feel it! The shock, the pain, the rending of their souls from their bodies."

*"Yes. Pick me up. I would feel what you feel."*

"No, I'm not touching that thing again. Not ever again," she muttered, clenching her fists.

*"It is foolish to resist me. You know you crave what only I can give you. Now, pick me up!"*

Blinding pain ripped through her head as she tried to resist. Her body tensed, then bowed back as the agony spread from her head, down her neck, her shoulders and her torso. When it flowed down her legs, she cried out hoarsely and reached for the object. The torment ended the moment she touched it, and was soothed away as she held it to her chest. Her body shook for a few moments and she caught her breath.

*"Good girl. See how much better you feel? Resistance to my will only causes pain, child. We are as one, and there is no escape. Why fight what you are? Why resist what you love and what only I can give you?"*

The girl only shook her head, unable to answer. It always seemed so clear when she wasn't holding the thing. It was wrong, what she did. The object needed to be destroyed, she needed to be destroyed.

But touching it, holding it, caused those thoughts to fade away, to be replaced by other, stronger thoughts. And the emotions that accompanied those thoughts were stronger still. The joy, the sheer pleasure gained by simply handling the object paled when compared to what she experienced when she actually used it.

The adrenaline rush of the hunt, the satisfaction in locating her prey. Her eyes closed as she remembered.

*"Yes, that's it. Feel it, girl,"* the voice murmured in her mind. *"Let yourself go and just feel."*

The look of fear on the face of her victim. The feel of blood on her hands, the smell it, the taste of it. She licked her lips and rocked her hips, moaning in pleasure. One hand dropped down to the hem of her skirt, then disappeared underneath it.

*"Perfect. And you can have more, much more."*

"Yes," she hissed, rubbing herself and rocking her hips faster. "The blood, the screams, the death. I will bring them all. They'll all die by my hand!"

*"We are death, and all shall fear us! We will be bathed in blood and all shall tremble before us!"*

"Yes, yes!" she shrieked softly as her orgasm ripped through her, leaving her panting and clutching the object to her chest.

*"We have only scratched the surface of what is possible,"* the voice told her gently. *"I will give you things no one else can, girl. Only obey me and I will introduce you to pleasures you've never dreamed of."*

Opening her eyes, she looked down at the object she held and stroked it lovingly. "Nothing can be better than the kill, the blood..." she murmured.

*"My dear girl, I've introduced you to the pleasures of your body, and those of your victims. Your body is no longer pure, and we've both enjoyed those experiences. The corruption of your mind is next. You are ready for the next step. You crave it, I can feel it in you. You have a taste for the darkness only I can give you. You've only to ask me for..."*

The voice cut off abruptly and the girl jerked as she heard a slight shuffling noise a few rows away.

*"Move, girl! Quickly, before you are discovered."*

Standing, her legs trembled for a moment. As they steadied, she moved away from the sound of slow, quiet footfalls. Reaching the aisle, she moved quickly to the row of books across from her, then towards the door. At the last row, she took a deep breath, and bolted for the exit.

Passing through it, she kept running until she reached her dorm, where she flung herself onto her bed and yanked the curtains closed.

Back in the library, Millicent Bulstrode cursed viciously as she heard the rapid, fading sounds of someone leaving the library and running down the hall. By the time she'd reached the doorway, even that was gone.

"Fuck!" she growled, walking quickly through the door and out into the hall. "Well, that's just great, Bulstrode," she muttered to herself. "Another sicko in this school and you're not even sure who it was!" She lit her wand and looked around angrily.

They say talking to yourself is a sign of insanity," an amused voice said from the darkness.

Spinning around, she glared at Deneb. "What are you doing here?" she spat.

Raising an eyebrow, he held up his hands in surrender. "Rounds," he told her. "It's after curfew, after all. What's got your knickers in a twist?"

"I need to see the Headmistress," she said as she brushed passed him. "You might as well come along. There's no sense in telling this twice."

She walked rapidly down the hall and Deneb had to trot to catch up with her.

Reaching the office of the Headmistress minutes later, she knocked loudly, and kept knocking until she was told to enter. Pushing the door open, she walked in, then nodded when Deneb shut and warded the door.

Seeing Millicent's expression, Minerva's eyes darkened. "What is it?" she asked the younger witch. "What's happened now?"

"I think I've discovered a third," Millicent told her.

"Wait," McGonagall said. Taking a piece of clean parchment from a drawer in her desk, she placed it on the desktop. "Let's get a transcript of this," she told the two students. Casting a quick spell on her quill, she nodded for Millicent to begin.

The seventh year went through the event quickly, but precisely. She left nothing out, including the fact that she'd been unable to get a look at the person.

"I'm not even sure of gender," she concluded, clearly frustrated.

"And the person was alone?" McGonagall asked, watching the quill scribble away.

"Yes."

"And talking to himself? That's rather disturbing," Deneb said.

"Or herself. And the disturbing part was what the person said, not who they said it to. Like I told you, I couldn't hear much. Every eavesdropping charm I tried seemed to bounce away, almost as if the person was shielded in some way. Whatever spell the person used wasn't perfect, though. I caught a few words."

McGonagall skimmed the parchment until she found what she was looking for. "And the words you did catch are rather alarming. Let's see, 'the blood', 'pleasure', 'die by my hand'." Shaking her head, she looked up at the two students, her eyes concerned.

"If the person had cast some sort of shielding spell, is it possible that he or she wasn't alone?" Deneb asked.

Millicent held her hands out, palms up. "I don't know," she replied. "I didn't see or hear anyone else, but I've never seen a shield like that one before. I suppose it's possible."

"Can you think of anything else?" the headmistress asked.

"No. I'm sorry, Professor," Millicent said, her shoulders slumping.

Canceling the spell on the quill, she quickly made a copy of the transcript and stood up. "Don't be, my dear. Had you not been in the right place tonight, we might never have known about this. I'll get this to Draco and see what he makes of it. I want the two of you to finish your rounds, but you're to do them together from now on. Starting tomorrow, all prefects, and the Head boy and girl, will patrol in pairs.

"Come to me if you learn anything new, and be careful. Now, off you go." With a wave of her wand, she brought down the wards and unlocked the door.

"Goodnight, Professor," Deneb said as he followed Millicent from the office and closed the door.

Millicent walked a few steps, then stopped and leaned back against the wall. "It's not much to work with. I should have been faster," she muttered, angry with herself once more.

Standing in front of her, Deneb shook his head. "We have more than we did an hour ago, thanks to you" he told her. Reaching out, he brushed the hair back from her face and smiled. "Don't be so hard on yourself, Millie. You and I make a good team. We'll figure it out."

"I hope you're right."

"I am, you'll see. But we won't do it standing here." Taking her hand, he pulled her away from the wall and started down the hall. "We need to finish our rounds and we both have class early in the morning."

"Don't remind me," she grumbled. "Double potions. I hate potions!"

When they turned the corner and started down the next hallway, she smiled. He still held her hand and didn't seem to be in any hurry to release it.

Michael O'Dalley and Draco filed into the room along with Amelia and Professor McGonagall. Remus stood in the back of the room, listening.

Harry frowned. O'Dalley's presence rarely meant anything good. "Alright, who wants to start off this morning?" he asked, trying to keep things light.

"I guess I might as well, largely because this topic is mostly in my area," Michael murmured. "Last night we learned of a possible third agent of Voldemort's in the school. Headmistress McGonagall's spies..."

"Please, Mr. O'Dalley. They are students concerned about the war and doing their part to help," Minerva said in a pained voice.

Draco's snicker became a cough as he tried to look innocent. Minerva's glare had him looking at his feet, inspecting his shoes. Even though she wasn't his teacher anymore, he still felt intimidated by her.

"Very well. Headmistress McGonagall's students overheard a conversation one student was having, with themselves apparently. I've seen the transcript Mr. Black was provided by the Headmistress and my initial impression was that we're not looking at a spy, but a homicidal maniac under Voldemort's control.

"My lord, we have a couple of other clues that were leading us towards the school in our murder investigation, and now it looks like we're able to tie this new information in with that. I believe that our murderer is at the school. Either among the students or staff."

Harry turned to the Headmistress. "Minerva?"

McGonagall frowned. "I don't like it, Harry. I've informed the prefects that from now on they will patrol in pairs, and I'm thinking of enacting an earlier curfew. But beyond that there isn't much I can do."

Harry turned to O'Dalley. "Michael, what about the weapon? Amelia said you think you've narrowed that down."

O'Dalley pulled a sheet of parchment from his folder and began to read.

"It's called a Blade of Mordoc. Dark Lord Mordoc was in what is now modern day Bulgaria. He actually controlled most of the country in the fifteenth century through the use of a cadre of assassins. He equipped his assassins with daggers that were imbued with the powers of a Dementor."

Harry leaned back nodded thoughtfully. "Yes, Remus told us about that. How about if we distribute pictures of the weapon and it's characteristics to all the local healers and law enforcement people? This way if they come across it, they'll know not to touch it."

O'Dalley nodded and made a notation in a small book. "Excellent idea, sir. Especially considering what we've learned about the blades."

Hermione looked at him with interest. "Oh?"

O'Dalley shrugged. "From what the Irish have told us, the blades are extremely dangerous. History says they have the ability to possess their owners." Opening a small book, he flipped through it for a moment until he found what he was looking for. "Alright then, the blade was designed to be a weapon of torture. The idea was to stab your victim in a non-lethal place and leave the blade in place. The blade would then cause intense pain on the order of a Cruciatus curse in order to force the victim to remove it.

"The downside of this is the Dementor aspect of the knife. It only became effective when the knife was removed. The process of pulling the knife out caused the blade to absorb the victim's soul, much like a Dementor's kiss."

Those in the room shivered slightly. The blades were truly evil and no one wanted to think about them too much.

"Does that mean the person wielding the blade might be controlled by it?" asked Hermione.

"It is a possibility, my lady," O'Dalley replied. "But we really don't have enough information to be sure. There's no record of an assassin being separated from his blade and surviving."

Hermione visibly shuddered and Harry reached over and grabbed her hand for a moment, then he turned back to O'Dalley.

"Is there anything else we can do, Michael? Can we beef up security at the school? Maybe send some deputies out there for night patrols?"

"I'll speak with Commander Stanton about it. If nothing else, it should reassure the Headmistress," he replied, smiling at Minerva.

"You might want to speak to Healer August, Michael. If we come upon a victim with the blade still inside them, we'll need a plan of action. Obviously, we can't remove it. At least, not easily," Harry offered.

O'Dalley looked surprised and he scribbled a quick note.

Harry turned to Draco. "You've been awful quiet during all this. Do you have anything to add?"

Draco shrugged. "Not really, Harry. When the report arrived today it sounded to me like it was more of a law enforcement issue than a case of espionage. I have suggested to Professor McGonagall that we monitor key points of the school by setting up a few of the stationary fliers Q branch created for us, and she's agreed."

"What about Ginny?" asked Hermione.

Harry frowned and looked down at his desk for a moment. "I don't know, Hermione. Remember the last time we exposed her to dark magic? I know



she's felt something every time the blade was used, but I'm not sure how to expose her to that right now. She's still too unsure and too affected by her gift for it to be of much use."

Hermione looked undecided, but she nodded. Harry's reasons made sense, for now.

### **Three Scots, Aviemore, Scotland (Jan 7th)...**

"Message for you, sir!"

McHardy looked up from his desk and took the slip of paper. His eyebrows rose when he felt it was more than one slip. Normally, messages were extremely brief.

"Has this been authenticated?"

"Yes, sir," replied the communications technician.

"Very well. Thank you," he replied absently.

The technician nodded and left the room, closing the door behind him.

McHardy opened the message and began to read.

*To: CO Three Scots, Royal Regiment of Scotland.*

*Frm: BAC, NY*

*It is important to ascertain the condition of the following arteries. A9/A96/A82. The status of A82 from Inverness to Fort William is critical. You are directed to send scouting missions out to determine the status of these roads. Stop.*

*Operational tempo will be increasing in coming months. You are to be resupplied starting 20th January. Three Scots will be brought up to full manpower operational status. See attached sheet citing units and equipment you will receive. Stop.*

*Conditions within Inverness are to be monitored daily. A special infiltration team will be included in unit reinforcements. You will use the team to set up a base within the city and report on conditions within.*

*Message ends...*

*BAC TAC 47678BX*

McHardy looked at the message flimsy for a moment longer, then frowned and reached for a map.

"Shit," he breathed, looking at the map, then stabbed a button on his desk.

The door opened. "Sir?"

"Locate Captain Hanover and ask him to come to my office, please," McHardy said.

"Sir!"

The door closed and McHardy stared at the map. Inverness to Fort William was a distance of more than 102 kilometers.

The door opened and Hanover entered the room. The former lieutenant had received his promotion when command of the regiment fell to his shoulders after the disastrous fiasco at Fort George.

"You sent for me, sir?"

"Yes, John. Come in and sit down, please. We have new orders from British Army Command in New York. It seems they want to know the status of the arterials around Inverness, especially A82."

Hanover looked up at the map and frowned. "How far out do they want to know?"

"From Inverness to Fort William, just over one hundred kilometers," McHardy said.

Hanover leaned back on his chair and thought for a moment. "Extended patrol, then. If there is little activity on the road, the boys could do it in ten days. But that rarely happens. Figure at least twenty days to cover the area and make it back. Observe and avoid contact?" he asked.

"Precisely."

"Make it twenty five days to be on the safe side, sir."

"How many men will you take?"

"On this type of mission? We want to keep the numbers down. Figure ten men, a radio operator and myself," Hanover replied.

McHardy frowned for a moment, then he made his decision. "Take one or two of Thrawkmort's lads with you."

Hanover blinked in surprise, but nodded. He couldn't explain what Thrawkmort's group was, but he knew from experience they were useful in a pinch. "Yes, sir."

"Very well, John, you have your orders. Gather your men, check your gear and plan to move out at dawn," McHardy said.

Hanover stood and saluted. "Yes, sir."

McHardy returned the salute, then turned to contemplate the map again. It was becoming apparent what command was considering.

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### **Haven Operations Center (Jan 10th)...**

Harry walked out of the training room deep in thought. He had just finished a dueling session against six simultaneous opponents. The sessions were getting brutal, but he needed them to keep himself up to speed. He dueled solo, while the others dueled in teams. He wanted to practice what it would be like if he were dueling his way to Voldemort, or dueling the Dark Lord himself. He seriously doubted the Voldemort would duel him alone, so he had to be prepared.

"Harry?"

He turned and spotted Draco beckoning him.

"Yeah, Draco?" he asked tiredly as he approached the pale blond man.

"Rough session?"

He nodded.

"Look mate, could I get your help for a little bit? I have to deal with the twins and I need to put them in their place," Draco said seriously.

"You're going to put the twins in their place?" he asked incredulously.

"Yes, I am," Draco replied stiffly.

"Lead on, Draco. This ought to be good."

"Fine, but just play along, will you?" Draco asked in a pleading tone.

Harry nodded and followed Draco to his office. He took a seat next to Draco's desk and waited. A few minutes later, Fred and George entered his office.

"You wanted to see us?" asked Fred with a smile.

Harry blinked and fought the urge to laugh. The twins had been in the office for less than twenty seconds and already Draco sported a large pair of donkey ears, which he seemed unaware of.

"Yes. I understand you're planning on marrying the Johansen twins?" Draco asked dryly.

Fred and George exchanged identical looks of surprise. It was true they were planning on asking the twins, but they hadn't known anyone else knew about it.

"How did you," Fred started.

"...find out about that?" George finished.

Draco smirked and leaned back on his chair. He scratched idly at one ear. "Oh, I hear things."

When Harry coughed loudly, the twins shot him a grin before turning back to Draco.

Harry doubled over coughing, he couldn't look at Draco, who was now sporting whiskers to match his ears.

Draco shot Harry an angry glance. Potter was supposed to be on his side! He picked up a parchment and handed it to George. "I take it you haven't seen this, then? Or perhaps you ignored it, like so many other inter-office memos?" Draco asked.

George read the memo and paled so hard his freckles looked like blood spots. "You can't be serious!" he exclaimed.

Draco shrugged and his ears flattened for a moment. "I'm quite serious. It's Ministry policy to discourage office romances."

Fred grabbed the parchment from George and scanned it, then glared at Draco. "I don't believe this. A summary court martial? Drawing and quartering? Burning at the stake? Public whippings?"

Draco's hair suddenly stood out straight and he impatiently pushed it out of his eyes. "I'm sorry, but the Ministry's stand on this is firm. I wanted to warn you before I was forced to take action."

Harry bolted into Draco's private bathroom. From behind the closed door came the sound of laughter.

Fred looked at his brother, aghast. "Now what?"

"I haven't a clue," George replied dejectedly.

"We could fire Inga and Helga," offered Fred.

George brightened, then he abruptly deflated. "No, they'd kill us. They like working around the magic."

Draco hid his smirk and raised one hoof, waving it at them. "I'm truly sorry, guys," he offered.

Harry stepped back into the office and collapsed into a chair, staring at Draco.

The two Weasley men kept passing Draco's bogus memo back and forth, at a loss, for once.

"Oh, really!" a voice exclaimed from the door.

Everyone turned to face Luna, who stood in the doorway shaking her head. Behind her stood the Johansen twins.

Harry felt the surge and wondered when Luna had mastered gestureless casting. Slowly, Draco's transformation reversed itself.

"This has got to stop," Luna said in a surprisingly annoyed tone. "He comes home depressed by your incessant pranks, and does little but try to think of ways to get back at you. Well, he succeeded. He made you think you couldn't marry your girlfriends," she said, waving at the Fred and George.

Both Weasley men stared at Luna in shock. Yes, they had planned to ask the girls, but they hadn't yet. And now Luna was giving away their secret!

Helga and Inga both gave identical squeals and lunged at their boyfriends.

Harry sat on his chair, grinning. He and Hermione would have quite a laugh over this, later.

Luna turned on Draco. "And you! Enough with the revenge already. Don't you know how mean that prank was?"

George glanced over at Fred. "Does this mean we can marry them?" he asked, his arms wrapped around his girlfriend.

"I think so brother," wheezed Fred as Inga hugged the breath out of him.

Luna stared at the Weasleys for a moment, then her eyes narrowed and both men's expressions changed.

From their pants, faint wisps of smoke drifted free and the two red heads looked pained. A moment later, Fred bolted to Draco's bathroom, leaving Inga staring at his back in confusion. There was a moment of silence and then a muffled howl. Fred threw open the door and tumbled back out, staring at Luna in horror.

"Please tell me it isn't permanent," he gasped.

"Alright, I won't tell you," she replied smugly. "Besides, I've done Inga a favor by doing this."

Fred glanced at George, who paled and rushed into the bathroom to check for himself. A moment later he came out, shaking.

Luna moved to sit on Draco's desk, her feet not touching the floor. She smiled dreamily at the two men. "Now, boys, a good prank is fun and all, but we don't want to get carried away, do we?" she asked.

The two exchanged a glance, then met Luna's blue eyes. "We surrender!" they exclaimed in unison.

She smiled happily. "I thought so. No more pranking my Dray. Play nice and everyone will be happy. Run along now and show your fiancées your new tattoos."

She seemed to focus on a spot over their shoulder and a flicker of an aura played about her body. The two Weasley men blanched and dragged their confused girlfriends from the office before Luna decided to do any more damage.

Draco leaned back on his chair and let out an explosive breath. "What did you do to them?"

"Oh, I know how you boys like to name your body parts. So I tattooed Gred and Forge on their willies," she replied, staring at her fingernails.

Harry winced and closed his legs involuntarily.

Luna glanced over at him for a moment. "You should go home, Harry. Your leg's hurting you and tomorrow might be a busy day. I meet with the committee tomorrow."

Harry blinked as his leg began to ache. "I guess I'll leave you two alone for now. I'll see you at dinner," he replied. Standing, he looked at them both oddly for a moment, then apparated from the office.

Luna swiveled on the desk so she was facing Draco. She smiled and hooked a finger, beckoning him closer. He slid closer in his chair and she wrapped her arms around him, pressing his face into her breasts.

"Don't worry about the twins anymore, Dray. I think the girls will keep them in line," she murmured, playing with his hair.

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### **Padfoot Manor...**

Harry sat at his desk, writing a reply to his friend, the Sheik, when Winky appeared next to him. He nodded to the little elf. "Winky, is there something wrong?"

"It's Miss Hermione, Master Harry. She be asking for some foods that I can't gives her," she said, tugging on the little dress Hermione had gotten for her.

Harry frowned. *Hermione doesn't usually ask for unique foods, and she's never unreasonable in her requests. Especially with an elf!* he thought.

"Alright, Winky. Tell me what she wants and I'll see if I can get it for you," he offered with a smile.

Winky smiled in relief. "Miss Hermione wants strawberries, vanilla peach swirl ice cream with pistachios, sardines and graham crackers. We don't have any strawberries, or sardines."

Harry made a list and scowled. "I'll talk to Hermione, then I'll see what I can do?"

The little elf nodded and vanished with a pop.

"*Honey? What's with the strange food request?*" he sent her.

Silence.

He frowned and checked their bond. Hermione had shut it down to the barest minimum and was keeping it closed. He could force it open, but with her keeping it closed, it would only close down again unless he over powered her, and he wasn't willing to do so.

He dropped his quill and stood up, summoning his staff. Luna had been right about his leg hurting. It had flared up just about the time he'd made it home.

He limped into the hallway and was surprised to see Dan, Remus, Draco and Neville in an intense conversation. Remus spotted him and waved him over.

They quieted down as he approached and Dan turned to him. "Let me guess, she wants some food we don't have?"

Harry nodded, dumbfounded. "How did you know?"

"It's the same with all of us, mate," Neville said. "Ginny wants a New York hot dog, a slice of pizza and a whole cheesecake!"

Draco snorted and shook his head. "At least that's doable. Luna wants a glass of nectar from a Stygian Fire Blossom," he moaned, then he grabbed his head. "To make matters worse, that lethal fuzzi-ball of hers keeps growling at me when I offer her something more normal."

Dan stared at the others, then shook his head in denial. "You don't suppose they're all pregnant?" he asked in a horrified tone.

A look of pure terror passed among the men.

"That's it, I'm going to talk to Hermione," Harry said grimly.

He turned and limped towards the door to his bedroom. The men watched him fearfully from a distance, figuring they were safe where they were.

Harry touched the door and jerked his hand back in surprise. Hermione had warded the door!

"Hermione. it's me. Open the door!" he yelled, shaking his still stinging hand.

"Do you have sardines?" came the reply.

Harry glanced at his friends, who gestured to him in support. He turned back to the door.

"Well... no... But look, Hermione, I want to talk to you."

"Get out of here, Harry. Go get me some sardines!" she ordered.

He flinched back from the door. The other men flinched with him. This just didn't make any sense. They all couldn't be pregnant at the same time. Besides they took precautions! He swore to himself, turned around and marched back towards his friends.

He stopped suddenly and stared at the men as a thought struck him. "Susan," he muttered. He turned around again and limped off in the direction of Susan and Terry's room.

The men followed along, confused.

He stopped and knocked on the door. "Terry? Susan? It's Harry. May I come in?"

Terry opened the door and let them all enter the room.

Susan sat at their breakfast table. Around her was an impressive array of foods, many rather exotic. She waved, then dipped a piece of peanut butter covered broccoli into a pot of chocolate sauce and bit into the dripping mess. She wore only her loosely fitting dressing gown over a nightgown. Every so often she'd reach up and stroke her Brotherhood medallion, as if for comfort.

Terry stared at the group of men. "Um... Guys? Is something wrong?"

Dan took another look at Susan and leaned back against the wall as his legs went weak with relief. He started to laugh and slid slowly to the floor. "It's her!" he exclaimed.

"I... er... I don't know how to say this," Harry murmured. Then he glanced at the others, looking for someone to rescue him from the awkward situation.

Remus stepped forward and clapped a hand on Terry's shoulder. "It's like this, Terry. Susan's cravings are being transmitted to every woman in the Brotherhood."

Susan stopped eating and stared at the others in horror. Terry's eyes widened and he blanched.

"Hermione is demanding sardines," Harry mumbled. "I've never even seen a sardine. It's a fish isn't it? I can't conjure something I've never seen before!"

Susan stood and walked over to the group. "You couldn't conjure them anyway, Harry. Conjured foods don't taste the same. I made Terry go out looking for this stuff," she said, pointing to the table.

One look at Terry was enough for the men to know that she might think he went out searching, but some of the items were, in fact, conjured.

"Talking to them might help, but I think it might help even more if you stopped caressing your medallion. I think you're broadcasting to the other women, via the medallion," Remus offered with a gentle smile. He couldn't fail to see the humor of the situation.

Susan blushed and nodded.

"So what do we do now?" asked a perplexed Harry.

"I suggest that we let Susan go talk to the ladies. In the meantime, it looks like we're going shopping," Remus said with a snicker.

"Does anyone know where I can get Stygian Fire Blossom nectar? And what's a Peanut M&M?" asked Draco worriedly.

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### **Padfoot Manor (Jan 11th)...**

The following morning, a group of unhappy husbands and very embarrassed wives sat around the breakfast table. Susan appeared, taking her seat and everyone glanced at her. She coughed and looked down at the table, mortified.

"So, Draco, did you ever figure out what a Peanut M&M is?" asked Harry with a smirk. He had gotten off easily. They had all apparated into Cork to find what they needed and he had found the sardines very quickly in a grocery store.

Draco frowned at him. The whole mansion had heard about his failure to find M&Ms. Luna had been uncharacteristically vocal about.

Luna blushed and stared at her plate.

Fuzz, currently invisible, opened her eyes and peeked through Luna's hair. "Meep whirr?"

She reached up and caressed Fuzz, causing the small creature to buzz loudly.

Crookshanks looked up from his position on the windowsill and wondered if he should go check out the sound. His people had kept him separate from the interesting thing for too long.

Ginny looked up from her plate. She was anxious to see that attention wasn't drawn to her. "Uh oh, Crookshanks alert," she said, drawing everyone's attention to the approaching kneazle.

Harry bent down and scooped up the large cat. "Oh no you don't, Crookie," he mumbled, then he tossed some bits of sausage and some scrambled eggs on a small dish and placed it on the floor before depositing Crookshanks in front of the feast.

The cat immediately forgave the limping human that smelled like his human. He tore into the dish of sausage and eggs, purring loudly.

"Crookie?" exclaimed Hermione in loud voice. "And that isn't good for him! I'm trying to get him to drop a few kilos and you're feeding him table scraps?"

Harry said nothing, trying to look innocent.

Her eyes narrowed. *"You've been feeding him leftovers all along!"* she sent him.

"They're doing it again," Remus said with a laugh.

*"Only once in a while,"* he protested.

"It's the strangest thing to know they are having a row and making no sound," Tonk said with a snort of laughter.

*"You don't see me feeding Hedwig the way you make my cat pig out!"* she huffed.

"Are you ready for today, Luna?" Remus asked.

*"Even if she did pig out, at least she does something. Crookshanks just lays around,"* he replied.

The purring stopped as Crookshanks stopped eating and glared at Harry.

"I don't think I'll have any problems, Remus. Besides, Dray will be coming with me," Luna replied, stroking Fuzz again.

*"WHAT?!"*

Harry winced and looked at her reproachfully. *"Let's hold this fight until later. Right now I need to stop something."* he sent, then turned to Luna.

"That might not be feasible, Luna. I need Draco today at the Operations Center. Caleb, Draco, Chuck and myself will be going over the first pass of an operations plan."

Draco scowled. "Harry, I can't do that. Not today. You know how Luna will be with their questions if I'm not there..."

"I'm counting on it," Harry retorted icily. "I need you at that meeting today, Draco. Luna's a grown up, and she can answer a few simple questions without you holding her hand."

Draco's expression hardened and he stared at Harry for a moment.

Luna glanced at Harry, stood up and smiled brightly. "Well then, I better change into something more suitable for the Wizengamot," she said before she left the room.

Draco stood without a word and followed her.

The meal was finished in an uneasy silence. Few wanted to get drawn into the conflict between Harry and Draco.

*"What are you doing?"*

*"I'm making sure Amhar learns not to mess with any of us,"* he replied.

*"By using Luna? You know she's going to sound like she's insane when she sits in front of that committee."*

*"For a bit, yes. But then what she is will become apparent."*

He winced a little when he felt the doubt coming over their bond in waves. He quickly finished his breakfast and left the table. Some would know his reasons, others would never understand.

He watched from the sitting room while Draco walked Luna to the door. After she left the manor, Draco turned, and spotting Harry, he walked over to talk with him.

"She explained your reasons. I don't like them, but it's very Slytherin of you," Draco said in quiet understanding.

"I don't like using her this way either, Draco. But she's the second most powerful of us and the one person people always underestimate. I want that to end," Harry replied softly.

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### **Wizengamot Investigative Committee...**

Amhar took his seat and smiled to himself. Behind the witness was a member of the Ministry's Magical Animal Control Department. He had alerted the department that they were to send a representative who would be taking a dangerous beast into custody today.

Around Amhar, the other committee members were taking their seats, chatting a little with their fellow members. He looked up when the door opened and Luna Black entered.

Luna was dressed in a simple outfit of muggle jeans and a pale blue blouse. It was one of her favorites. She wore her Brotherhood medallion around her neck, and what appeared to be a necklace made of carrots.

Amhar frowned. The girl hadn't brought the beast!

Luna sat at the small table provided for the witness and arranged a small stack of parchments in front of her. A small whirring sound came from her

every so often. She divided the parchment into four small piles and put them on the table in the four cardinal compass points.

"Mrs. Black, I hate to interrupt your fascinating exercise, but it's time to begin," Amhar said snidely.

"You can begin if you want, Councilor. It is a Tuesday, after all," Luna replied, looking at the curtain skirting the edge of the table that the Councilors sat behind. She could see that the curtain was laced with Nuk-Flies.

Amhar frowned, then pulled a piece of parchment out of a folder and looked it over briefly before speaking. "You are sixteen years old, correct Mrs. Black?" he asked.

"That's correct, Mr. Councilorman. Or just over two dog years," she said dreamily.

Trenton Largo coughed and Amhar glared at him, wondering if he was laughing.

Luna shook her head, causing Fuzz to whirr loudly and she chastised herself for not paying attention.

"You're married and no longer attending school? How is that possible?" Amhar asked, leaning forward in his chair.

Luna looked up at him. "Well, there was this ceremony called a handfasting. Draco and I professed our love..."

"No, no, no. I mean, why did your father allow you to marry so young? And to leave school?" Amhar said with a hint of exasperation in his voice.

Luna giggled slightly. "Because Daddy let me. He knew I wanted Draco and had made him mine already. As for school, there was nothing more they could teach me."

Amhar smiled to himself. The girl was coming off sounding like an idiot. If she kept it up, she'd surely say something she shouldn't!

"You are married to Draco Malfoy, aren't you?" asked Amhar.

Luna looked down at her fingernails, examining them carefully.

Amhar glared at the young woman who seemed to be ignoring him.

Luna glanced up at the skirt again and shuddered. The Nuk-Flies seemed to be getting agitated.

"Mrs. Malfoy!" snapped Amhar.

Luna leapt to her feet and whipped out her wand. She scanned the room for threats. "Where? That must mean Lucius is here, too! Everyone stay down!"

Trenton buried his head in his hands and was fighting back tears. He had been briefed on Luna's abilities, and her eccentricities, but this was his first experience with her.

Amhar sat dumbfounded at Luna's behavior.

Andrew Korwin stood up. "Mrs. Black? Mrs. Black, please be seated. I can assure you that Lucius Malfoy is not here."

Luna eyed the Councilor for a moment before sitting again. She looked at Amhar and frowned. "You know, it really isn't nice to scare people like that. Someone could have gotten hurt!"

On her shoulders a pair of yellow eyes appeared and stared at Amhar. A whirring sound came from her shoulder and she reached up to calm Fuzz.

Largo coughed and reached under the table. While pretending to tie his shoes, he cast a silencing charm on himself and began to laugh.

Korwin nudged Amhar, who blinked at him in surprise before glancing down at his parchment again.

"Yes, well, moving along. Mrs. Black, what does your husband do?" Amhar asked.

"He does something with house elves for the Ministry. He's also my protector, he makes me laugh and he's fabulous in bed," she replied seriously as a blush stained her cheeks. She thought the question rather personal, but figured the committee must really need the information.

Ms. McFerrison, one of the neutrals on the committee, looked at Luna in astonishment and barked out a laugh before she could cover it. "Lucky girl," she muttered.

Largo looked to be splitting his sides and Amhar was visibly angry.

"NO! I mean, what does he do for the Ministry." Amhar demanded.

Luna shrugged her shoulders. "He does something with house elves. He's also one of Harry's friends and a unit commander in the brigade. Beyond that, I really couldn't say and wild puff babblers couldn't drag it out of me."

Amhar looked up from his writing and stared at the young woman. Was she even sane? "Where did you find the Snorkack, Mrs. Black?" he asked.

Luna relaxed back on her chair. "I didn't find her," she replied happily. "A Snorkack can't be found unless it wants to be," she added. *Nowthis is*

something I can talk about, she thought. "Did you know Snorkacks have prehensile tails and an ability to apparate?" she asked.

Amhar blinked in surprise. There was something odd about her blue eyes. "Well, no," he stammered in reply. Her eyes seemed to twirl in a mesmerizing motion.

Behind Luna, the man from the Department of Magical Animal Control looked at his trap in dismay. He hadn't brought one warded for apparation!

"You should really read about them, Mr. Councilorman. They're fascinating creatures," Luna murmured.

Korwin stared at Amhar in disbelief. He had allowed the child to derail the entire course of the questioning. *What is Amhar thinking?* he wondered. "Mrs. Black, where did the Snorkack come from, if you didn't find it?"

Luna blushed prettily and looked up at Korwin. "Snorkacks aren't much different than we are, sir. Must I give you the little Snorkack talk?"

Ms. McFerrison covered her mouth and glanced away. Laughing uproariously, Largo had slipped off his chair and was now pretending to look for something under the table, still safely cocooned in his silencing charm.

"Mrs. Black, I believe Councilor Korwin wanted to know who found the Snorkack. If you didn't find it, who gave it to you?" one of the neutral Councilors asked, trying to clarify the question for the girl.

Luna blinked and looked at Amhar in surprise. "Oh. Why didn't you say so in the first place? Professor Hagrid caught the Snorkack eating fluxweed in one of the school greenhouses. He knew I had studied them extensively and wanted me to see it. When he arrived at the manor on Christmas day, the Snorkack decided I was a suitable human for it's needs and bonded with me. Fuzz is now my familiar," she said proudly, then she reached up and caressed the small creature as it slowly appeared on her shoulder, causing many to gape.

Amhar blinked in surprise and stared hard at that creature. "Officer!" he said, calling out to the man from Animal Control. "I demand you lock up that creature! It's a danger to us all."

Fuzz turned to watch the man stand up and she whirred menacingly at him. Luna eyed the man while she caressed her Snorkack and her eyes flashed with power.

He swallowed nervously and sat back down. "With all due respect, Councilor, I didn't bring the proper cage for a creature like this. Since it's not actively threatening anyone, I don't think it's necessary to cage it," he said timidly.

"I'm afraid I agree with the officer, Councilor," said Largo. "The creature is not threatening anyone here and I suspect Mrs. Black is capable of keeping it under control."

"She's quite safe," added Luna. "She only attacks those who threaten her or her friends."

Largo winced a little. Luna wasn't helping her case.

"Very well. The beast can stay where it is for now," snapped Amhar. "You got the beast from Professor Hagrid, but why did you take it into battle with you?"

"I didn't take Fuzz into battle, Fuzz went into battle by herself and I followed to protect her," Luna said softly. "Snorkacks are quite good in a fight, you know. In fact, a Snorkack can take on a full grown Mud Dragon and come out the victor. Did you know that?" she asked, pinning Amhar with her gaze again.

Amhar blinked. "Umm... No, I didn't know that," he replied, then he shook his head. "Mrs. Black, did you command that creature to kill Albus Dumbledore?"

"Certainly not! She did that all on her own, but I don't believe she'll do it again," Luna offered.

Largo leaned forward on his chair. "What makes you think that, Mrs. Black?"

Luna placed a hand on her chest. "Because I had to give her a bath afterwards. All the world knows Snorkacks hate water. She now knows that killing results in a bath. I'm sure next time she'll just maim and rip limbs off."

Amhar began to shake and his face turned bright red with anger. Since her arrival, the child had made a mockery of him and his committee! His hands curled into claws as he visualized wrapping them around her small neck and choking the life from her.

Seeing his condition and understanding it's cause, two more members of the committee discovered Largo's excellent silencing charm.

"Mrs. Black, are you aware that a Snorkack is a protected species? And as such, you are not allowed to keep them as a pet?" asked Amhar through gritted teeth.

"Councilorman, I already told you, Fuzz is not a pet. She is my bound familiar, like Albus Dumbledore's phoenix, Fawkes, although Fawkes did abandon him. Maybe a better example would be that Veela you wanted to bind as your familiar when you were sixteen. You begged your parents for weeks, didn't you?" Luna asked, tilting her head slightly as she watched Largo bite his fist under the table.

Several of the committee members burst out laughing and Amhar started to sputter in rage. He stood and his chair crashed to the floor behind him.

"That's it!" he declared. "I refuse to allow you to make a mockery of these proceeding. Officer, I order you to take that dangerous creature into



custody. I want it put down by tonight," Amhar said angrily, pointing at Luna.

Luna's expression changed and the vagueness in her eyes flashed into sharp awareness. She stood slowly and a green aura surrounded her.

The man from animal control took one look at her and knew instantly what he was seeing. He backed off under her unflinching gaze. "Councilor, I humbly submit my resignation. I catch stray Kneazles and Puffskiens, maybe the odd Plimpy or Porlock. This is out of my league," the man said. Turning suddenly, he dashed from the room.

Luna turned to face the committee. As she did, a series of popping sounds were heard as all sorts of strange creatures flashed into existence. On the table in front of her appeared a short man with a horn protruding from his forehead. He wore a bright yellow vest, but no pants. He glanced at Luna and backed away slightly from the angry witch. Then he whirled around and faced the source of her anger.

Trenton Largo canceled the silencing charm and scrambled out from under the table. Running to Luna's side, he spoke calmly and quietly to her, trying to calm her.

Amhar ducked under the table when one of the new creatures jumped onto the committee table. It looked like a cross between a rabbit and an Acromantula. It's eight legs and long ears gave it superb balance and hearing. The creature, a Bider, would have been cute, if not for its four inch fangs and eight eyes.

Luna blinked and turned to look at Councilor Largo. When she did, the creatures started to vanish one at a time.

"Mrs. Black, you must calm down. No one is going to hurt your familiar. The international rules of wizardry make it illegal for one wizard to harm another's familiar," Largo told her seriously.

Luna blinked again and her aura faded.

Amhar peeked out from under the table, just in time for the little horned man in the vest to make a crude gesture to him. With a rude sound, he, too, vanished.

"Really? You're not going to take Fuzz away from me?" she asked.

"No, we're not taking Fuzz away. I think we're finished today, Mrs. Black. Thank you for answering our questions. You're free to leave now," he said softly, then smiled at the girl.

She nodded and smiled prettily at him before turning and walking out.

Amhar stood and placed both hands flat on the table to glare at Largo. It was then that he discovered the Bider had left a foul smelling present on the table and he had placed his hand in the middle of it.

"What is the meaning of this, Largo? That girl was here for a reason and that creature is dangerous!" he snapped, shaking his hand furiously and spraying his papers with the Bider's gift.

Largo stared up at the man for a moment, shaking his head. "You know, Amhar, this committee of yours has been a farce from day one. You should be thanking me about now. In case you didn't know it, I just saved your life. Mrs. Black is a Child of Gaia and probably the third most powerful magical human on the planet, right after Voldemort and Harry Potter. She is undoubtedly the most powerful witch in the world the planet and you're threatening her familiar? Just how many pieces do you want to be buried in?"

"You have no authority to seize her familiar, Councilor," said Lillias McFerron as she stood up. "I believe it's time for us to close this committee and prepare our report to the Wizengamot. We have accomplished little and it's turning into a witch hunt!"

Amhar stood. "This is insane. We haven't heard from any of the principles in this. We haven't heard from Mrs. Potter, or her parents. We can't give up when we're getting so close!"

"Close? Close to what, Councilor? Just what do you think will happen if you drag Lady Potter or her parents before this committee? I'll tell you what will happen. Harry Potter will shut you down and quite possibly withdraw funding for the Wizengamot!" exclaimed McFerron.

"You have a vendetta against Potter and I don't really want to be a part of it, Amhar," said Largo. "The only reason why you aren't a smear on the grounds of Haven is that Lord Potter is busy fighting the war and trying to ignore the damage you have been doing to the war effort."

Amhar stood sputtering, too enraged to form coherent words.

"Friends, I think we should take a short recess for a few days and let tempers cool down. Perhaps we have gotten a little off track here. After a few days off we can meet again to discuss how we can refocus our efforts," Korwin said placatingly.

"Fine, we'll recess for a week and meet back here on the eighteenth!" Amhar snarled, then he gathered up his papers and stormed from the room, wiping one hand on his pants.

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### Author's Notes:

Bob looked up and wondered why Alyx was wearing a Hockey goalie mask and carried a shovel.

"What are you doing?" he asked.

"It's time for the Author's notes. I want to be prepared this time. Last time the readers got angry with us," she replied.

"Yeah, but this chapter is different. It's got everything in it. What can they find to complain about?" asked a confused Bob.

"Did you include anything about a kitchen sink in this chapter?" Alyx demanded to know.

"Well... um... no," Bob answered uncertainly.

"See! It doesn't have everything in it! They now will have a reason to complain," Alyx answered smugly.

Bob sighed and turned back to the author's notes.

We had to ask Dilly about the complaint about her speech, and here is her reply. "Dilly do be thinking that Rebel Goddess do be to picky. But if she do be interviewing other house elves and finding they do be using the word 'do' less, then Dilly do be using it less too! Dilly do be a good house elf no matter what Rebel Goddess do be saying"

There, you have it from the source. Dilly likes the word 'do'.

Bimalc: As to our knowledge of UK Geography... heh, it's called the Internet and a system called multimap.com

Muirmin: No, this year we are not attempting to do the nanomowrithingie.

Crys: Sir Basil is not related to Clancy's Sir Basil. Our Sir Basil might as well have been Sir Pepper, Sir Paprika or Sir Parsnip... I hate thinking up names. The sheepish pun was something Alyx threw in. I saw it during the final read through and left it in because I thought it wasn't baaaaaad.

John: The Blood Jihad and the Iron Wand aren't thinking that far ahead. They expect that Voldemort will ultimately tear down the ward and allow them to boil out of Britain.

Harry's leg will continue to be an issue with him. Face it folks. As good as Wizarding medicine might be, it can't fix everything. Harry is coming to learn that there will be limitations, such as avoiding portkeys. Now that also doesn't mean he can't fight or duel. We mentioned quite a few chapters ago that Eocho knew spells that would return the leg to nearly normal mobility for limited durations. And for a heavy price, which is why you haven't seen him use those spells yet.

The arch was a plot device we invented for the last chapter. It probably won't be seen again.

And for those wanting to know, Snorkacks are covered in seventh year Care of Magical Creatures, which none of our heroes attended. Don't blame us if you slept through that class!

And now... **BLOOPERS!!!**

**You are my heir little *loin* , whatever way it has come to pass.**

Sheesh... what can we say about this?

**"Oh so the world revolves around the great James Potter!" Harry retorted ignoring the calls from his friends to *shit* down and be quiet.**

Just out of curiosity, but is it possible to shit up? And is that optional?

**Hermione had to admit that Harry looked adorable that morning as his glasses weren't quite on straight and his hair was *stinking* up even more than normal.**

Harry, wash that hair. If it stinks enough for people to notice it... ewwww.

**One of the *fowl* specters swept up to Harry.**

Here is a dementor attack that was written by the Great Gonzo.

**After Hermione nodded in the affirmative, Harry started by kissing her passionately, he then trailed kisses down her chin, her neck, passed her *color-bone* , until he reached the valley between Hermione's breasts.**

Obviously this writer is a med student drop out.

*Bobmin*  
*FanficAuthors.net*

# Sunrise Over Britain

## Chapter 23 - Muddying the Waters

### Standard Disclaimer:

Voldemort walked onto the stage and tapped the microphone hesitantly. "Is this thing on?" he called.

"Boo! Down in front! Get off the stage you bum!" shouted random audience person number six.

Voldemort narrowed his eyes and he thrust out his wand. "*Avada Kedavra!*" he shouted, killing random audience person number six.

Voldemort smiled. "I always feel better after allowing myself to express my anger in creative ways," he said into the microphone, then his expression sobered.

"Before we can begin this session of Sunrise Idol, the authors have asked me to tell you that they do not own Harry Potter. If they did, he'd be American and have really cool powers and a big chested girlfriend. But no, this is all owned by some British lady, which explains a lot. Anyway they don't own anything," he said, then he paused and looked around hoping someone would say something so he could kill them.

Seeing he wasn't going to get his wish, he sighed. "Oh very well, and now Sunrise Idol!"

"WAIT!" shouted Alyx and she rushed out onto the stage. She grabbed the microphone from Voldemort.

"I'm sorry, but I refuse to let my story be taken over by a stuck up like Simon Cowl. Get outa here Voldy or you'll regret it!" she snarled.

Voldemort fingered his wand and eyed Alyx.

She smirked at him. "Try it buster and I'll have you dancing in pig tails and a sun dress while singing tiptoe through the tulips next chapter."

Voldemort blanched. "Maybe another time," he said, then he reached for his portkey. There was a whooshing sound and Voldemort tore himself into two pieces. The audience gasped and started to laugh.

Harry dropped the invisibility cloak, revealing himself and a chain attached to a large concrete block and to Voldemort's leg.

"Anti-Portkey ward on the block," Harry said with a grin. The audience cheered and Alyx trudged off the stage wondering if she'd ever get a normal disclaimer in this story.

"Probably not," snickered Bob.

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### Sunrise Over Britain

#### Chapter 23

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#### Stonewall Lane, Dublin, (Jan 12th)...

Marne Murphy looked up from the report on drug distribution. She had inherited the business from her late lover, literally. He had died from causes that most suspect stemmed from Ms. Murphy. Those too vocal in their suspicions joined the late drug boss in his grave. The rest realized that Ms. Murphy was an rising star on the drug scene in Ireland and threw their lot in with her.

Ms. Murphy owned a string of apothecaries throughout Ireland and from the outside they appeared to be legitimate businesses. They were, in fact, a front for her drug distribution business as well as real apothecaries.

She had been investigated by the Irish openly, as well as discretely, on several occasions and they had been unable to find anything to pin on her. But times were changing.

With the turmoil across the Irish sea, she had gotten sloppy, allowing herself to be pulled into supporting the illegal regime in Britain. By supporting Voldemort she had exposed her organization and for the first time people were finding out things she wanted kept hidden.

She looked up from the report and reached for her wand when a knock came at the door. "Come," she called

The door opened to reveal a tall, broad man with a heavy limp. His left hand was heavily scarred by fire and nearly useless to him.

"Lugo, what have you learned?" she asked.

"Ms. Murphy, the buzz at the Ministry is all about a secret investigation led by a team of Unspeakables. I can't say with any certainty, but I think we may have a problem."

Murphy drummed her fingers against the desk while she thought about the problem. She grimaced and looked back at the man. "What do you think, Lugo?" she asked. She had grown up with the man. To her, he was more of a big brother and protector than her chief enforcer.

The older man grunted. "I think we made a mistake when we got involved with those people in Haven. We're exposed now."

Murphy looked at him sharply and he raised a hand as if warding off a blow.

“Don't give me that look, Marne. You know I agree with what you're doing, and I agree with supporting our Lord. The screw up was in how we got involved in Haven,” Lugo offered in a conciliatory tone.

Murphy frowned and her shoulders sagged a little. “Yes, I think you're right. We're normally much more circumspect, but we were rushed in supporting our friends in Haven. What do you suggest?”

Lugo walked over to a small bar in the corner and poured himself a drink. He gestured to an empty glass and Murphy shook her head. She kept the bar in the office for him and when she occasionally wanted to entertain visitors. Her tastes, however, were more primal and couldn't be satisfied with liquor.

“I think we need to erase the evidence of our involvement in Haven,” Lugo offered, then sipped from his glass.

“That won't be easy. Before I can do that, I'll need to get permission from Lord Malfoy,” she replied with a shake of her head.

“Well, you better think about it. If the Ministry is getting close to us, Lord Malfoy could lose a major source of income and supplies over a pet project that doesn't seem to be working.”

“I'll write him immediately and point that out. The Haven project hasn't been a total failure, but it certainly hasn't been as successful as we hoped. In the meantime, make sure all the escape routes are still open and active. If we have to go to ground, I want it to be done quickly.”

Lugo downed his drink. “I'll do that right now,” he said. Placing the empty glass on the bar, he walked from the room.

Murphy watched him for a moment, then pulled a clean piece of parchment from a drawer in her desk. She had learned to trust Lugo's sense of survival and he was right. They were exposed now, and Lord Malfoy had to be told.

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### **Padfoot Manor...**

Harry stood and walked over to the window, stretching. He chuckled to himself. The morning briefing had just ended and Amelia had told them that Amhar and his cronies were still in disarray after the session with Luna.

He had counted on Luna and she had come through beautifully. Most people were confused by her. She looked younger than she was and her responses under questioning had thoroughly confused the committee. When Amhar had tried to take Fuzz from her, she had allowed her power to shine through. The committee had not met since then and Harry had learned that Trenton Largo had suggested closing it down altogether.

“What has you chortling to yourself?”

Harry turned and smiled at Hermione. She had stopped detailing her notes from the briefing and was looking at him curiously.

“Luna,” he replied with a grin.

“Oh? Should I be jealous?” she asked, her eyes dancing merrily.

Harry shook his head. “Hardly. I like Luna a lot, but not in that way. There are times when she makes me want to grind my teeth and my hands itch to wrap around her neck. And she doesn't bother me nearly as much as she bothers you. I'm just laughing because of what she's done. I knew that she'd have the effect of throwing dear Councilor Coeur de Lion and his committee into total disarray.

“I've read the transcripts from that particular meeting and Trenton Largo allowed me to view his pensieve memory of the meeting. She literally scared them silly at the end of it.”

“Well, what can you expect? She's a Child of Gaia, after all,” Hermione replied.

Harry returned to his desk and sat down, looking pensive. “That's what caught them by surprise, my heart. Every one of us derives our power from inside our bodies,” he replied, thumping his chest. “Luna is different and people don't seem to understand what she can do. She has her own source of power, like the rest of us, but she's a representative of a higher power. When the conditions are right, she can literally tap into the forces of nature.

“She's more of a Celtic High Priestess, representing one of the Elder Gods, than a witch,” Harry said, then he trailed off into silence.

“Yes, well, at least she's gotten that committee off our backs for a while,” Hermione murmured with a slight frown. Mention of Elder Gods always made her a bit nervous. To her, the whole concept seemed vaguely HP Lovecraft-ish.

“Just for a while, love. Amhar is off balance, but his type never stays that way for long. When he's ready, he'll bounce back with a vengeance.”

She frowned. “How much longer do you think we'll have to put up with him?”

Harry smiled thinly. “He's just an annoyance at the moment. He really hasn't done anything to interfere with the war effort yet. Amelia is right, though. The fool has frozen the Wizengamot because of that committee of his. Had he been smart, he would have pressed for an open, full body investigation, rather than a closed committee. Merlin! Listen to me! I'm starting to sound like Neville, spouting off all this political stuff.” He shook his head ruefully and smiled weakly at Hermione. He hated politics and hated the fact that he had to deal with it.

He looked down at the parchments on his desk, then back up to Hermione. "Did you see your father yesterday? He's as uncomfortable as you are on a broom, but he loves that flying carpet the Sheik sent us."

Hermione placed her stack of parchments down in front of her and turned to stare pointedly at him. "You're not going to let me live that down, are you? You know I don't like heights."

"Yes, but I didn't know where you got it from. According to your mother, you don't seem to mind flying in muggle airplanes."

She made a face and he laughed at her expression.

"But seriously, how will you be able to join in family Quidditch games if you're afraid to fly?"

"Hah! I'll watch, and provide healing for the children. You, on the other hand, I think I'll let bleed," she said haughtily.

He laughed and reached out to caress her mentally. They both loved this sort of gentle teasing.

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## **Hogwarts Castle...**

The doors to the Great Hall swung open and Mulciber entered the large room. He paused for a moment to take in the view. The Dark Lord sat on his throne on the far end of the room and was conversing with the leader of the Iron Wand tong. The man was ancient compared to Voldemort and he knew an obscure branch of Chinese magic that excelled in interrogation and torture. That interested Voldemort.

He slowly approached the throne, waiting for his master to acknowledge his presence.

Voldemort looked up and noticed Mulciber. He motioned for him to approach, while the Iron Tong leader stepped back a few steps.

"Well, Mulciber?"

"My lord, the prisoner Snape is requesting your presence when possible. He sends a message stating that he thinks he has a solution to one of the problems you asked him to research."

Voldemort looked bored and Mulciber began to sweat a little.

"Also, my lord, we have confirmed from several sources that the reports of Dumbledore's death are true. According to the Haven newspaper, he led an assault on Potter's home using Bulgarian mercenaries. The attack failed, resulting in his death and that of most of his men."

Voldemort leaned back and considered the matter. "Have Lucius contact our friends in the French Ministry. I think it would be to our advantage if they lodged an official complaint over the death of the leader of the light," he said with a chuckle.

A wave of laughter ran through the assembled group of Death Eaters. Using the death of an enemy to their advantage fitted their peculiar brand of humor.

Voldemort smiled at his servants. *The French are useful pawns. In their bid to demonstrate their independence, they've played right into my hands,* he thought gleefully. *I will use them to disrupt and confuse my enemies.*

Turning to other matters, the Dark Lord dug through a pile of parchments and pulled one out to hand to Mulciber. "This contains a list of books that Brother Chung and I want, Mulciber. You will obtain them for me."

Mulciber winced inwardly hearing the leader of the Iron Wand addressed as 'Brother'. That meant that, at least for now, he was giving the man status higher than even Mulciber's.

Horatio took the list and bowed. "I will do as you command, my Lord," he murmured.

Voldemort sneered at his minion and Mulciber backed away from the throne.

Far below the Great Hall, in the chamber of secrets, the ghost of Penelope Clearwater appeared and conversed with the Bloody Baron for a few minutes. The Baron then turned to Sir Nicholas. "Find Peeves. We need to send for Lord Potter and he is the only one that can do it."

Sir Nicholas gave the Baron a courtly bow and faded from view, leaving the elder ghost chuckling at the Gryffindor's antics.

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## **Haven Operations Center, Q Branch (Jan 13th)...**

Arthur Weasley walked into the large work area run by his sons. He was inordinately proud of his boys. They had turned their inventive genius from creating pranks to more serious matters when Harry and Draco asked them to help with the war. And in doing so, they had created devices that had saved lives many times over.

"DUCK!" someone shouted.

There was a blinding flash of light and Arthur staggered back as though he had been physically struck. He blinked rapidly and tears streamed down his face. Spots danced before his eyes just before his vision grayed out. Blind, he slid to the floor, his eyes burning painfully.

"What in blazes?" he yelled.

"Dad!" shouted one of his sons.

He heard the sound of running feet approaching, then someone skidding to a stop.

"Dad? Are you alright?" asked one of his boys.

Arthur knew his sons very well and could usually tell them apart by sight, but not by voice. He looked around blindly and grimaced when he began to feel ill. "Fred? What in the name of Merlin did you do?" he asked.

"It's George, Dad. We were testing our Sun Bangers; they're anti-vampire weapons," he said, then he paused and looked at his father with a frown. "I think we need to get you some help, Dad. You have a marvelous sunburn that's going to cause a lot of pain," he murmured.

Arthur winced. "Tell me about it," he muttered.

"OY! Freddo! Dad needs a healer!" he shouted.

Arthur heard the sound of furniture scrapping along the floor, then he felt two sets of arms steadying him.

"Easy, Mr. Weasley," said Inga. "We're going to get you into a chair. You've got a real nasty sunburn."

While Fred and George went into another room to make a floo call, Arthur let the two girls guide him to a chair and smiled. He had learned two days ago that his boys had proposed to the two muggle girls.

Inga applied a damp cloth to Arthur's face, gently covering his eyes. He shivered and began to feel nauseous as the impact of what had happened began to strike home.

"Easy, Mr. Weasley. Fred is trying to get a healer here. Just relax," Inga said softly.

Arthur nodded. Every exposed piece of skin felt like it was on fire. He could hear voices in the outer room, but he was hurting too much to care.

George slipped into the office and watched Fred for a moment. His brother was talking on a portable floo.

"Alright, just hurry," Fred said, then he snapped the floo closed, breaking the connection.

"How did Dad get into the room? I thought you sealed the door? And where's the healer?" asked George.

"A healer will be here shortly. The on duty healer is out with Commander Stanton's Raiders on a training exercise. I had to call over to the hospital to get them to send someone. As for the door, I guess I forgot," he said, embarrassed.

"George! It was your turn to set the security," complained Fred.

Helga, George's fiancée, watched the two silently.

"I know, I know. I'm sorry, I was just over excited about testing the Sun Banger," George replied, then he glanced towards the door that lead to the other room and their injured father. "I'm going in to be with Dad. It was my fault and I should apologize."

Fred nodded silently and watched him leave the room.

"I'm surprised you didn't yell at him more," Helga said softly.

Fred hung his head. "I couldn't. I probably would have made the same mistake if it were my turn for security. We've a tendency to make similar mistakes," he replied, then he looked up as the door to the corridor opened and Melinda McKinney ran in, carrying her potions bag.

"Where is he?" she said, panting.

Fred pointed to the other door and she rushed through it. Fred and Helga followed her a few minutes later.

Inside the large work area, Arthur lay stretched out on a cot that George had conjured, while Melinda worked on him.

"What happened to him?" she asked, examining the fiery redness of his pale skin worriedly.

"We were testing a weapon to use against Vampires," George replied.

"And he walked in as it went off," Fred added.

Melinda ran a few tests and frowned. "Well, you've managed to give him sun poisoning. It's lucky you two weren't exposed, considering your complexion. I can treat it, but he's going to be uncomfortable for the rest of the day. His eyes will heal, but I have something which will stop them from hurting."

She cast a wide field numbing charm on Arthur, then set about applying a salve to his exposed skin. She was somewhat confused by her reaction. She and Arthur were becoming quite close, but she had never treated someone she loved before. Her trip from the hospital to the Operations Center was a blur. Her only thoughts had been of Arthur and the fear of losing him.

Arthur shifted slightly and sighed in relief as the combination of the numbing charm and the cool feeling of the salve made his skin feel better almost instantly. His eyes were damaged and he could barely see, but he had heard Melinda's comment about them. Reassured, he pushed down the thread of panic that had begun to take hold.

Melinda turned away from the twins and spoke softly to Arthur. Once he had calmed, she faced the boys again. "I don't know what you were testing, but it's dangerous. If you're going to use it in battle, we need to talk about it first. That can wait, however. Right now, you're going to help me get your father home where he can rest. He's going to need to be in bed for a couple of days while he heals."

She stood while Fred and George levitated Arthur onto a stretcher and hand carried him from their work area. They had often embarrassed people with their pranks, and some of the things they made they knew were lethal, but this was the first time anything they had made had hurt someone they loved.

Inga followed Melinda and the boys from the room. Helga waited a moment, then she pulled out a device that looked remarkably like a television remote controller and she pressed a button, which caused all the sconces in the room to go out. With the lights out, she pocketed the controller and walked from the room, locking the door behind her.

In one corner of the darkened room, a cabinet suddenly glowed and a muffled scream echoed off the walls. Amy had returned from her latest adventure.

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## Hogwarts Castle...

Snape looked up from the work bench when the door opened. His eyes widened and he immediately dropped to his knees upon seeing Voldemort enter the room.

"Master," he murmured, keeping his eyes fixed firmly on the ground.

Voldemort eyed the man for a moment, then looked around. Off to one side of the room was a small desk, piled high with ancient looking books. The shelves were crammed with books, and a chalkboard was loaded with arithmantic equations.

"You asked to see me, Severus?" the Dark Lord asked, his eyes narrowed.

"Yes, Master. Might I show you what I have discovered?" he asked timidly.

There was a moment of silence. "Very well," came the sibilant reply.

Severus rose to his feet and walked swiftly to the shelf and pulled down a large book. Placing the book down on the work bench, he flipped it open to a marked page.

"This, Master, is an account of Grun One Hand. He was a wizard living in Scandinavia over a thousand years ago. The account explains, in vague terms, how a dark ritual resulted in Grun being unable to use his wand. The story mentions a tvileren, which he used as a replacement."

Voldemort looked at Snape for a moment, then glanced at the items on the table and motioned for him to continue.

"If I'm right, a tvileren, or scepter, would suffice as a replacement for your wand," Snape said, then he pointed at the items on the table. "I have been experimenting with foci for the scepter, and I have determined that in order for this to work, I'll need to use three foci to distribute your power across them."

Voldemort examined the items on the table for a moment. "Yes, I can see where that might work. What do you propose for the core materials? They would have to be powerful foci."

Snape lifted a small jar from the table. "A Wizard's heart string, freshly culled, the phoenix feather from your old wand, and... Begging your mercy, Master, but your blood would act as the third."

The Dark Lord's eyes widened and he hissed for a moment. "Explain yourself, Severus! Your life hangs in the balance."

Snape flinched. "The Wizard's heart string is even more powerful than a Dragon's heart string," he explained quickly. "It has long been forbidden by the Ministry, however. To own a wand using that core would earn a wizard the kiss."

"The core from your old wand comes from an ancient phoenix. Potter's old wand held a feather from the same phoenix, making the two wands brothers. But I know for a fact that he no longer uses that wand, so there is no issue of the wands locking up."

"Your blood is a powerful focus material. Including your blood in the scepter will add a powerful boost to the magic, especially if I cap the scepter with a bloodstone soaked in it. Using your blood will attune the scepter to you alone, Master. No one else would be able to use it. You could easily charm the scepter to make it lethal to anyone who might touch it."

Voldemort watched Snape carefully during his explanation. Seeing no hint of subterfuge, he looked back at the table and its contents. "I take it you have all the materials at your disposal?"

"Most of it, Master. I'll need your old wand and some of your blood," Snape replied.

Voldemort gestured to one of the Death Eaters who had followed him into Snape's chambers. "You! Hold him under wand point. If he even attempts



to cast while he holds my wand, kill him.”

The Death Eater bowed low. “I will do as you command, my lord,” he said, then he pulled his wand and pointed it at the back of Snape’s head.

Snape repressed a shiver as the hairs on the back of his neck stood up. Voldemort reached into the folds of his robe, extracted his wand and placed it on the table.

He pulled a small knife out of his pocket and carefully picked up the wand by the firing tip. Using the knife, he split the wand into two halves and extracted the feather. He placed the two wooden halves to one side, then opened a box that contained two halves of a very dark wood.

“Elder Mahogany, Master. It’s very rare and hard to come by, but Mulciber was able to obtain a length for me. It is very powerful,” Snape murmured. The wood had been split already, with a small hollow space running the length of the wood.

He placed the Mahogany halves on the table, then placed a small bowl and knife in front of Voldemort. “If you would, Master,” he asked, pointing to the knife.

Voldemort scowled for a moment, then he picked up the knife and sliced his wrist over the bowl. The blood dripping into the basin was nearly black and steamed slightly in the chilly dungeon.

Snape watched for a moment, then he picked up the blood stone with a pair of tongs and placed it into the bowl. The stone sizzled and the blood started to boil around it. Next, he picked up a small brush and, dipping it into the blood, he painted both halves of the wood with it. When he had finished, he removed the stone from the bowl and poured the remaining blood into the hollow of each half of the scepter.

With the blood in place, Snape placed the phoenix feather into the small pool of blood. The blood and the feather glistened in the dim light and emitted an eerie green glow.

On top of the two foci he added a still dripping heart string from a captured witch he had killed earlier in the day. He watched closely as the foci seemed to meld together. Nodding to himself, he combined the two halves of the scepter and capped both ends.

Placing the scepter into a long stone basin on the table, he picked up a corked bottle of blue liquid and paused for a moment. Closing his eyes, he cast out a silent prayer to anyone who might hear. If this failed, it would mean his life.

With a quick motion, he uncorked the bottle and carefully poured the contents over the visible seam in the wood. The liquid hissed on contact and the wood smoked slightly, but the seam sealed perfectly.

With a relieved sigh, he used the tongs to turn the scepter over and repeated the process on the second seam.

Once the wood had stopped smoking, he picked it up and attached the bloodstone to one of the end caps, then put it down. A moment later, the scepter began to glow and Snape stepped back from the table.

“Master, you must complete the final step. You must claim the scepter as yours. It will fight for control, but you will overcome it,” he said, looking down at his feet again.

Voldemort stared at him for a moment, then he stepped closer to the table and picked up the scepter.

The lights dimmed suddenly and the room rumbled ominously. The scepter vibrated wildly in the Dark Lord’s hands as if it were struggling to break free. His red eyes widened as a wave of intense pain washed over him and he glared at the fighting scepter.

Voldemort made a snarling noise in the back of his throat. He recognized what was happening. The inclusion of his blood meant he had granted the scepter a piece of himself, much like his old diary. The scepter was as much Voldemort as he was and the two struggled for dominance. He felt the assault on his mental shields and he pushed out with all his might, pushing back at the presence in the scepter.

Snape stepped back in alarm as the air in the damp dungeon dried out and became heavy with static. Flickers of lightning surrounded Voldemort while he struggled. Snape watched in alarm and prayed that some of his more volatile potion ingredients didn’t ignite.

As quickly as the struggle began, it ended and Voldemort staggered. The scepter suddenly stopped resisting and sparks fountained from the bloodstone. His eyes lit up with delight and he surveyed the room for a moment before he made his decision.

“Avada Kedavra,” he whispered, pointing the scepter at one of his guards. A thick rope of green energy leapt from the bloodstone and hit the man square in the chest. The man fluoresced brightly, then seemed to collapse in on himself. Within seconds, all that was left was his robe, his wand and a smoking pile of ash.

Voldemort smiled cruelly at the results.

Seeing the Dark Lord’s expression, Snape shivered in fear.

Voldemort examined the scepter closely now that he had successfully mastered it.

“Master, you can improve the scepter’s performance if you carve runes into the wood,” Snape offered.

The Dark Lord held the scepter up to the light, marveling at the way it seemed to pulsate in his hands, almost as if it were a living extension of himself. “Yes,” he hissed sibilantly. “Runes for pain, control and death. I will consider it most carefully.”

He then lowered the scepter and looked Snape directly in the eye. He sneered, sensing the fear in the Potions Master. "You have pleased me, Severus. I must think of a suitable reward for you," he said, then he turned and swept from the room, carrying his precious scepter in the crook of his arm.

Snape sagged with relief. It had been extremely close. He had come close to death many times in his life, but this had been especially trying. "Girl!" he snapped.

The door opened and his slave scurried into the room. She dropped to her knees in front of him and started to fumble with his pants. He shoved her away and she looked up at him in confusion. He grabbed her by the hair and pulled her up until she was standing on her toes.

"I bet you wish your family had allowed you to return to school for your seventh year, hmm? But their pathetic attempt to save you from the Dark Lord has condemned you. Had you returned, you would have been evacuated with the others." he said viciously.

When she only stared at him blankly, he yanked her head back. "Shall I tell you how your parents died, my pet? Your father was chained to the wall, and as your mother watched, his stomach was split open and his entrails spilled out. But he didn't die. They kept him alive for a time. And as he screamed, your mother was beaten and raped. Once the men had enjoyed her, Mulciber inserted the tip of his wand into her body and cast the *Reducto* r curse. Your father died only moments later, covered in the resulting gore." Seeing the agony in her eyes, agony he had caused, he laughed.

With bared teeth, she kicked out at him. "The apple will avenge us!" she screamed. "I will make you a gift of it and the world will..."

Sneering at her obvious insanity, he punched her hard in the stomach, knocking the breath from her lungs. He spun her around and tore at the rags around her waist, exposing her ass to the cold dungeon air. Wrapping his hand once more in her long, dirty, black hair, he bent her over the table and fumbled with his robe.

The girl clenched her fists. Her parents were dead. Some part of her had always known that. But as the images from the Dark Man's descriptions played through her mind, she could only think that they were the lucky ones. Living had become a nightmare she could not wake up from, and death seemed a sweet, beckoning release. It would be a simple thing, but she couldn't go, not yet. Not while the Dark Man still lived.

In her madness, she thought of herself as an avenging spirit and never noticed when Snape entered her body, or the hard pinches and slaps he delivered as he used her for his own release. She would bring down the Dark Man, thereby weakening the Pale Creature. She would free not just herself from the darkness, but the world!

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### Parliament Building, London...

Lucius Malfoy placed the parchment down on his desk and leaned back, thinking. Murphy's letter was disturbing. The last thing he could afford to do was jeopardize her operations and the inflow of gold that came from it.

The operation involving the Haven members of the Wizengamot was his brainchild and he couldn't let what was, admittedly, a minor operation, interfere. The master would not be pleased if something happened to Murphy and her drug cartel.

He pulled a blank parchment out and started to write.

*Mame,*  
*Consider the Haven operation canceled. You are to do whatever it takes to protect your operation and keep the flow of gold and supplies coming to us.*  
*Lucius*

It was short and to the point, but it did exactly what it was supposed to do. He tied the parchment to an owl and it immediately took off.

With that problem now out of the way, he turned his attention to the issue of Dumbledore and the French. He sighed and glanced out the window. Running the country wasn't as much fun as he thought it would be. Oh, for the days when torturing a muggle was so much fun!

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### Three Scots, Aviemore, Scotland...

McHardy opened the door to his office and walked over to a cabinet. Opening it, he pulled out a bottle of twenty year old scotch and poured himself a double shot.

Thrawkmort's group had received their own orders the day after he had sent out Hanover on that extended patrol and McHardy had just come from reviewing the results of their efforts.

When McHardy and his men first located the underground facility they were using, it was small and poorly ventilated; just a couple of concrete storerooms left over from World War II. In the beginning, Alastor Moody had spent several days expanding and enhancing the damp rooms into something resembling a usable base of operations. But Thrawkmort's group had taken over the job from Moody, who was now somewhere to the south, leaving McHardy and Three Scots on their own.

Thrawkmort's men had added storerooms, bunk rooms and even an indoor vehicle garage with a hidden ramp. At first, he had thought that the garage was meant for vehicles his men captured. Today, however, he had learned the truth of the matter. A single crate, barely four feet long and a foot high, had been recovered from an air drop. The first of many supply drops to come.

McHardy hid sweat in awe as Thrawkmort and his men removed a dozen M1 Abrams tanks and expanded them to full size. The tanks would be used in a future, unspecified operation. Right now, command was prepositioning hardware. The crews would come along later. McHardy shook his head and wondered if the crews would be sent to him shrunk down and in a lunch box.

He sat at his desk and read over the dispatches he had received. Hanover reported he was near Kirkton, a small town southwest of Inverness. It had taken all of this time to get from Aviemore to Inverness before he could even begin to survey A82.

Hanover was using one of the new burst satellite radios. The information was recorded, encrypted and sent to an orbiting satellite, where it was relayed to Aviemore via the Americans. The information was sent via a high speed burst, making the radio nearly impossible to locate.

McHardy picked up another dispatch. This one detailed a schedule for arriving reinforcements. He was pleased to note the crews for the twelve tanks would be arriving via a more normal method. They would be delivered by two Pave Low helicopters near the latter part of the month. He cringed a little seeing that the same helicopters would be delivering enough munitions and fuel to allow the twelve tanks ten days of operation. That would mean Thrawkmort and more of this miniaturized supplies business. It just wasn't natural!

He frowned and thought about his men, then he scribbled a note to send back to command. He knew better, but he had dropped some hints to his men concerning a movie made by the American's in the sixties about shrinking down people and equipment. His men were eating up his tale and loving every minute of it and he wasn't about to do anything to change their mind. It was a peculiar piece of disinformation to use on your own people, but the truth was too unbelievable.

When it came to super technology and conspiracies, it seemed everyone was willing to believe that the American government was capable of building fantastic stuff and covering it up.

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### **Weasley Cottage, Haven (Jan 16th)...**

Holding her wand, Melinda scanned Arthur's body one last time, then smiled down at the tired man who sat on the bed. "That was the last one. I know kidney stones can be painful, but it's always best to let them pass naturally, when possible. Are you in any pain?"

"No," he said, grimacing. "The potion you gave me helped with the pain. It's just embarrassing, that's all."

She grinned. "It's not anything I haven't seen before."

"Perhaps, but I'm not in the habit of taking a piss in front of my lover. Or my healer, for that matter," he grouched as he passed her the chamber pot.

Laughing, she took the pot from him and set it on the night table. Using her wand, she checked the urine and nodded. "There it is," she announced.

"For Merlin's sake, Melinda. Don't play with it!" he exclaimed.

"I'm not playing. It needs to be analyzed like the others. I'm sure it's just calcium, but it's better to be safe."

"The others? You did this with the others?"

"Yes," she told him as she maneuvered the stone into a sterile tube and sealed it. "Although you were unconscious for most of it."

"You drugged me?" he sputtered, shocked.

"Please. I'm a healer. I do not drug people, I medicate them." She held up tube, and using her wand, checked the makeup of the stone. "Just as I thought, it's mostly calcium. Vitamin D poisoning can be pretty nasty. You got off lightly, really. With the dose you received from that Sun Banger thing, you're lucky you didn't damage your kidneys."

"Yes, I suppose so," he replied absently, still mulling over the implications of being drugged. "Hold on a minute. If I was unconscious, how did I..." he trailed off and motioned towards the basin on the night stand.

She shrugged. "A little healer's trick. I used a charm to monitor your bladder. When it reached a certain level, a bell sounded and either I, or one of your children came in and... Ah, let's just say we helped you out. And as vitamin D poisoning can often cause constipation, and did in your case, we didn't have to deal with that particular bodily function." She grinned, impishly.

"Oh, gods," he moaned. "Melinda, a father is supposed to have some privacy from his children!"

"I suppose I could have asked a few of the healers at the hospital to help out," she said, thoughtfully.

He shuddered at the thought.

She shook her head and sighed in exasperation. "Arthur, I kept you unconscious for the first two days. The pain from kidney stones is horrible and I couldn't give you anything to relieve it. Those potions can't be mixed with the potions used to leech out the high concentrations of calcium in your blood. I could have removed the stones surgically, but the possibility of post-op infections and..."

"Fine, I get it," he interrupted. "It was necessary and I should stop whining about it."

"If it makes you feel any better, your children were too worried about you to be interested in anything else." She smiled at him. "They love you and would do anything for you."

"I know, and I love them, too." He looked up at her a bit sheepishly. "I know I'm being an ass, but..." He stopped suddenly and his eyes widened in horror. "Oh, gods, Ginny didn't...?"

She couldn't help it, she laughed. When he tried to stand up, she shook her head and pushed him back down, gently. "No, stay put. I'm sorry, I shouldn't have laughed. But your expression... Never mind." She did her best not to grin. "To answer your question, no, Ginny didn't. Your children decided that it would be 'unnatural' for her to help with that particular task."

Arthur slumped over slightly in relief. "That sounds like one of the twins."

"It was. Fred, I believe, with your other sons backing him up. To be truthful, Ginny looked a bit relieved by their decision."

"Well, that's something, anyway." He scowled at her. "So why did you have to help? Why couldn't the boys have taken care of it?"

"They weren't always available," she retorted, rather more sharply than she'd intended. "They do work, if you'll remember."

"Couldn't you have modified that damned charm of yours to notify them at work?"

"I suppose I could have. Excuse me for being too worried about you to think of it. Next time, I'll let you piss yourself!" Turning towards the night table, she picked up the chamber pot and stomped off to the bathroom, muttering to herself about ungrateful men.

Arthur mentally kicked himself. It was obvious she was under a lot of stress, and here he was acting like a total ass. He sighed heavily and rubbed his face tiredly.

When she walked stiffly back into the room and placed the chamber pot on the floor beside the bed, he reached out, snagged her hand in his and pulled her over until she stood between his legs. She tried to tug her hand away, but he tightened his grip.

When she glared at him, he shook his head. "Melinda, please," he entreated.

Her anger crumbled. Her legs gave out and she sank to her knees. Wrapping her arms around his waist, she leaned her head against him. "I'm sorry, Arthur. When I got the call at the hospital, I was afraid I'd lost you. I've never had to deal with the care of a loved one as a healer. Generally, it's frowned upon, as it can be difficult to make logical choices when someone you love is in pain."

"And here I am, moaning over trivialities." He ran a hand through her hair gently. "I'm sorry, Melinda. I know it was hard on you, but I'm glad you didn't call in another healer."

"I wouldn't allow it." She pulled away from him, placed her hands on his thighs and looked up into his eyes. "I'll catch hell from Healer August over it, I'm sure. But I didn't trust anyone else. It's silly, I know, but..." She shrugged helplessly.

Running a thumb over her lips, he smiled softly. "Can you forgive me for acting like an idiot?"

"If you'll forgive me for getting so angry. There was no cause for it."

"Yes, there was, but as we've forgiven each other, it doesn't matter." Bending down, he brushed her lips with his. When her hands squeezed his legs, he deepened the kiss.

She pulled away from him a few minutes later and shook her head. "If you keep that up much longer, we'll both be in bed, doing things your children shouldn't know about. And they're due home soon," she murmured.

"I'll ward the door," he said, reaching for his wand on the night table.

"Arthur, you've just passed a stone. Any sexual activity will have to wait," she told him laughingly.

He fell back on the bed with a groan. "How long?"

She stood up and looked down at him. "At least a week, Mr. Weasley."

"Merlin, you're killing me. I rarely get you alone and now you're telling me we can't. You're a cruel woman," he muttered, though his eyes danced merrily.

"It's just the pain relief potion talking. You wouldn't even be thinking about such a thing if not for its effects."

Snagging her hand once again, he pulled her down beside him on the bed and rolled over enough to gaze down on her. "Remind me later to send my thanks to the inventor," he murmured, then bit her lower lip gently.

"He's dead," she breathed, as she began to unbutton his shirt.

"What a pity," he gasped as she ran her hands over his bared chest.

The slamming of the front door jolted them back to their surroundings. When Arthur rolled away and sat up, Melinda sprang off the bed and pulled out her wand.

Moments later, the door was pushed open and Bill looked in. Seeing his father sitting on the side of the bed, dressed, but for an unbuttoned shirt, he smiled. "You must be feeling better," he said, walking into the room.

I am, thanks to the lovely Healer McKinny," Arthur said, watching with dancing eyes as Melinda ran a series of diagnostic charms.

"He'll be fine," she confirmed, smiling at the oldest Weasley offspring. "But you'll have to watch him closely. He's pumped full of pain relieving potion at the moment and thinks he can do anything," she added primly.

Arthur's answer grin was a bit lascivious.

Bill looked at his father's unbuttoned shirt with new eyes. Grinning slyly, he looked between the two and raised an eyebrow. "Did I interrupt something?"

"Yes, actually," Arthur began.

With a quick flick of her wand, Melinda silenced him and turned to Bill. "No, nothing. Your father should be fine by tomorrow. He passed another stone today, but my scans indicate it was the last. His eyes have healed, the sunburn is fading and his calcium levels are back to normal." Her tone was clinical, but her blush was telling.

Arthur retrieved his wand and canceled the silencing spell. "Casting a silencing charm on a patient? Not very professional," he teased.

"I don't think she cast it on her patient, dad. In that instance, I think we can assume that she cast it on her lover before he could embarrass her in front of his son," Bill said, pretending to mull it over, while ignoring their thunderstruck expressions.

"Now, Bill," Arthur began seriously.

"I think I should be going," Melinda blurted.

Bill grinned. "I didn't mean to embarrass either of you. Really, I didn't. But you should know that your relationship isn't a secret. We've known about it for some time. It might relieve you to know that, though you don't need it, you have our approval.

"Now, I'm going to start dinner. Carry on, if you wish, thought you might want to ward the door," he teased as he walked out. "The twins are due home and they don't need to see that sort of thing."

When the door closed gently, Arthur and Melinda stared at each other for a moment.

"Well, that was interesting," Melinda said.

"Very," he replied as he captured her hand once more. "Ward the door, love."

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## Hogwarts (Jan 17th)...

"My Lord, Lucius Malfoy asks to speak with you," said a Death Eater.

Voldemort looked up from caressing his scepter. He had carved the runes on it, then he'd adorned the scepter with jewels and gold, making it a thing of obscene beauty. The bloodstone on the end pulsed malevolently whenever he picked up the scepter.

Now he sat on his throne in the Great Hall, cradling his scepter like a newborn babe.

"Send him in immediately," Voldemort uttered.

The Dark Lord had been practicing with his scepter and it showed. The walls were splattered with blood and worse.

Lucius walked briskly into the hall. He approached Voldemort, then he bowed deeply. "My Lord," he murmured.

"Lucius! Tell me what news do you bring?"

"We have word from our spy in Haven, my lord. She has managed to determine how many fighters they will be able to put into the field against us. She also tells us that Potter refused to aid a group of Germans who had visited us, but hadn't taken the mark. They fell ill crossing his line of death and eventually died while under the care of the French Ministry..."

The sound of something cracking and breaking echoed through the Great Hall.

Lucius paused suddenly and he looked at his master, horrified.

An egg slowly dripped down the sides of the Dark Lord's head and his eyes flashed angrily.

Lucius chewed on his lip to fight the urge to laugh, knowing it would be his death if he did so.

A high pitched laugh echoed through the large chamber. "HA! HA! The yolks on you, snakeface!" shouted Peeves.

Lucius' eyes widened. The track of the egg was clearly turning Voldemort's skin a bright orange color.

Peeves popped up from behind a Death Eater and lobbed another egg with perfect precision. Lucius took a step back as it splattered, spraying chunks of egg and shell. The Dark Lord's eyes burned red and he stood, glaring at the poltergeist.

Voldemort whipped up his scepter. "*Reducto!*" he snarled.

Peeves dodged and the curse hit one of the Death Eaters standing against the wall. The Death Eater screamed and exploded in a shower of blood and gore. When the air cleared, there was a foot deep hole in the wall.

Peeves flew up to the rafters and dodged in and out of the beams, while Voldemort tried to aim at him.

"Your father was a muggle," chortled Peeves, then he ducked in front of another Death Eater.

"*Reducto!*"

Peeves darted up to the rafters again and another Death Eater exploded in a shower of gore. The poltergeist pulled a bag out of his pocket and hurled it at Voldemort.

The bag hit Voldemort head on and exploded, covering him with flour.

"Flour, eggs, a snake cake we make!" laughed Peeves.

The Dark Lord roared and clubbed a Death Eater who'd moved into his path. The man fell to the floor, brains oozing from his ears. Voldemort wiped his eyes clear and raised his scepter.

"AVADA KEDAVRA!" he shouted.

A thick rope of energy jumped from his scepter, striking Peeves in the center of his chest. Peeves screeched and fell to the floor with a meaty thump.

"You killed me! Oh, the agony! Oh, the irony! Oh, the pain!" moaned Peeves. Then he began to glow a bright green and his body seemed to break into pieces.

"I'm broken!" wailed Peeves. His head floated above the pieces for a moment, then everything started to fade.

Peeves took one final look around, then he winked at Malfoy and faded from view.

Lucius blanched and wondered if this was truly the last of they had seen of the dangerous poltergeist.

Voldemort cast a spell to clean himself, then he turned to glare at Lucius. A Death Eater stifled a laugh and then moaned in pain as a blade of Mordoc sunk into his chest. The man fell to the floor and started to scream.

"Think it is funny, do you? Enjoy one of my blades," Voldemort hissed at the man, then he turned to walk back to his throne.

The man's cries increased and he wrenched the blade from his chest. His back arched and his face contorted with pain and fear, then he sighed and collapsed back to the floor, dead. The blade slid from his lifeless fingers and Voldemort summoned it to his hand.

"Lucius," Voldemort snarled. "Continue with your report!"

Lucius scurried forward, thoroughly cowed by what he had just witnessed. The Dark Lord was now powerful enough to kill a poltergeist!

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### **Office of the Minister, Haven (Jan 18th)...**

"You asked to see me, Amelia?"

Amelia looked up and spotted Harry standing in the doorway. "Yes, Harry. Do come in, please. I'm afraid we have a bit of a problem."

"Oh? What did I do this time?" he replied and he closed the door and sat down.

Amelia smiled thinly. "I'm afraid you're closer than you can imagine, Harry. Our Department M in France is reporting some unsettling news this morning. As you are aware, the French were not pleased when we refused to treat those Germans they had in their custody. Eventually, all of them died. We've also identified at least twelve others who managed to make it to Germany before falling ill and dying. Those Germans did not seek healer help, so we never knew about them until too late. And the German Ministry reports all twenty were members of a suspected pure blood society with violent tendencies.

"In any event, the French were upset about the death of the eight, and now with the death of Dumbledore, they are refusing to acknowledge Dumbledore's criminal status. They have laid the blame squarely at your feet and have charged you with murder."

Harry scowled furiously. "So now I'm a wanted criminal?"

Amelia shook her head. "Only in France, Harry. France is trying to get others to accept their warrant, but so far it's been rejected by every country they've approached. Their actions are muddying the waters and confusing things. I've spent half the morning explaining the situation to other Ambassadors so they can explain to their own Ministry's.

"Officially, His Majesty's Government categorically rejects the French action. I asked you here today to inform you that the Ministry rejects the French demands and we are seriously considering calling an Avalonian Council to address this. You are an official of the British Ministry, an Ambassador,

and as such you carry diplomatic immunity.”

Harry sighed and leaned back on his chair. He accepted a cup of tea from Amelia and thought about what she had told him. “If I understand this, then as long as I don't travel to France, I should have no problems, right?”

“That's essentially correct, but you need to be a little more careful than that. There may still be some countries that support France. We're monitoring that situation closely. In the meantime, I'd suggest staying close to home. The French will not do anything rash, like send one of their action teams to try to take you by force.

“The downside to this mess is that I had planned on asking you to accompany a delegation to the French Ministry. I had hoped that we could use your presence to sway the neutrals back to our side and perhaps topple the current administration. Now I'm afraid that option is closed to us.”

“Send Neville,” Harry said with a bit of a shrug.

Amelia looked at him questioningly.

“Look, Neville is a powerful wizard, a member of the Brotherhood, and more importantly, his Gran has been training him for his role in politics since he was knee high. If anyone is capable of handling the diplomatic stuff, it's Neville,” he replied.

Amelia thought about it for a moment. “Yes, the Longbottoms have a history of Ministry service and politics. Neville would be a help on this particular mission.”

Harry stood. “Good enough, Amelia. Shall I inform Neville that you need to speak with him?”

“Yes. Thank you, Harry,” she said. When he left, she turned back to the papers on her desk.

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### **Wizengamot Building, Office of Amhar Coeur de Lion...**

“Your morning owl post, Councilor,” said Dorothy, his new secretary.

Amhar frowned and accepted the large pile of mail from the dumpy old woman. When his last secretary quit, he had little luck finding someone to fill the role, especially at what he paid. Dorothy was incredibly efficient and about forty years older than he liked to hire on. While she was an expert in maintaining the office and keeping his schedule, she was nothing to look at.

“Thank you,” he mumbled. For a brief second she looked at him like his mother used to and he shuddered. That look always made him feel a bit insignificant. He'd hated that look then, and he hated it now.

He flipped through his mail. It was mostly innocuous stuff, a few offers of bribes and the like. He stopped when he reached a particular letter, which he opened.

*Dear Councilor,*

*It was a honor to see you again at the party last week, and while we appreciate the invitation to visit, our schedule simply does not permit it at this point.*

*Regards*

*Mame*

Amhar laid the letter down on the desk and his hands trembled. The letter seemed innocent, but it basically told him that his connection to Murphy was being shut down. The letter didn't say he was in danger, just the connection was being closed and they would contact him as soon as they could.

He broke into a cold sweat. This could mean anything! Murphy's organization could be in danger of being picked up by the Irish, which meant they'd be coming for him, too. Or Murphy could be just being cautious.

He leaned back on his chair and wondered what he should do. Murphy had outlined several types of messages he might receive. To the uninitiated, they would all appear to be innocent letters, when in fact they carried specific messages. This letter was clear. The network was being severed, he was on his own and to act with caution.

He smiled to himself. He never imagined playing the role of spy, but there was a unusual thrill to it.

*According to this, I have nothing to worry about, he mused. It's business as usual, then. I'll alert Korwin that we need to get the committee moving again.*

Amhar lifted the note from Murphy and aimed his wand at it. A second later, it vanished in a flash of smoke. He waved his wand again to clear the air, then signaled for his secretary to enter the office.

“Dorothy, let's get ready to send out some summons for new witnesses for the committee,” he said in a congenial tone. He'd keep plugging away at Potter and his allies. Maybe if he shook the tree hard enough, something would fall out.

Dorothy nodded and took down the names of the people he wanted to see, then she left. In the outer office, she duplicated the list and sent it on a priority interoffice routing to Trenton Largo. He'd look at the list and arrange for some of the witnesses to be warned ahead of time.

## Haven School of Witchcraft and Wizardry...

She shivered in the chill air of the dormitory. She'd closed the curtains of her bed and cast a silencing charm to ensure the others could not eavesdrop.

Sitting on the bed with her legs crossed, she stared down at the object in front of her. She knew what was to come and shivered again, this time in anticipation. It was useless to resist, nor did she wish to. Not anymore.

*We've come a long way together, girl. Do not fear what is to come. You are immune to my sweet nectar. I've seen to that. Tonight, we shall consummate our dark union. We started in blood, and so shall we end. You know what you need to do. Make our bond complete. Make us one.*

Nodding, the girl picked up the object. Holding her hands as though in prayer, with the dagger between both palms, she closed her eyes.

"Meus vita quod anima ad vobis. Vestri mos ad mei. Imbibo mihi." She stumbled over the unfamiliar words at first, but finished in a strong, firm voice as the object in her hands began to glow. Taking a deep breath, she repeated them in English. "My life and soul to you. Your will to mine. Drink of me."

With a quick motion, she grasped the dagger in one hand and slid the blade across the top of her thigh, hissing as it bit deep. She dropped the dagger and cried out as she clutched at her leg. It felt as though the flesh was being burned from the bone.

Images flashed through her mind. They were confusing and disjointed, but all were images of death. The screams of the dagger's victims roared through her. Her heart thundered in her chest as she experienced the agony of the dying, and the ecstasy of the dagger's servants.

As pain and pleasure fought for dominance, her body went taut. Unable to take more, blackness descended and she went limp.

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## Padfoot Manor, late afternoon (Jan 19th)...

Harry looked up from his desk when he heard the door to his study open. Standing in the doorway was Amelia and Councilor Trenton Largo.

"Amelia and Trenton! Come in, please," he said, standing and waving them to chairs.

*"Love, you might want to join me in my study, and bring Remus. Amelia just showed up with Trenton Largo. Neither of them look particularly pleased about something,"* he sent to Hermione.

*"I'll be right there. I'll have Winky find Remus and tell him to join us,"* she replied.

Harry took his seat. "I've sent for Hermione and Remus."

Amelia shook her head and smiled at him. "That still amazes me."

"What amazes you?" asked Largo.

"Harry and his wife. They have a bond that allows them to speak to each other mentally. They can be quite a distance apart and still talk to each other," she replied.

"Mindspeech? Really? Don't let Councilor Umbridge know about that, my Lord," Largo said with a smile. "She's been rebuilding the Department of Mysteries and I know for a fact she's looking for topics to research. You don't want her prodding you with her wand."

Harry shook his head. Agatha Umbridge was one of the Ministry's staunchest supporters, and she had volunteered to help the Ministry revive the research division of the Department of Mysteries. The woman was quite different from her sister, but she was very tenacious when confronted with something new. In that way, she reminded him of Hermione.

"Don't worry, I have no intentions of telling her about it," Harry replied with a smile.

"Tell who about what?" asked Hermione. She stood in the doorway, her eyes narrowed and focused on Harry.

He waved a hand. "Agatha. Trenton was warning me not to tell her about our bond and what it can do."

Hermione sat down and looked at Trenton curiously. "Councilor Umbridge isn't that bad," she said in defense of the woman.

Harry laughed. "I'm afraid, Trenton, that Hermione considers Agatha something of a kindred spirit. Councilor Umbridge has spent many an evening here at the manor in deep discussion with my wife over some obscure point of magic."

"You know, Harry," Hermione said archly, "you're not as stupid as you pretend to be. I've seen you walk by and point out the error in our argument, then walk away, pretending you don't understand anything."

He smirked. "It's all a matter of application, Hermione. You deal with theory, I deal with application. I'm not an expert in runes, but the portals are a new application of those runes. I just took what someone else... Ah, Remus. Finally. Come in and sit down. Amelia and Trenton showed up and, from their expressions, I'd say they don't have good news."

*"Saved by the werewolf,"* Hermione sent wryly.



Harry choked on a laugh.

Remus shook his head ruefully from the door and walked over to a free chair.

Amelia and Trenton exchanged a glance, then she nodded to Trenton.

“My Lord, my lady...”

“Please, Trenton, I think we can dispense with the titles,” Harry said, interrupting him.

Largo nodded. “Alright, thank you. Now, you might not know it, but I made some arrangements that resulted in a change of staff in Councilor Coeur de Lion's office. His secretary had been looking for employment elsewhere because, well, lets say that the good Councilor was a little too playful for her tastes, or for her husband's.”

Harry scowled and motioned for Trenton to continue.

“Actually, we had to speak with her husband. He's a Canadian Auror and he wanted to challenge the Councilor to a duel,” Amelia quipped with a grin.

“It would have save us a lot of headache if he had,” grumbled Harry.

Hermione shot him a reproachful glare.

“Anyway,” added Largo. “As I was saying, we set dear Councilor Coeur de Lion up with a new secretary, one who is highly efficient, and less suited to his particular tastes. And she works for us.”

Harry looked at him with interest now. “And?”

Largo's expression turned sour. “Tomorrow, Lady Potter and her parents will receive notices calling them before the committee. Amhar is firmly convinced that Lady Potter's parents used some dark ritual to gain their magic. He plans on having all three present and witnessing at the same time in the hopes that one may say something that will trip another into a damaging admission. The committee will meet in two days time.

“Considering the change in the method, I've pushed for, and gotten, approval for this coming session to be an open committee session. The Minister will be attending, as will several neutral members of the Wizengamot who have heard things they do not like about Amhar's tactics.”

Harry stood and walked to the window. He stared out at the grounds, his body stiff. Hermione looked at him sharply as their bond narrowed down to the bare minimum needed to keep it open. She could tell he was furious just from his posture.

“Two days, then. It's time to put an end to this once and for all,” Harry said tightly.

“Harry?” Amelia said in alarm.

“I think this has gone on long enough, Amelia. I know you've advised patience, but I can't allow this to continue any longer. I will not sit back and let that... that man attack my wife and family.”

Everyone in the room stood in alarm. Magic was literally pouring off Harry in waves that could be seen and felt.

“Harry, love, calm down. You can't kill him...” She trailed off when he glared at her.

His aura flickered in the fading light from the window.

“I'm not going to kill the man, Hermione,” He said with some irritation. “If Amhar is killed, another will just take his place. I need to neutralize the problem at the source. I should have done it before Christmas, but I let everything else distract me from what was occurring.”

Hermione relaxed a little when she felt the bond widen enough for her to feel his anger lessen. It was replaced by a steely determination.

Dobby appeared in the study, holding Harry's traveling cloak and his money bag. He handed them to Harry and then vanished again. Harry put on his cloak and tied the bag to his belt, then he summoned his staff to his hand.

“I'll be back by the time you meet with the committee,” he said. Then he started to glow. It started as a bright pinprick of light at the center of his chest and it expanded until he couldn't be seen. A moment later, the glow faded and he was gone.

“Merciful Merlin! What was that?” exclaimed Trenton Largo.

“I don't think there's a name for it. Harry calls it traveling. It's slower than a portkey or apparating, but he can cover enormous distances without risking a fall at the end of the trip,” offered Remus. He then turned to Hermione. “Well?”

Hermione nibbled at her lip. She was scared. Harry had left without telling her where he was going. “I still feel him, Remus. It isn't like last time when he cut me off. He isn't even all that angry. He's determined to put a stop to this, but I haven't a clue how he plans on doing it,” she said pensively, then sighed. “He's going to be gone tonight and tomorrow night.”

“Do you think we should track him down and stop him?” asked Amelia worriedly.

Remus snorted and tried to hold in a laugh. "Stop Harry? Be serious, Amelia. You might as well hope to stop the tide from coming in. When he wants to, he can be as implacable as a force of nature. Frankly, I'm pretty sure he's in no danger whatsoever. I'm more concerned about how he intends to neutralize Coeur de Lion 'at the source'."

"Is he always like this?" asked Trenton.

"No," replied Hermione. "Harry acts rashly sometimes, but I know him. He's not acting rashly this time. He's got a plan, something he hasn't told anyone about, I think."

"If you're trying to make me feel better, Hermione, it's not working," Amelia complained.

Hermione could only shrug. Harry was gone for now, and it wasn't making her feel any better.

Slowly the group broke up, leaving Hermione sitting at Harry's study. She carefully opened the bond as wide as she possibly could.

"Harry?" she called.

The silence from the bond disturbed her and she couldn't stop that tear that ran down her cheek. The bond was still active, but she still felt very much alone. Suddenly a surge of emotion came up the bond to her and she gasped in surprise.

They were too far apart to speak, but not too far to feel what the other was feeling. She shivered as Harry caressed her from wherever he was. He sent her reassuring feelings and love.

She sighed and left his office. It would be a long day tomorrow without him, she was sure of that.

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### Hogwarts Castle, Slytherin's Chamber...

"You are sure of this, my child?" asked the Bloody Baron.

"Yes, my lord," replied the ghost of Penelope Clearwater.

The Baron frowned. He turned to Sir Nicholas, who was looking more than a little concerned. "We must learn the truth of this, Sir Nicholas."

"I quite agree, my lord Baron. What do you suggest?" asked Sir Nicholas.

"Summon the ghosts to council!" snapped the Baron.

Sir Nicholas' eyes widened. "A council? You wish to hold a council?"

The Baron stared at him so hard he visibly trembled. "It will be as you order, my lord Baron," mumbled Sir Nicholas.

Penelope stared at the two senior ghosts and was visibly frightened. The Baron had taken her under his wing, so to speak, helping her learn the ways being a ghost. So few of the living understood what the existence of ghosts was like. And so few wanted to know. Penelope had been surprised to discover that ghosts had their own community, their own government, they could even partake in a form of pleasure that involved merging their form with another ghost for a brief period of time. Ghostly marriages were common place, even if the living didn't know about them.

Now she was about to see something new, something she had only been told about. The Ghost Council of Hogwarts.

Sir Nicholas moved to the center of the chamber, not far from the table where Harry's power crystal rested, and he began to make a deep thrumming sound. Penelope gasped as the sound hit her, causing every part of her body to tingle.

The Baron moved to stand in front of the power crystal, waiting. Slowly the chamber started to fill with ghosts. Hogwarts had a long history and people had seen only a handful of the total number of spirits contained within it. Some of the spirits even predated the building of the castle, having been here from an earlier building.

The Baron was one of the strongest ghosts in the castle, and hence the leader of the Ghost Council, but he was by no means the oldest, or the wisest. That honor fell to a Christian monk who died in the fourth century when the monastery that had been on the site was looted and burned. He was never seen by the living, and even among the ghosts he was a barely visible outline.

"Who summons the council?" asked the ancient monk. His voice sounded distant, almost like the sound of the wind.

"I summon the council, ancient Thadeus," replied the Baron, bowing low in respect to the eldest of them.

"Our daughter, Penelope, has overheard a most disturbing conversation between two of the black cloaks. They claimed that the Dark Lord now has a new wand, a stronger wand, and that with this wand he has killed brother Peeves," the Baron said.

A murmur rolled through the crowd of ghosts.

"What will we do?" wailed Myrtle in terror. Several other ghosts looked around in fear, as if the Dark Lord had suddenly appeared to obliterate them all.

"It is possible," said Thadeus, "that the Dark Lord may have a latent ability in necromancy and in the boosting he obtained from his foul rite, may

“Without Peeves, we cannot inform Lord Potter of what is going on here. None of us can affect the corporeal unless we possess a body and we cannot bring the living here. Lord Potter holds the secret to the chamber, only he can bring other living beings here. He will not return for at least another two weeks to replenish the supply of traps and pranks used by Peeves,” the Baron said thoughtfully. “What would you suggest, Thadeus?”

“We must learn all that we can about this new wand of the Dark Lord's. But we must be wary. He cannot exorcise you if he cannot see you. Never be visible in his presence. And we must learn the truth about Peeves. We must search the castle and the outlying buildings. I have heard of poltergeists being driven out, but never one being destroyed. Peeves may be merely hiding. If we can't find him, then I think it's safe to assume we have lost him. We'll have no choice at that point but to wait for Lord Potter's visit so we can make other arrangements to get information to him.”

The Baron nodded and turned away from Thadeus. He surveyed the ghosts arrayed before him and noted the small cluster of ghosts in the back corner of the room. He frowned and his eyes narrowed. These were former black robes that hadn't crossed over. Their loyalty to the castle and the others was tenuous at best.

“It is time for you five to choose your loyalty,” the Baron said, addressing the group directly. “You know our secrets, but are unable to reveal our safe room because of the magic on the room. You can choose to help those living in the castle now, and they will not thank you for your aid, or you can choose to help us and be welcome among us. Know that if you choose to help the black robes, we will deny you access to the crystal of power. Your magic will slowly fade and you will dissolve into the great ether.”

“You can't force us to help you!” shouted one of the ghosts.

Most of the other ghosts in the room turned to view the former Death Eaters.

“We are still loyal to our lord and master!” another said vehemently.

One of the five looked at the other four, then he moved away from them. “I died by Voldemort's own hand, killed because he was impatient. I was young, just graduated from school and I made a mistake in accepting that way of life. I have much sin to atone for, but I will cleanse the stain on my soul. I will not support that monster anymore.”

Several of the other ghosts surged forward and grabbed the repentant ghost by his arms, pulling forward into the main group.

The Baron nodded and smiled gently at the newest of their kindred, then he turned to the other four. His expression hardened and his voice rang out harshly.

“Hear then the voice of the Ghost Council of Hogwarts. You have defied the collective will and refused to join in the defense of our home. For that crime you are cast out! If your loyalty lies with your Dark Lord, then go, join him. You are no longer welcome in our chamber. Does the council agree?”

The shout of 'Aye!' echoed off the chamber walls.

The four suddenly moved close together, cringing as they felt the power of the council being used against them.

“Thus spoke the will of the Ghost Council of Hogwarts. You are outsiders. No ghost will speak with thee, no ghost will aid thee, no ghost will acknowledge thee. Begone!” shouted the Bloody Baron.

A howling wind rushed through the chamber and the four ghosts found themselves being pushed from the room. They screamed in terror as they passed through the wall. The stones glowed softly as the combined magic of the council sealed the walls, preventing the four from entering the chamber again.

Thadeus drifted over to the remaining former Death Eater. “How are you called, my son?” asked the ancient ghost softly.

“Damien. I was called Damien,” answered the ghost shyly.

“Come, Damien. The path to atonement is not easy, but we can guide you,” Thadeus said. The other ghosts respectfully moved away from the pair. Their conversation would take decades. His path to atonement would take centuries.

The Baron turned to Sir Nicholas. “You heard the Wise One. Let us search the castle for Peeves, and we must set a watch on the Dark Lord. We must know more about this wand of his.”

Sir Nicholas bowed and turned to the others. “The council is ended. Search every nook and cranny of the castle. Find Peeves,” he commanded.

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### **Haven School of Witchcraft and Wizardry (Jan 20th)...**

Millicent was walking down a corridor when she suddenly found herself being pulled into a broom closet. Instantly, she had her wand out and aimed at the figure holding onto her arm.

Deneb backed away slowly and raised both hands. “Easy there, Milli. There's no need to get violent,” he said with a wry grin.

She scowled at him. “What in the name of Merlin do you think you're doing pulling me into a broom closet? And don't call me Milli!” she hissed at him.

Deneb grinned and slowly lowered his hands when she lowered her wand.

"I wanted to talk to you and you've been avoiding me," he explained in his easy going way. He moved a little closer to her and she backed up against the closed door.

"W-w-what did you want to talk about?" she asked. Hearing herself stutter, she grew angry. She wasn't used to being nervous, but he was making her so. He was invading her personal space, almost as if daring her to push back. What did he want?

Deneb smiled at her discomfort. "Am I making the great Millicent Bulstrode, terror of Slytherin house, nervous?" he asked mockingly.

"You don't scare me," she replied, trying to sound sure of herself and failing miserably.

He raised an eyebrow at the waver in her voice and his grin widened. He leaned a little closer to her. "I wanted to know why you've been avoiding me, Milli," he said in a strangely gentle voice. Gone was any hint of mockery or derision. "The Headmistress said we're supposed to work together, but every time I spot you, you head in a different direction."

"I, uh... I'm used to working alone, Thorntree," she snapped.

"It must be very lonely doing that," he murmured, then he reached out and pushed an errant strand of her hair behind her ear.

Her eyes widened and she tried to back up further, only to realize her back was already against the door. Her anger vanishing, only to be replaced by confusion. "W-w-what are you on about?" she stammered.

"Oh, I think you know very well," Deneb said in a husky tone.

Millicent ducked and moved around him. She didn't like having the door to her back with no room to maneuver.

Deneb turned around to face her and shook his head. "Do I make you that nervous, Milli? Be honest with me. Tell me you don't like guys, or that you don't like me, and we'll just be friends. But I promise you, I'll do nothing to hurt you," he told her softly.

"Why me?" she asked in a near squeak. "I'm not stupid, Thorntree. I know I'm nothing to look at. I know what the boys around school say behind my back. You could have any girl you want. Why are you tormenting me?"

Deneb leaned his back against the closet door and stuck his hands in his pockets. He eyed her for a moment, then he shrugged. "I see it's confession time, so I'll be blunt. I like you. I could date any girl I want, I know that. But I don't want one of those thin, powdery girls. I'm not attracted to the waif look. It's alright for some guys, but not for me. I like a woman who's smart, cunning and has a bit of meat on her bones.

"I know you don't believe me, Milli, but I think you're smart as hell, sly as a fox and pretty enough to keep me awake at night. I've been trying to catch your attention since we moved to Haven and you've been ignoring me. Tell me you're not interested and I'll back off," he told her.

Millicent shook her head in denial. This couldn't be happening to her! She had gone her entire school career without attracting any serious male attention, and now one of the most handsome boys in school not only liked her, but thought she was pretty?

"I think you need your eyes checked and your head examined," she muttered darkly, unable to wrap her head around the idea.

Deneb's expression fell. "I see," he said hesitantly. "I'm sorry you feel that way, Millicent. I'll leave you alone."

He turned and reached for the doorknob.

"Wait!"

He paused and leaned his forehead against the door. "What?" he asked.

She was surprised to hear the hurt in his voice. Maybe this wasn't a prank after all, a small voice in the back of her mind said.

"You're serious, aren't you? This isn't some kind of cruel prank?" she asked.

"I'm very serious, Milli. This is no prank. I wouldn't do that to you or anyone," he told her, then sighed. Things weren't going the way he'd hoped they would.

"No one has ever thought of me that way."

"I figured that might be the case. But I do think of you that way."

"So what do we do now? I'm not exactly used to this kind of situation."

Deneb turned and looked at her carefully. She had dropped her usual mask of indifference and he could see the hope in her eyes. He smiled at her and reached out with one hand. She hesitated for a second, then took it in her own. She was surprised by how warm and comforting his hand was.

"I'd like for us to have a relationship, Milli. You know, the usual. Dates, hand holding, sneaking off to a broom closet to make out, that sort of thing. Maybe someday we'll be ready for something more, but I don't want to rush either of us into that. I see so much in you that you've tried to keep hidden."

Really?"

Deneb nodded and moved close enough that their bodies brushed lightly. "Really," he replied. He placed one hand gently on her hip, leaned down and kissed her softly.

When he pulled away a moment later, he saw a look of startled pleasure flicker across her face. When she smiled at him, he bent down and kissed her again. He marveled at how her smile made her look so much prettier.

Twenty minutes later, the door to the broom closet opened and Deneb and Millicent stepped out. She bore a happy, if slightly bewildered look, but he looked smug. He'd been right. She was everything he'd hoped for, and more.

*Maybe in a few months I'll explain my grand plan to her, he thought. By then she'll be used to the idea of having me around and the thought of getting married in a few years won't scare her off. Then again, she might just kick my arse for even suggesting it. He grinned at the idea. Either way, life with her will never be dull!*

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### **Haven, Assorted Locations (Jan 21st)...**

Hermione rolled out of bed at Winky's urgings. The elf had set breakfast at their table, but she wasn't very hungry. She hadn't slept well. She missed Harry and that disturbed her sleep. Throughout the night she'd gotten weird flashes in her dreams that didn't make sense to her.

She had held the bond as wide as she could for as long as she could. But by the time she gone to bed she couldn't hold it open any longer. She'd released it only to discover Harry was holding it open for them. She'd crawled into bed feeling the love and longing pouring through the bond, but it was a poor substitute for having a husband to hold at night.

"Mistress, should be getting up now," Winky urged. "Breakfast is on the table, then you goes straight into the bath. You has important meetings today and you needs to be awakes and fresh. I lay out your good clothes."

Hermione shuffled to the table and poured herself a cup of tea from the set Harry had given her for Christmas. She sipped her tea and idly nibbled on some toast, not really thinking much about what she had to do. Today was her turn in Amhar's Wizengamot committee, along with her parents, and she was not looking forward to it.

She glanced out the window and was surprised to see hundreds of elves going over the front lawn. "Winky? Why are there so many elves outside?"

Winky looked up from laying out Hermione's family dress robes. "Master Harry's orders, Mistress. He tell Dobby to make sure the Manor sparkles," replied the little elf, then she reached out a hand and snapped her fingers. A jewelery box appeared in her hand and she opened it, pulling out several pieces and laying them on the dressing table.

Hermione turned to look at the elf and she frowned. "Winky, I don't think I need to wear those clothes today, nor the jewels."

Winky sniffed loudly. "Master said so, Mistress."

Hermione froze for a second, then she glared at Winky in anger. "Are you telling me that my husband is *ordering me* to wear these clothes?" she said between ground teeth.

"Winky don't know about no ordering, all Winky knows is that the Master wanted his lady to wear her very best today. Her parents and everyone in the household is to do the same. Mistress can wear what she wants, but doesn't Mistress like to please her mate? Winky knows she likes to make Dobby happy, even if he is an insane elf," she said with a straight face.

"Fine! But I swear he better explain this or I'll make him sleep downstairs on the most uncomfortable couch I can find!" she exclaimed, then she stormed into the bathroom, muttering under her breath.

Winky laughed softly to herself and turned back to setting out what her mistress needed for the day. Alone, she softly hummed to herself and wished Hermione were more appreciative of her mate, even if he was as nutty as his elf.

An hour later, dressed in her finery and sparkling with jewels, Hermione was finally released by Winky so she could meet her parents. She stepped out of the bedroom and muttered a startled oath. The corridor was full of house elves, cleaning everywhere.

She turned to see her parents walking gingerly around the creatures. Her parents were dressed in their best. She was surprised to see that both of them wore family robes with a crest on them and she wondered who had researched the Granger family crest.

Both Dan and Emma had a bemused expression on their faces.

"Good morning, love," said Emma.

"Good morning, Mum. I take it you had help dressing today?"

"It was the strangest thing," said Dan. "We woke up to two elves who insisted on making sure we wore the appropriate clothing and jewelery today. An elf popped in with a huge chest of jewelery, most were antiques and asked Emma to pick some items. There were several crowns. Crowns! Can you believe it?"

Hermione's eyes flickered to the silver circlet that her mother wore to help tame her hair and she wished she had thought about that. It was finely

wrought and made her mother appear absolutely regal.

"This is Harry's doing, isn't it?" Emma asked.

Hermione scowled and nodded.

Dan chuckled. "Don't be too angry with him, pumpkin. He's obviously got something up his sleeve. This is all part of his grand plan."

Hermione turned and looked at her father with suspicion. "What do you know about it?" she asked, practically snarling.

Dan took a step back, ducking behind Emma. "Why, I know nothing," he sputtered. "But I can tell when a husband is trying to surprise his wife."

Hermione glared at her father, her anger simmering. Across the bond she felt Harry's love, and a silent plea to stop fighting. She closed her eyes for a moment, calming herself, then she opened them again. "Fine," she said. "But Harry's got a lot of explaining to do when he gets home. Look at this! There must be two hundred elves working around the manor!"

Dan looked at her daughter carefully, then he turned to Emma. "She's awful irritable today. Could she be pregnant? You were irritable like that when you carried her."

Both Emma and Hermione turned to glare at Dan, who cringed and flinched back from them. "Alright! I was just asking. Don't you think we should get going?" he said, desperate to change the subject.

Hermione and Emma gave him another death glare before moving towards the stairs. In the foyer, elves appeared with their cloaks. Hermione took hers, donned it and stepped outside the manor to the apparation point. She paused and looked around in confusion. Several elves were renewing the coloring charms on the manor, and off to one side, a flagpole had been erected. It was flying the British flag and underneath that, the flag of the Ministry of Magic.

"What is going on here?" Dan asked in confusion.

Hermione smiled. She had a suddenly burst of inspiration and she shook her head. *Harry wouldn't do that, would he?* she wondered. *But then, since no one bothered to tell Harry what he can and can't do, I wouldn't put it past him.*

"Hermione what are you smiling about?" asked Emma. "You look like Crookshanks after he's caught a mouse!"

She smiled and turned to answer her mother when another voice stopped her.

"Wait!"

Everyone turned to see Luna walking out of the Manor house, dressed in her version of the Black Family robes. The garish fluorescent pink clashed horribly with the international orange trim. And if that wasn't bad enough, she had found her necklace of butterbeer bottle caps. She held Fuzz in her hands and she was speaking to the Snorkack quite firmly.

The Snorkack buzzed and whirred in reply.

Luna walked up to Hermione and lifted Fuzz up to eye level. "Protect," she murmured.

The little Snorkack whirred loudly, then she leapt over to perch on Hermione's shoulder, wrapping her tail loosely around her neck. With a loud whir, the Snorkack faded from sight, leaving only two eyes blinking at Hermione.

Hermione looked at Luna in surprise and the blond laughed gaily. "She wanted to go with you," she said, then she turned and walked back into the manor. "Have fun!" she called before she entered the building.

Hermione stood motionless. She hadn't had much quality time with Fuzz and she wasn't sure what to do. Fuzz rumbled softly on her shoulder and she could feel her curl up and begin to snore softly. Carefully, she turned around and faced her parents. "Do you both remember your apparating lessons?"

"Sure, picture where we want to go, concentrate and then step over," replied Emma excitedly. This would be her first semi-long distance apparation.

Dan nodded.

"Alright then, we're going to the lobby of the Wizengamot building," Hermione announced.

Emma nodded, then she closed her eyes and vanished with a loud pop.

Dan huffed and grumbled something about her always having to be first, then he too vanished with a loud pop.

Hermione laughed and followed the two, though more quietly.

She appeared a moment later in the lobby of the Wizengamot building and looked around. Not far away her mother was checking herself carefully to make sure she hadn't splinched herself. She didn't see her father.

"Dad?" she called.

The door to the lobby opened and Dan ran inside, his chest heaving from running.

"What happened to you," asked Emma in a smug tone.

"I missed my landing point," he replied in a surly tone. Both women exchanged amused glances.

Hermione checked her watch. "We have five more minutes. We might as well go on in."

Dan and Emma nodded and Hermione turned. She suddenly stumbled and Dan caught her. Her bond flared to life.

"Hi!" sent Harry.

"Where are you?" she asked, somewhat snappily.

"Oh ho, someone's mad at me, eh? Well, I'm sorry, my heart, but I promise I'll make it up to you. And to answer your question, I'm at Gringotts. We'll be there shortly, I just want to wait until the committee is in full session," he replied.

"We?"

"My lips are sealed!" he replied with amusement.

"Harry, you don't need your lips to talk to me this way," she replied in exasperation.

"Fine, my brain is sealed then."

"Now that I am willing to believe! Alright, I'll let you have your fun, but this better be good or you'll be sleeping on the couch for the next year!"

Laughter bubbled up the link to her and she couldn't help but smile. "Harry's back. He's at Gringotts right now and says he'll join us once the committee session gets underway," she announced to her parents. She felt as though a weight had been lifted from her shoulders.

Straightening her shoulders, she led her parents towards the committee meeting room. She felt a profound sense of relief that Harry was nearby again, and that he had a plan, even if he wasn't sharing it with anyone.

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### **Wizengamot Investigative Committee...**

Amhar Coeur de Lion stepped into the room and his smile drooped slightly when he spotted the Grangers and Hermione. The girl was wearing her family robes, proclaiming her affiliations, and her right to be called Lady Potter. The Grangers were also wearing family robes, although he didn't recognize the crest.

His smile turned to a frown when Hermione remained seated when he entered and took his seat. *I'm going to have to do this fast and hard*, he thought. *I can't drag this session out, or let them assume control of the questioning.*

He looked at the trio before him, then he lifted a piece of paper.

"Let the record show that on this day we began the testimony of Mrs. Potter and her parents Mr. & Mrs. Granger," he said officiously to the court reporter.

"Lady Potter," Hermione said, interrupting him coldly.

"Excuse me?" Amhar said.

"Lady Potter. I am Harry Potter's wife, but my title is Lady Potter and you will address me as such," replied Hermione. A whirl came from her shoulder and Amhar glanced around the room nervously.

"She's right, Councilor," added Councilor McFerron. "Her title is Lady Potter. To call her anything else would be an insult."

"Mud bloods aren't allowed titles," snapped Amhar angrily. He hadn't expected Lillias to jump in on the Potters' side so early in the session. McFerron's comments undermined his authority in front of the witnesses!

Amhar turned to Hermione. "Tell me, *Lady Potter*, why shouldn't I charge you and your parents with indulging in the dark arts. I have spoken with many knowledgeable researchers and there is no known light art ritual that will give power to muggles like *these things*," he said with a snarl, pointing at Hermione's parents.

Hermione, along with nearly every committee member, bounced to her feet, shouting. No one noticed when the doors to the room swung open and a red carpet rolled into the room. A moment later, everyone cringed and covered their ears as a deafening fanfare of trumpets filled the room.

As soon as the fanfare ended, Harry Potter walked into the council chambers wearing the dress uniform of a full colonel of the British Army.

Hermione's eyes widened and she couldn't believe just how good he looked in the uniform. He carried his staff in one hand and a piece of paper in another.

"What is the meaning of this?" shouted Amhar.

Harry ignored him. "Minister Bones, are you present?" he called.

Amelia stood up. "I'm here, Harry," she replied in confusion.

Harry unfolded the note and began to read it aloud. "Madam Minister. By order of His Royal Majesty, King Charles, you are commanded to dissolve the illegal and non representative body known as the Wizengamot.

"Beginning today, the British Ministry of Magic will work to revise it's charter, bringing it in-line with current, modern governing practices. You will no longer discriminate against anyone on the basis of blood, color, race or religion. You are further commanded to assemble an elected legislative and oversight body that will assume the duties held by the former Wizengamot. The elected body will assume a legislative role in the government, but not judicial, which will be held by a third body of government, appointed by and overseen by His Majesties government.

"So orders the King of the United Kingdom," Harry finished with a flourish. Then he folded and pocketed the order.

There was stunned silence in the room and everyone stared at Harry. Finally, people began to break free from the shock the King's order had caused.

Amelia sat down heavily, stunned speechless. Dan and Emma stifled their laughter. Even Remus, who sat behind them, had a difficult time holding in his laughter.

"You can't do this!" shouted Amhar. "This is treason! I won't allow it!"

"He can't do it, perhaps, but I can," a voice called from the back of the room.

Harry smirked at Amhar and stepped aside so he could get a good look at the King.

Amelia shot to her feet and gaped. Hermione smiled and curtsied instinctively. Amhar collapsed in his seat, his mouth opening and closing.

The King looked at Amhar. "I'm told, Councilor, that you consider yourself related to the Royal Family. I have news for you, sir. The house of Windsor does not recognize bastard lines of earlier Royal Families. Even if you were acknowledged, you would of be of the line of Angevin, not Windsor. You are no relation to the Royal House of Britain."

The King walked over to Hermione and took her hand in his own. "It is good to see you again, my lady. Your husband has invited me partake of your hospitality, offering a place to stay and invited me to dinner. I can't tell you how much I look forward to spending a nice quiet evening with you and your husband."

Hermione blushed. "We are honored to have you join us, Your Majesty," she replied.

It was clear to everyone present that the King, at least, had no problems with Hermione's station in the scheme of things.

"What does this mean?" asked Trenton Largo in confusion.

The King turned to look at Largo and Harry walked up behind him. "Trenton Largo has been a long time supporter of the Ministry and the war effort, sir," he said quietly to the King.

Charles smiled at Largo. "It means that the new Wizengamot will represent the people, Councilor. You govern at the will of the people. Balancing the good of what your people want with what is good for the country as a whole is the task of every real politician. An elected body may sometimes mean bad people are elected, but they rarely stay in office for long."

The King glanced at Amhar, who was still sitting in shock, and it was obvious who he thought was a bad person in office.

Amelia stepped up to Harry and the King. "This is most unexpected, Your Majesty," she said, shooting a death glare at Harry. Harry smirked back at her. After all the times she pushed him into something he didn't want, it was only fair for him to get one up on her.

The King laughed genially. "Don't blame Harry too much, Madam Minister. He came to me with a problem that only I could solve. But it was not without some measure of cost on his part. For far too long we have ignored our magical subjects. That will change, starting today. Lord Potter's position in the SAS was mostly fictitious, until today. Today the SAS activates the 24th regiment, a special unit that will remain under your Ministry unless we need it. Lord Potter will be the overall commander of the unit. This change will mark the beginning of closer ties between the Ministry of Magic and the Crown."

Hermione stepped up behind Harry and she admired him in this uniform. "*Looks very good on you,*" she sent to him. "*Very good.*"

Harry blushed to his roots and glared at Hermione. The images she sent to him had little to do with what was happening and everything to do with what she planned for him later this evening.

"*Stop that! This is serious.*"

"*I am serious,*" she retorted, then she grinned wickedly at him.

"Sir, since you're here, would you like for us to show you around? We would be honored to give you a tour of Haven and the surrounding areas," offered Amelia.



"I'd be delighted," replied the King. "I am anxious to see what you have built. I've heard much from Lord Potter and from the Prime Minister, but it would be nice to see it first hand."

Amelia nodded, and she slowly walked from the room with the King in tow.

Arthur stepped up to Harry and Hermione, grinning widely. "I'll send word via a house elf when we get close to the manor, Harry. Now, if you'll excuse me, I have to catch up with Amelia. I suspect she's having kneazle kittens right about now." With a wave, he trotted from the room.

Amhar glared at Harry. "This isn't over, Potter." he snarled. Then he stood and walked stiffly out of the room.

No one noticed a pale Andrew Korwin slink from the room behind Amhar.

Trenton stood and walked unsteadily around the table to join Harry and his family. Lillias McFerron stood nervously near by.

"Trenton, let the Wizengamot members know that if they are willing to help the Ministry in the war effort, we will find jobs for them. The King has ordered a change. You know, it always struck me as odd that the Ministry and the Wizengamot never agreed with the Magna Carta. Now it turns out that because of that oversight, he can do what he did. He has no authority to speak of among the muggles, but to the Ministry of Magic, he's still the Monarch," Harry said with a smile.

Lillias and several other members of the committee breathed a sigh of relief and left the room.

Harry wrapped an arm around Hermione's waist. "I'm sorry I had to keep this secret from everyone, but I wasn't sure I could pull it off. Now, let's go home. We have a very special dinner to get ready for."

Hermione snuggled closer to him, her anger from early vanished entirely.

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### **Haven School of Witchcraft and Wizardry (Jan 24th)...**

An hour after curfew, a lone figure slid from shadow to shadow, hunting. Prefects were still out on patrol, as were a few teachers, but that was part of the thrill. She wasn't stupid, of course, She'd cast cushioning charms on her shoes and a disillusionment charm on herself, but she still felt the adrenaline rush through her system.

She had run across a pair of prefects five minutes ago. To test her charms, she passed very close to them in the darkened hall, and neither had seen or sensed her passing. She could have taken both of them, had been tempted to do just that, but changed her mind at the thought of sweeter prey. She had no specific person in mind, but then she rarely did. But she always knew them when she saw them. Something about them called out to her, and she was always happy to answer.

Coming to the end of a long hall, she peeked around the corner. Seeing it empty, she leaned against the stone wall and thought about turning around. When the sound of a door opening, then closing again came to her, she peeked around the corner again and smiled. A woman stood in front of a closed door halfway down the hall and drew her wand.

Realizing who she was seeing, the girl's heart raced. This was her victim!

*Perfect, my girl. Tonight, darkness shall descend upon this place and all shall fear us! Take her so that we may feast upon her agony!*

Nodding to the sibilant voice only she could hear, she walked quickly down the hall towards the woman. When her victim turned away from the door she had just warded and began to walk away, the girl smiled. It was almost as if the woman was begging to be taken!

Deciding to take her before she reached the end of the hall, the girl quickened her pace to catch up. Moments later, she drew an object from her robe. The blade of the dagger glinted in the low light of the few wall sconces still lit at this hour.

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### **Outside the Headmistresses Office, Haven School of Witchcraft and Wizardry...**

Closing the office door, Minerva turned and drew her wand. Warding the office was something she didn't normally do. But with the information Millicent had brought her about the person she'd overheard in the library, she'd begun to do so.

On her orders, the prefects now patrolled in pairs for safety. Most of the teachers had begun to do the same, feeling it would set a good example. Filius had managed to talk her into going with him this evening for their nightly rounds. He didn't like the idea of the Headmistress being out alone. She was angry over the need for such precautions, but agreed with him to ease his mind.

After warding the door, she tucked her wand back into her robe and started for the Great Hall, where she was to meet Flitwick. She was a few minutes late and knew he'd be worried. Before she could quicken her pace, she heard laughter, felt a hand grasp her shoulder...and then pain. Blinding, agonizing pain.

The breath was driven from her body. Ripping, grating, burning! She was burning! A shrieking sound pounded her eardrums and she writhed in agony, trying desperately to reach her back where the pain was centered. The corridor tilted strangely and she collapsed to the ground.

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### **Author's Notes:**

Alyx looked up when she heard the insane laughter coming from the PC screen from hers.

"What are you cackling about?" she asked.

"Muhahahahaha! I'm getting revenge!" Bob replied, cackling gleefully.

"Revenge? On who? And why?"

"Them!" Bob shouted, pointing at the eager faces blinking at Alyx through her monitor. In fear she cringed back from the bizarre scene.

"What are they?" she asked in hushed tone.

"Readers," Bob replied ominously. "They read our work and never say anything, we feed them and they are silent. Maybe they are pod people."

"How are you getting revenge on them?"

Bob looked up at her, his eyes shining with mischief. "CLIFFY!" he proclaimed loudly.

"Yep, that will do it, but if they come after you, I knew nothing about it. I'm innocent!" Alyx exclaimed.

"B-B-But you wrote the last scene in the chapter!" Bob protested.

"Yeah, but you made it the last scene, I didn't. Now get on with the Author's notes," Alyx replied, brandishing her frying pan of infinite attacks.

Bob cowered back. "Yes dear."

For the record, Amhar is only slightly disarmed. We haven't seen the last of him yet.

Ok... this is the last time we'll say, the next person that brings it up will find themselves immortalized in fan fiction by dying a gruesome grisly death. If magic were capable of regrowing a limb don't you think that Moody would have both legs? We are not going to cut Harry's leg off and replace it with a leg like Wormtail's hand. We're not going to give him a peg leg etc... If your leg hurt on a chronic basis you wouldn't want it cut off, especially if you knew that avoiding some activities would prevent it from hurting.

As to why portkeys bother Harry so much, the way I see it, it's a combination of two things. One, his leg makes it difficult for him to maintain balance, but more importantly Harry is overpowering a portkey. If he activates the portkey, it takes power from him to transport and well you know Harry, he never does things in a small way.

Hopefully Harry's comments about Luna will clear up a little of the confusion about her.

I have nothing to say to all those people who wrote back with explanations of how it might be possible to shit up. You people have far too much time on your hands.

MononWalker: The name of the blade was something pulled out of thin air, along with the made up backstory.

Crys: Actually Alyx thought the idea was quite amusing. We often discuss plotlines and minibunnies like that long before they hit the keyboard, so I knew she was in favor of it before I wrote it.

And now... BLOOPERS!!!!

**"Make sure next time you don't do it again next time," Voldemort told. Harry nodded and let Hermione go.**

This really isn't a blooper as much as it is one of those statements which makes you go huh?

**The first plain is the plain of spirits, that's where you go after you die to be jugged.**

Who am I to comment about being jugged. Just don't jug these authors too harshly.

**"But in growing up, we have a choice in how we change, our choices determine where we go, who we become."**

This is one blooper that must leave the author feeling sheepish. Ewe think?

**I sweat I will get Dumbledore for doing this to you.**

Yes, this is an example of the famous Wizarding world sweating oath. Someone send him to the showers. Please.

And finally, a special. Both of these bloopers came from the same story. The author was obviously making an attempt to correct mistakes.

**"I'm going back, burger off!" yelled Ron biting his thumb at them.**

**"Berger off!" she said growling.**

I left a review pointing out the errors to the author. The reply was a simple "Bagger off!"

*Bobmin*  
*FanficAuthors.net*

# Sunrise Over Britain

## Chapter 24 - Dangerous Dagger Dilemma

### Standard Disclaimer:

Alyx walked over to Bob's desk and peered over his shoulder.

"Uhuh, I thought so. You're running out of people torment in the disclaimers aren't you. You're sitting at a blank screen!"

"Be quiet woman, I'm letting my creative juices bubble," Bob replied

"Sounds kinky," Alyx murmured, then she blushed and frowned realizing that Bob was using this conversation as part of the disclaimer.

"You know you love it," he chortled. "It's the hidden exhibitionist in you."

"In your dreams," she muttered darkly and started to walk off the stage muttering vile threats under her breath.

A blond woman pushed by Alyx. Alyx stopped and did a double take. "It can't be," she muttered.

The blond walked up to the podium set center stage and tapped on the microphone. "Is this thing live?"

Feedback screeched loudly and echoed in the theater.

"I want everyone here to understand that I own Harry Potter," said J.K. Rowling. "Bob and Alyx are only playing around in the world I created, even if I lost my writing abilities at the end of book five and book six comes across like a piece of poorly written fan fiction, it's still all mine. Mine mine mine mine!"

From off stage Harry Potter walked over to a spot not far from J.K. Rowling and he lifted up his wand.

BANG!

The knight bus appeared, crushing Rowling to bits.

"Welcome to the Knight Bus, emergency transportation for the stranded wizard or witch. 'ello 'arry!" said Stan Shunpike.

"Hiya Stan, thanks for dropping by but I changed my mind," Harry replied.

BANG!

The bus vanished again, leaving a red smear on the stage.

"You can't do that! You killed JR!" screamed Alyx.

"Too late, I just did it," replied Bob smugly.

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Sunrise over Britain

### Chapter 24

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#### Padfoot Manor, Late Evening (Jan 24th)...

Harry sighed and shook his head. Had he known what kind of new paperwork he would be dealing with he would have just killed Amhar. He was certain there was only one form needed to fill out for killing an annoying little man. Handling the formation of a new regiment of the British Army meant forms, in triplicate!

He stood and stretched, then walked over to the window. It was raining, again. The winter weather in Ireland made it difficult for him to keep up his early morning runs, or even his evening walks with Hermione. He leaned his forehead against the cold glass and wished for spring to hurry up.

"Something wrong, Harry?" Remus asked from the open door.

Harry turned and grinned sheepishly. "Not really. I'm just wool gathering and wishing for spring. I think once this war is over, I'm packing up the wife and going somewhere warm for a couple months."

Remus moved into the room and took a seat in front of Harry's desk. "You know, your father said something similar. I remember when your parents took a week off to go to Anafi," he said, then he laughed to himself. "Not long after their return they told us you were on the way."

Harry smiled and returned to his desk.

Remus cocked an eyebrow, spotting the huge pile of paperwork on the desk, all of it muggle forms.

You have to fill all this stuff out?" he asked incredulously.

Harry looked at the pile mournfully. "Yeah, it's a sodding mess, too. His Majesty wants to turn our Brotherhood Brigade into the 24th Regiment of the SAS. It sounds good on paper, but logistically, it's a nightmare. I asked Amelia to find me help, but I think she's still annoyed at me for springing a surprise royal visit on her."

"What kind of help are you looking for?"

"Ideally, a wizard or witch who's served in the muggle military, but I'll take a squib at this point. So far, we've come up emptied handed. Amelia said she's going to search through the lists of people rescued in our raid," he replied. "The real problem is that, while most of the Brotherhood Brigade is willing to fight in this war, will the current members be willing to stay in the Brigade following the war? I don't know. I'm not sure I want to, but I promised His Majesty that I would serve for four years."

"Why isn't Amelia's people handling most of this work, Harry? You shouldn't be burdened with doing all of this yourself, especially since the Crown has commanded the Ministry to do this."

He smiled evilly at Remus. "Well, that's another reason why Amelia isn't too happy with me. You see, Hermione pointed out to Amelia that the order to revise the charter specifically included an anti-discrimination clause for blood, color, race or religion. That wouldn't be bad, except that race includes non-human species."

Remus choked and started to laugh. "Amelia must be having kittens!"

"Oh, she's not as upset as she appears to be. To be honest, I think she's really quite pleased with the King's visit. He spent a quiet evening with us, mostly asking questions about our way of life and comparing it with the muggle way. I think he'd really like to see our world made public, but he understands why we can't allow that," Harry told him.

"I can understand his ideas. The muggles have things we don't have. It wasn't until Hermione started showing me that I came to understand," Remus replied, then he shook his head in wonder. "Did you know the muggles have sent men to the moon? And they have an understanding of medicine that is far beyond anything we have."

Harry nodded. He leaned forward, resting his elbows on his desk. He was about to tell Remus about a muggle book he had read that had given him the idea for the portals, when a scream pierced the manor.

Harry jumped to his feet a second before Remus.

"Another attack?" Remus asked quietly.

"No, I don't think so," Harry said. He pulled the Brotherhood medallion out from under his shirt and opened his senses to the bond they all shared.

"It's Ginny," he said tensely. He grabbed Remus by the arm and apparated them directly to Neville and Ginny's room.

Neville whirled, pulling his wand, then relaxed spotting Harry. "Dammit, Harry, don't do that! One of these days I'm going to hit you with something."

Ginny clung to Neville, her eyes darted frantically around the room. She was nearly hyperventilating in panic.

"Remus, go see O'Dalley at Constable headquarters. I think she's reacting to that damned dagger again," Harry said quietly.

The door banged opened and the rest of the Brotherhood rushed in. Luna and Hermione went to straight to Ginny to help calm her.

Dan, Emma and Tonks approached Harry, while Remus hurried to the apparation point.

"What's happening?" asked Emma worriedly.

"She's reacting to that knife again, I think," Harry said, while watching the girls trying to comfort Ginny.

Terry and Susan stood off to one side, also watching. Susan had reached the end of her second trimester and was now very noticeably pregnant. When Terry conjured a chair for her, she smiled gratefully at him.

Harry paced the room while others tried to calm the red head. He glanced at the door and wondered where Narcissa was. It was unlike her to be absent.

As if Harry had spoke his thoughts aloud, Draco walked over to him and said, "Mum's at the hospital tonight. They were holding a late lecture on a new procedure she needed to learn. Should I call her? Or perhaps another healer?"

Harry frowned. "I'm not sure. She's upset, but I don't know if she needs a healer."

Echo drifted in through a wall and floated over to Harry and Draco. "Her gift is troublesome, but tonight she will learn the full aspect of it, and perhaps take comfort from that fact."

Harry eyed his mentor speculatively. *Can she affect the dagger? Is she strong enough?*

"What the hell?" the girl muttered as she backed away and slapped her hands over her ears to block out the shrieking. It wasn't coming from her victim, but from the walls of the school!

In a panic, she took a step towards the writhing woman, only to stop when she saw two figures race around the corner at the end of the hall. As they pounded towards her victim, she growled. The woman was hers!

Others were coming. Should could hear them calling out to each other, hear their feet slapping against the stone floor as they ran.

Whimpering, the girl took several steps back slipping into the shadows, her eyes locked on the dagger. She had to get it back! Her thigh burned and the voice in her head buzzed angrily. She told herself that she hadn't failed. She could still kill the woman. All she had to do was step forward and pull the dagger out!

But it was too late. The two figures had reached her prey and more were approaching. She had to leave, to get away. They'd search, now. They'd check every bed to find out who was missing.

Stuffing a fist into her mouth to stifle the whimpers she couldn't stop, she raced down the hall, the burning pain in her leg from the dagger's kiss a reminder of her failure.

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## **Haven Infirmary...**

Tripuri Patil jerked at the sudden shrieking sound bouncing off the walls of her office in the infirmary. She'd been briefed on the new warding and understood instantly what it meant. Someone in the school had been critically injured and was in need of immediate medical care.

Leaping to her feet, she reached under her desk for her emergency kit and bolted out the door. Racing from the infirmary, she stopped long enough to mutter a quick locator spell, then sprinted in the direction it pointed her.

Several minutes later, she skidded around a corner and nearly plowed into a group of students and staff. "Move!" she shouted as she pushed through them. "Everyone move away!"

As they made a hole, she rushed to the side of the woman writhing on the floor and gasped when she saw who it was. "Minerva? Oh, Merlin!"

"You must help her!" Flitwick squeaked. He held Minerva's hand as tears ran down his cheeks.

After a quick visual examination, Tripuri's eyes widened. Drawing her wand, she placed it against Minerva's temple and murmured softly. The woman's screaming stopped instantly and her body went limp.

"What did you do?" Flitwick asked worriedly.

Scowling, Tripuri shook her head. "We don't have time for that now, Filius. Cancel the ward! I can't hear myself think over that racket!"

Leaning back, she muttered another spell and the wall sconces flared brightly. "Chloe?" she called as Flitwick drew his wand.

The small popping sound of a house elf appearing was loud in the sudden silence of the hall and many people jumped nervously.

"Miss need Chloe?" the small creature asked.

"Yes. Go to Mr. O'Dalley and tell him that his dagger has been found and that we need medical help. Use those exact words, Chloe, they're very important. Do you understand?"

Nodding, the elf vanished.

"O'Dalley?" Flitwick asked. "Shouldn't you have sent for healers?"

"I did, Filius. O'Dalley has a protocol in place for this. As soon as Chloe gives him the message, he'll get everyone moving."

"I don't understand," the diminutive man said, scowling at her.

"Look at the dagger, Filius," she hissed quietly. "You know what it is! With my message, O'Dalley will realize what's happened and get the help we need. Or would you rather I just blurt everything out in front of the students?" she asked and flicked her hands towards the gathered students and staff.

Releasing Minerva's hand, he stood. "Prefects, get everyone back to bed, now! Teachers, escort them to the dormitories." When no one moved, he cast a quick sonorus spell. "You have one minute. If there's anyone left in this hall after that point, you will be scrubbing the floors of the school with your toothbrush. And that includes teachers!" His voice bounced off the walls and made several people slap their hands over their ears.

While many were shocked by the normally jovial Professor's anger, no one wanted to test it. The hall cleared quickly, leaving only Tripuri, Flitwick, Millicent Bulstrode and Deneb Thorntree.

"I said everyone," Filius growled at the two students.

"I'm sorry, Professor," Millicent said as she watched the corridor, her back to Deneb. "Neither of us is leaving you or Miss Patil alone."

"You're both vulnerable," Deneb agreed as he watched the other end of the hall. "We're staying until help arrives. If that means we'll be scrubbing the halls, so be it."

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### **Haven Constabulary Office...**

O'Dalley stood and stretched. It had been another sixteen hour day and he was exhausted. He had spent the day reviewing everything they knew about the murders and still hadn't figured out a new line to investigate. The search for the murderer had gone cold and the only thing he could do was wait for the murderer to make a mistake.

He placed some papers in a briefcase, telling himself he would review them at home, but knowing full well he'd probably eat, then go to bed. Standing, he walked around his desk and started for the door to his office when a popping sound gave him pause.

"Master, I brings words from Madam Patil at the school," squeaked the elf that appeared.

"Yes?"

"Madam Patil says your dagger is found and they need medical help right nows. Professor Kittycat is hurts badly!"

The little elf hopped about looking at O'Dalley hopefully. O'Dalley's brain took a moment to register what he had been told. Then he sprang towards the office door and jerked it open.

"Barney!" he shouted. "Get someone over to the Hospital and alert Healer August that we found that damned dagger. They need healers at the school right now. Then send word to Commander Stanton. Tell him that all of the constables are heading to the school and that we need him to cover the town, at least for a few hours."

Barney looked up from his coffee and donut in surprise. Then he placed both regretfully on his desk and started moving. Several other constables popped away, heading for the school.

O'Dalley returned to his office, he had other calls to make. From the outer office he heard several popping sounds of people arriving. The constables office was normally a laid back place, but not tonight.

A few minutes later, O'Dalley spotted Remus and Commander Stanton standing in his doorway. He waved them in, then went back to his portable floo.

"Yes, that's right. All the help you can send, Mike. I appreciate it," he said, then he closed the connection.

"I don't have much to tell you right now. All I know is that word came from the school. They found the dagger and apparently Headmistress McGonagall is badly injured," he said tensely. "I'll be leaving here for the school in a few minutes. I just want the Irish MLE forensic boys standing by."

Remus paled at the news and swallowed noisily. He had researched the dagger for O'Dalley and Healer August. He knew exactly how dangerous it was. "Is there anything we can do?" he asked.

O'Dalley's shoulders drooped. "Honestly, Remus, I don't know. If Minerva was stabbed with the dagger, she's probably dead. I know Sylvia was looking into ways of neutralizing the damned thing, but she hadn't come up with anything last time I spoke with her."

Remus nodded soberly. "I'll inform Harry," he said, then he apparated away.

O'Dalley looked at Charles Stanton. "Chuck, I know this is a pain, but I have no one else to turn to."

"Mike, go do your job. My boys and I will hold down the fort for you," Stanton said.

O'Dalley nodded gratefully at the American, then he hurried from the room.

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### **Padfoot Manor...**

Harry turned to look at Eocho. "What do you mean?" he asked.

"I know little, Maglios, but I can sense the evil as well as my daughter can. And tonight it is not abating, like previously. I think the assassin has been separated from the dagger. The blade calls out for its mate to finish the grisly task, but something has happened to interrupt it."

Harry frowned and tried to wrap his brain around the idea. "Alright, so you're saying that the blade is still in it's victim? I'd hardly call that good news, honored teacher."

"It is not good news for the victim, Maglios. But much will depend on the strength of my smallest daughter tonight," Eocho said.

Harry was about to reply when Remus and Hermione joined him from separate directions. He looked between the two and frowned. "Alright, Hermione. You first."

"She's calmed down, but she says something terrible is happening tonight. Worse than any of the other murders."

Harry nodded and looked at Remus.

"I don't have all of the news, Harry, but O'Dalley says the dagger has been found, and that Minerva has been badly injured. The school is calling for medical aid related to the dagger," he said, not as quietly as he'd intended.

Everyone turned to look at Remus in shock. With the sole exception of Eocho, every person in the room had been a student of Minerva McGonagall. Even the Grangers had studied under her direction.

Harry's expression darkened. "I'm going to the school. Remus, talk to Eocho, he's got something to say about Ginny's talent, but he's playing riddles again," he said, shaking his head.

Remus blinked in surprise and nodded. Harry closed his eyes and reached for Minerva's aura, but couldn't locate it. He grimaced and an icy knot of fear formed in his belly. Reaching for Professor Flitwick, he apparated away.

Remus turned to look at Eocho. "Honored Teacher?" he asked, his voice hard.

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

Harry appeared in the corridor not far from Flitwick. Nearly a dozen stunners lanced out and splashed harmlessly on the shield he always maintained when he wasn't in the manor and he grimaced. "Hey! Watch it!"

"Lord Potter!" gasped Professor Flitwick.

Harry took in the scene. Minerva lay on the ground, face down, a gilded hilt sticking out of her back. She was silent and unmoving, almost as though she was just sleeping. Around her knelt several healers who were conversing in hushed whispers. Several constables stood nearby, most of them looking sheepish for shooting at Harry when he arrived.

Harry nodded at Millicent and Deneb, then he turned to Flitwick. "Professor, you've known me since I was a snot nosed firstie. I think you can dispense with the formalities and call me Harry. Now, how is she?"

Flitwick grabbed Harry by the hand and walked him a few feet away. His eyes shone with tears. "It's not good, Harry. Madam Patil put Minerva into a coma, a deep one, like they use when healing a patient after surgery. But that's all they can do. No one knows how to remove the dagger without killing her. I think they're seriously considering giving her Mercy. At least that way her soul might be able to move on. If they remove the blade, that won't happen."

"Mercy? You mean they're thinking of killing her?" he asked incredulously.

Flitwick nodded and the tears began to roll down his cheeks.

Harry's anger flared, as did his aura. His body burst into a blaze of light and he walked over to the whispering healers.

"The person that kills her will follow her to the grave," he stated flatly.

The healers looked up, startled, and blanched at seeing the blazing young man before them.

"But, my lord!" protested one healer.

"I mean it," snapped Harry. "Keep her alive!"

Sylvia August joined him and placed an arm around his shoulders. "I'm sorry, Harry. We can keep her like this for a while, but not for long. We simply don't know how to safely remove the dagger without killing her."

"Keep her alive. I think we may be able to help. I'll be back in a little while. In the meantime, move her into one of the classrooms and conjure a bed or something. Just get her off the floor," he ordered, though his tone made it sound more like a plea.

Healer August searched Harry's face for a long moment, then she nodded. "I'm willing to try anything at this point. If we do nothing, she will die. She may die still, but I do not want to give her Mercy unless we have no other alternative."

Harry nodded and apparated away.

"You heard the man. Let's get her into the nearest classroom and make her comfortable," August ordered.

---

### **Padfoot Manor...**

Harry appeared back in the Longbottom's room to find an intense conversation going on between Hermione, Remus and Eocho. Ginny sat sniffing on the bed with Neville's arms around her.

"But, Honor Teacher, the power flow required to make such a sink would be enormous," protested Hermione.

"It's a lot, Hermione, but it's not beyond our abilities," countered Remus. "Ginny can handle the flow, I'm sure of it."

Remus conjured a parchment and quill, then he scribbled some arithmantic equations on the parchment. "Check me on this, Hermione," he ordered



as he shoved the parchment at her a few seconds later.

"Children," Eocho said in a patient voice. "Yes, the power is there. The question is, can my daughter do this? Evil magic is known to effect her in an untoward manner. Will she be able to do this?"

"That's what I want to find out," Harry said coldly, startling everyone. No one had noticed his arrival.

He walked to Ginny and his expression softened considerably. "Ginny," he said softly. "Do you think you can help Minerva?"

Ginny dropped her eyes and shivered violently.

"Harry, don't press her," Neville said in a warning tone.

Harry shot him an angry look. "Neville, we need to know this. Before I arrived and stopped them, the healers at the school were planning on giving Minerva Mercy."

Several others in the room gasped.

Neville shuddered and closed his eyes.

Harry leaned closer. "Ginny?" he pressed.

"I don't know," she said in a whimper.

"Are you willing to try? With all of us helping you? We're not going to let you do this alone."

She nodded and he placed a supportive hand on her shoulder for a moment, then he turned to the others. "If I understand correctly, this is going to take a lot of power. That means all of us, except Susan," he said.

Susan looked up from her chair and glared at him.

"Susan, you are six months pregnant and I'll be the first to admit you are not sick nor an invalid. But we do not know what, if anything, this kind of magic can do to you or your baby. Do you really want to risk exposing yourself to this level of dark magic?"

Susan flushed and looked down, but shook her head. "Alright, Harry. I'll stay here."

"I'm sorry, Susan, but you and the baby are too important to risk. To Terry, and to the rest of us," he added gently.

Terry shot Harry a grateful look.

"I'm returning to the school. I'll meet everyone in the corridor outside Minerva's office," he told them, then he grabbed Remus by the shoulder and apparated them both.

Eocho watched as Hermione and Neville assisted Ginny off the bed.

"The Maglios would not ask you to do this if he didn't think you could, my daughter," Eocho said. "All will be well. Trust in yourself and your brothers and sisters to support you."

Ginny nodded weakly and let Hermione lead her out of the room.

Within moments, Susan and Eocho were alone. She sighed heavily and slowly pushed herself to her feet. Even though the healers were pleased with her progress, she looked closer to eight months pregnant than six.

She placed a hand on the top of her belly and smiled at Eocho.

"Do not fear, child, your decision to remain behind was the correct one. You and your baby cannot be risked so close to such dark magics."

"I know, honored Teacher. I just wish that Siomha wouldn't kick so much," she replied.

Eocho smiled and nodded approvingly. "A good, strong name. Your daughter will be the first of many for the Brotherhood. Siomha will lead the way."

Susan blushed at the unexpected praise. Together they both walked from the room with Eocho detailing what he knew of the roots of the name.

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

Harry appeared with Remus a moment later in the same place he had left only a short while ago. He looked around the empty corridor in confusion, then noted an open classroom door nearby. He walked to the door with Remus following him.

Healer August looked up as Harry entered. Her expression was a mix of fear and hope. "My Lord, you're back! Please tell me you have good news?" she asked in a pleading tone.

Harry nodded. "One of our own, Ginny Longbottom, is a nullifier. She is particularly sensitive to Dark Magics. And while she is very powerful in her

own right, my people will back her up with a power sharing ritual. Remus will explain the details, while I prepare a section of the room for the ritual.”

Sylvia nodded, then turned to look intently at Remus, who stared at Harry's retreating back for a moment, before turning back to Healer August.

Harry looked at the room. In one corner, Minerva lay on a small cot. His staff flared and the room expanded enormously. He then banished all the desks to the far corner, away from the still woman. Dobby appeared next to him a moment later, summoned by Harry's silent call.

“Dobby, bring me the blue notebook from my study, then alert the elves that we need to set up for a ritual. We'll need the supplies. We're rushed, Dobby, so hurry.”

The elf nodded and vanished.

Using his staff, Harry quietly began an incantation to lay down the power circles. His staff flared as the central circle started to appear in bright gold on the floor. The room hummed and crackled with the power being expended. He never noticed when everyone in the room stopped to stare at him.

*This needs to be a different setup than we used last April, he thought to himself. Make a larger center circle for myself, Ginny and the cot with Minerva on it. And nine outer circles for the brotherhood members, instead of eleven.*

“Can we help?” asked Hermione.

Harry looked up in surprise. He hadn't noticed them arriving. “Yes, actually. Dobby will be here in a moment with my notes on the power sharing ritual. I'll deal with the inner circle where Ginny, Minerva and myself will be. Can you use the notes to make sure the elves are inscribing the proper runes for the outer circles?”

Hermione nodded. “I'll also tell Healer August that we'll need more beds in here. Once the ritual is done, we're all likely to be exhausted.”

Harry watched as Ginny, pale and trembling, stared at Minerva. Neville was holding her tightly, trying to comfort her.

“Do that, love. I better have a word with Ginny,” Harry replied absently.

He moved quickly to the Longbottoms. “Ginny?” he said softly.

She turned haunted eyes to him. “I don't know if I can do this, Harry. It's aware of me. It knows I'm here and it's preparing to fight.”

Harry shook his head. “In your first year at Hogwarts, you fought Voldemort. It took him months before you finally succumbed to him. You're stronger than you think. I'll be in the circle with you and our family will be joining us. We'll all help you.”

Ginny nodded, but he could see she still had doubts.

“Do you know what you must do?” he asked.

“Yes,” she said, then closed her eyes. “It's so evil, Harry. You can't feel it, but I can hear it snarling at me. It's a vile, hate filled thing. It lives to kill as painfully as possible, feeding off the terror of its victims.”

He nodded, then reached out to touch her aura, calming her and strengthening her. Her eyes flew open and she gasped. “You'll be fine. We'll be with you when the time comes,” he said reassuringly.

He smiled at her, then turned around to watch Dobby and nearly a dozen other elves as they entered the runes into the circles under Hermione's watchful eye. She stood holding his notes, examining the circles and comparing it to what he had in his book.

Harry moved to the center of the empty inner circle. It was much larger than the one they'd used back in April. He glanced once again at the healers, then went to work, inscribing the center circle with the pentagram and the runes.

He looked up when Hermione interrupted him.

“How are you coming?” she asked.

“I'm almost done here. Another five minutes should do it. How about yourself?”

“All of the outer circles are complete. But just to be safe, I have Remus double checking them. This isn't the same setup we used back when we shared power to make the ward around Britain,” she noted.

Harry shook his head. “No, it can't be. We don't have everyone and we'll have more people at the center. I was thinking of just Ginny, Minerva and myself, but it might not be a bad idea to include Healer August.”

Hermione looked across the room at Healer August, who paced nervously, shooting anxious looks at Harry, and she smiled. “I think you might be right. Including her would at least help ease her concerns.”

“Alright, why don't you go talk with her, while I finish up here. Oh, and it might be to everyone's advantage if we all had a dose of Pepper Up before we start.”

“Good idea. I'll get some from the healers,” Hermione replied before she turned away.

Harry nodded to himself and went back to inscribing the necessary runes in the circle. Normally the largest rune would represent the person

receiving the power, but he also had to include runes to protect Minerva. With so many in the circle, there would be a little bleed over, but nothing too unmanageable.

Nearly ten minutes later he looked up to see the Brotherhood clustered in one corner of the room. Each held a small vial in their hands. Healer August stood nervously next to Remus.

He walked over to them. "Is everyone aware of what they are doing tonight?"

Several shook their heads and Harry looked reproachfully at Remus.

"Hey, I haven't had a chance to explain this to everyone yet," the older man protested as he moved to the front of the group and turned to face them.

"Alright, everyone. Listen up," he said, gaining their attention. "We're going to use a facet of Ginny's talent. She's a nullifier, meaning she has the ability to temporarily drain an enchanted object of its energy. That's why she can sense enchanted objects, in particular dark magic objects. Our thought is that if she can drain the dagger of its energy, we'll be able to remove it without harming Minerva. Once it's removed, Harry will destroy it in much the same way he destroyed the assassin's bear.

"Healer August will remove the knife, but only after Ginny says it's safe. In the meantime, she'll monitor Minerva," Remus continued, then he turned and addressed August directly. "Sylvia, inside the circle you will experience both a slight power drain as well as a boost. The power sharing ritual will channel most of the power from all of us into Ginny. But some of that will bleed over into you. It may be disorienting, so be careful."

The old healer nodded and swallowed nervously.

Harry took one final look around, then he noticed someone. "Draco," he called. "Millicent and Deneb are standing out in the hall. Thank them for staying around. They refused to leave earlier. Also, ask them to return to the dorms and gather all of the students where they can watch them. We don't know who used the dagger, but it could have been a student. Together, at least, they can protect themselves."

With a nod, Draco walked from the room.

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### **Haven School Common Room...**

Millicent paced the large common room, ignoring the students who stood in small groups, discussing the fate of the Headmistress. She felt responsible for what happened and was furious with herself for not catching the person she'd overheard in the library.

"Millicent," Deneb called.

When she turned to face him, he murmured something to the group of students gathered around him, then made his way to her side. "The prefects have checked the common room. No one's missing," he told her quietly.

She scowled, looked around the room and said nothing.

"It must have been a member of staff," he said.

"No, not necessarily. It could have been a student who was smart enough to blend in with this lot when they came rushing down to see what happened." She shook her head in disgust. "Well, they'll find out who it is one way or another, even if they have to use Veritaserum on us all."

"They can't," Deneb protested. "If people found out that Veritaserum was used on underage children, they'll go nuts. It could bring down the Ministry!"

"If they don't catch who did this, the school will close. Remember, this school is Irish, Deneb, not British. If the Irish Ministry green lights the use of Veritaserum, Minister Bones can do nothing about it. Oh, she could register a complaint, but this is Irish soil, and for all her power, she leads a government in exile."

"Brogan Mallory is no fool," Deneb told her as he watched his fellow students mill about. "If he orders the use of Veritaserum here, he'll torpedo his own career. Politicians may be blood sucking, morally corrupt maggots, but most are not stupid enough to throw themselves to the wolves."

"Really?" Millicent asked, scathingly. "Then explain Cornelius Fudge to me."

"I said *most* are not stupid enough. He was one of the exceptions."

A fifth year prefect approached them, looking worried.

"What is it, Jeremy?" Deneb asked.

"We may have a problem. A fourth year girl seems to have injured herself somehow," the sandy haired young man told them quietly. "Madam Patil is with the Headmistress, so I don't know who we should call to come look at her."

"Come on, then. Let's go have a look," Millicent said.

As Jeremy lead them to the couch where the injured girl sat, the crowd around her melted away. The blond fourth year looked up as they stopped in front of her and her eyes widened. She rubbed her right thigh and grimaced.

"What do you want?" the girl snapped.

"To find out what's wrong with you," Millicent told her bluntly. "How did you hurt your leg?"

The girl only shrugged and looked away.

Millicent rolled her eyes. "Does that mean you don't know, or that you're not going to answer?"

"I don't have to tell you anything," the girl muttered.

"Now, you listen to me you little," Millicent began, only to be interrupted when Deneb stepped in front of her and smiled.

"Maybe you should let me handle this," he said quietly. When Millicent nodded, he turned to the girl and crouched down in front of her.

"Hello. Orla, isn't it? You used to be in Ravenclaw at Hogwarts, didn't you?" Deneb asked.

"Yes," the girl said, turning her head to look at him.

"I remember you," he told her. "You used to whistle whenever someone was sorted into Ravenclaw."

Orla Quirke smiled. "I did, yes."

"My name's Deneb."

"I know who you are," she told him, still rubbing her thigh. "You used to be a Hufflepuff."

"That's right. Orla, what happened to you leg?"

"Nothing. It just aches a little." She looked down at her hand and seemed surprised to find it rubbing her leg. Lacing her hands together, she looked at him again and tried to smile.

"It's obviously bothering you. I'd like to help you, if you'll let me," he said gently. The others in the room seemed to fade away as he focused on the girl in front of him.

She blinked bright blue eyes at him. "You would? You'll help me?"

"Yes, if you'll let me."

"Then you'll get it back for me?" she asked. "I didn't mean to leave it behind. It was an accident."

"Was it?"

"Yes. The pain will go away once I have it back. But I'm not allowed to leave the common room and there are too many here who would see if I tried to sneak out."

"Well, then, if you'll tell me what you left behind and where it is, I'll be happy to go and get it for you," he told her cheerfully.

"I left it in the witch. I didn't mean to, but I didn't have enough time to get it back before everyone came."

Deneb frowned, puzzled. "The witch? Who, Orla?"

She scowled and the whites of her eyes began to darken. "Don't be dense. You were there, you saw."

"I was there? When?"

"Tonight!" she growled. "You were there, protecting." She laughed suddenly, sending a shiver down his spine. Her eyes, now completely black, bore into his. "The hag thinks she can keep it, but it's mine!"

Deneb's eyes widened and went blank. "Of course it is," he told her. "I won't let her keep it from you."

Millicent drew her wand slowly and quietly told Jeremy to move the other students away.

Orla stood and began to yank her hair. "She may have escaped me this time, but I will have her. She's mine, too. It promised me that. All the blood I could have, whenever I want it. You'll drown it it," she snarled, looking down at Deneb. "All of you!"

When Deneb reached out to her, she kicked him in the chest and sent him flying backwards. Grabbing her head, she screamed once, then launched herself at him again, only to slam into something solid.

Falling to her knees, Orla shook her head groggily and looked up into the blazing eyes of Millicent Bulstrode.

"You'll not touch him again," she told the girl.

Orla's lips pulled back in a snarl and she sprang to her feet.

"I don't think so," Millicent said, her wand pointed at the blond. "*Stupefy!*"

When the girl fell to the floor, unconscious, Millicent searched her pockets and took her wand. "*Incarcerous*," she murmured and watched as the young witch was bound.

She turned around to face those in the room and found Deneb on his feet, rubbing his chest. "Are you alright?"

"Fine, though I think I'm in for a spectacular bruise. She may be small, but she has one hell of a kick," he said, shaking his head.

She nodded, then scanned the room quickly. "I think we've had enough fun for one night," she said loudly. "Prefects, get everyone into their dorm rooms."

"You heard the Head Girl," Jeremy yelled over the groaning and complaining. "Come on, everyone off to bed!"

The other prefects began to move students along and the common room was cleared of students in short order.

"Now what?" Jeremy asked as the last student left the room.

"Find O'Dalley or his assistant," Deneb said. "Both should be in the school. Tell them what's happened and bring them here. If you can't find either of them, grab the first teacher you see."

"I'll hurry," Jeremy told them.

Once he was gone, Deneb turned to Millicent. "Keep her unconscious, Millie. There's something strange about her eyes. It was almost as if I'd fallen into them and the frightening part was that I didn't want to leave." He shuddered.

"You were agreeing to help her get the dagger back," she told him quietly.

"I would have, too. I would have done whatever she asked of me."

Millicent sighed heavily, then began to unbutton his robe.

He raised an eyebrow. "I'm glad to know you want to see me naked, Millie, but do you really think this is the time?" he teased.

"I want to see if there's any damage to your chest, you prat," she grumbled as she pushed his robe aside and lifted his shirt.

"You sure know how to bring a guy down."

"I'm sure your ego will survive," she said, laughingly. "You're right. You're going to have a lovely bruise, but I'm sure Madam Patil can take care of it when she has the chance." She looked up into his dancing eyes and smiled.

Taking her hand, he pulled her towards the couch where Orla had been and they both sat down. Deneb fixed his robe and wrapped an arm around Millicent's shoulders. Both watched the blond carefully for any signs of wakefulness.

Several minutes passed in silence, then Orla jerked violently and screamed as though her soul had been ripped from her body.

"*Stupefy!*" Millicent and Deneb both shouted and the girl went limp once more.

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### **Minerva and the Healers (A few minutes earlier)...**

"Alright then. Everyone take your potion and let's get into position," Harry said grimly. In truth, he wasn't sure this was going to work, but they owed it to Minerva to try.

Ginny turned and looked at Neville with huge, haunted eyes.

He swept her into his arms and kissed her soundly. Then he released her. "You can do this, Gin," he said. He believed in her. He knew exactly how strong a woman she was.

She nodded and her expression grew determined. She looked up at Harry when he approached her.

"You ready?" he asked.

She took a deep breath. "Yes, let's do this."

Harry wrapped an arm around her shoulders and led her into the center circle, where he signaled for Sylvia to join them. A pair of healers levitated the cot with Minerva into the center a moment later.

Sylvia and Harry each donned a pair of dragonhide gloves, since they would be touching the dagger. It was necessary to physically touch the blade, since Ginny's talent would nullify any spell cast to move it.

Harry looked around and received signals of readiness from each Brotherhood member. He looked at Minerva once more, then straightened his shoulders and raised his staff with both hands.

He turned to face one point of the pentagram and waited for everyone to turn in the same direction he faced. His magic flared and the crystal on his

staff shone brilliantly. With a sharp crack, he brought the end of the staff down in contact with the point of the pentagram.

"In diligo quod fides nos partis vox pro verum quod justicia," the group intoned together. Then they turned and faced the next point of the star.

Sylvia looked up from checking Minerva. The circles on the floor began to pulsate and the air hummed and throbbed with power. She swayed and gripped the edge of Minerva's cot. It was unlike anything she'd ever experienced. She could literally feel the power flowing through her. It felt as though a million ants were crawling over her skin.

Harry's aura exploded in bright light, then reached out and engulfed Ginny.

Ginny gasped as warm air brushed against her, moving her hair away from her pale face. Gathering her courage, she moved closer to Minerva, who lay with the blade still protruding from her back. She held out both hands and they flared with a strange blueish flame. The blade seemed to vibrate and snarl as she approached.

"Gnash ytarig bolla fee," snarled a voice that clearly wasn't human.

Ginny's aura dimmed and she staggered back from Minerva.

The tendril that extended from Harry to Ginny widened.

Luna broke the circle, stepping from her spot to the center circle. She clasped Harry's hand and he looked at her for a moment, then nodded. The tendril widened again, then thickened once more, becoming a ribbon of visible power.

Sylvia knelt on the other side of the cot, watching the three in the inner circle with awe. When the room began to shake, she shrank back from the power being displayed.

Ginny's expression hardened and she stepped up to Minerva. A flash of pure black energy came from the dagger, but she batted it aside, almost casually.

It wouldn't be until the next morning that someone discovered the large hole in the ceiling she had made.

She knelt next to the cot, cupping her hands around the hilt, but not touching it.

"Kali fee!" something screamed, and a wave of darkness exploded from the dagger. Ginny's hands contained the wave of blackness, soaking it up.

"Cohibeo quod Adficio is Malum Res!" Ginny shouted. The flames around her hands surged to the dagger, surrounding it and she moaned painfully. The dagger seemed to struggle with her as the blue fire around her hands fought for dominance with a cold blackness from the knife.

The two struggled and Ginny screamed, a second later another voice added its own scream to hers. The dagger flared again and Ginny leaned forward.

"NO! I fought Riddle and you're nothing!" she screamed at the blade. The building groaned and rocked from the energies being expended. The windows in the classroom shattered outwards. The force of her outburst nearly drove Harry and everyone to their knees.

The inhuman voice whimpered aloud and the knife suddenly glowed blue like her hands.

Ginny nodded painfully to Sylvia, who did a quick check of Minerva's vital signs before she removed the dagger carefully.

Harry stepped forward, taking the dagger from Sylvia and moving it to a metal bowl. He nodded to Ginny, who looked at him gratefully before slumping sideways against the cot. Her aura collapsed and she closed her eyes, unconscious.

Harry stared at the dagger for a moment. Without Ginny's influence, the blade's energy surged back into it and it pulsed malevolently at him. Holding one hand over the metal bowl, he clenched his teeth. "*Incendio*," he growled.

Both the bowl and the blade caught fire. Harry increased the power until the dagger was burning white hot. Slowly, the blade burned away, hissing and snarling in a language no one present understood.

When the blade was finally gone, he turned back to look at the Brotherhood and Sylvia. Everyone had collapsed to the floor and several healers bustled about, administering potions and getting people onto cots.

Healer August knelt with several other healers, working feverishly on Minerva. With the dagger removed, she was just a stabbing victim now. It was a dangerous condition to be sure, but one they were trained to handle.

Sylvia looked up at him, a grateful smile on her face. It had taken bit of doing, but Minerva was one patient she wouldn't have to administer Mercy to.

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### Haven School Common Room...

When the door to the common room finally opened, Deneb and Millicent stood up. Jeremy entered with O'Dalley and Professor Flitwick behind him.

"I'm sorry we took so long," Flitwick told them as he rushed forward. "Oh, no. Orla Quirke? But she's such a bright child!"

"The Headmistress?" Millicent asked.

"She's alive and the dagger has been removed."

"But how..."

"Later, child. We'll discuss it later," Flitwick told her.

O'Dalley looked down at the student tied up on the floor, then turned to Deneb and Millicent. "What happened?"

Deneb shook his head. "Millicent should probably explain. I was... not myself for a few moments."

O'Dalley scowled, but remained silent as Millicent told him what happened.

She was clear and concise as she explained the events of the night, only becoming hesitant at the end. "Sir, I know you'll have to wake her up to interview her, but I'd suggest having several people in the room when you do, ready to knock her out again."

"I know you think she may have had some sort of control over Mr. Thorntree..." O'Dalley began.

"She did," Deneb replied quietly. "Believe me, Inspector, you need to protect yourself and your people from her. Whatever has control of her also has the ability to reach others through her."

Though skeptical, O'Dalley nodded. "I'll make sure no one is alone with her, then. I may have further questions for you both once we've spoken to her." When they both nodded in understanding, he pulled out a portable floo and called his assistant, Barney, and told him to come to the common room and to bring the representative from the Irish Ministry, if he had arrived.

When the three students turned to Professor Flitwick, the diminutive Professor sighed tiredly. "The Headmistress should recover fully. Ginny Weasley was able to remove the dagger and Harry destroyed it."

Deneb's eyes widened as the pieces fell together. "That's why she screamed," he blurted.

"What's this?" O'Dalley asked.

"She was unconscious, then jerked and screamed horribly. We stunned her again, of course. But if she's as connected to the dagger as I think, she would have felt its destruction, even though she was unconscious."

"Then maybe she's free of its influence," Flitwick suggested.

"Perhaps, but I won't be risking it," O'Dalley stated. "She'll not be alone with any of my people until we're sure of it."

The door to the common room was pushed open and Barney entered, a tall man following him. "Inspector, this is Mr. Nick Fergus, the Irish Ministry representative."

"It's good to see you again, Nick," O'Dalley said, shaking the man's hand. "I'll fill you in on the details as soon as we move the girl." He nodded to the blond on the floor.

"She's the murderer?" Fergus asked, astonished. "But she's so young!"

"Yes, but there are other forces at work in this case. Let's get her to a holding cell first, then I'll explain what's happened. Barney, the girl's name is Orla Quirke. Find her parents and bring them to the office."

"Yes, sir." Barney spun around and walked quickly from the room.

"*Mobilicorpus*," O'Dalley muttered, his wand pointed at the bound girl.

Fergus cast a blurring charm on her features. "No sense parading her around, Michael."

"Aye, true enough." He looked at the others in the room. "I know it's been a rough night for all, but try to rest. We'll contact you if we have any further questions."

When the door closed behind them, Flitwick looked at the three students. "I don't know how we'll ever thank you," he told them quietly. "You've made us all very proud."

"What will happen to her?" Millicent asked, her eyes still on the door.

"I don't know," the professor told her quietly.

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

Minerva McGonagall opened her eyes and looked around in confusion. The last thing she remembered was a soul tearing pain centered in her back. Now she lay on what was clearly a bed in the infirmary. Around her were other forms, some snoring gently.

She looked towards the window and wondered what she was seeing. She couldn't see out of them properly, but it looked like there was a fire of some sort outside. The ceiling of the infirmary was lit up with it. She started to push the covers aside when a voice stopped her.

“Lay back and relax, Minerva. You’ve had a bad shock and need time to recover.”

“Miles?” she whispered.

Miles Pickerton moved into her field of view. “Aye, it’s me. Now rest. I’ll go get Healer August.”

“Miles, what in the name of Merlin is going on?” she demanded loudly.

“Shhh... You’ll wake the others,” he replied, then he sighed and sat in a chair next to her bed. “Oh, very well. You’re a stubborn woman, Minerva McGonagall. I’ll tell you enough to keep you in that bed, then I have to get the healer. I promised I’d get her if you woke up. We weren’t sure you would,” he said softly.

Minerva looked shocked. “What happened, Miles?”

“You were stabbed with that damn Dementor blade. They were going to administer Mercy to you when Harry Potter showed up and told them not to. You owe your life to him and his Brotherhood, Minerva. That little red headed girl somehow drained the dagger long enough to remove it without killing you. It took all of them to do it, and they’ve exhausted themselves in the process. That’s who you hear sleeping around you.”

“And the glow from outside?” she asked.

Miles smiled at her and conjured a mirror, which he stuck to the wall, allowing her to see the inner courtyard of the school. It was filled with hundreds, maybe thousands of people. The witches and wizards stood silently, the tips of their wands glowering brightly. The muggles stood arm in arm with their magical counterparts, only they held lit candles.

“They’re here for you, Minerva, standing vigil,” Miles said gently. “You once told me in jest how Harry said people consider you part of their family. He wasn’t kidding and those people aren’t kidding either. They started gathering hours ago in the cold and have been here since. We’ve sent elves out with hot drinks and we’ve taken some of the parents with little children inside out of the cold. But they’re here for you because they love you and want to hear news of you.

“We’re not even sure how they found out. After they removed the dagger, they moved you and the Brotherhood to the infirmary. That’s when we noticed them. The crowd has been growing ever since.” Seeing her expression, he smiled.

Minerva’s eyes glistened with tears. Over the years, she’d had a few special students, but she considered them all hers, in a way. And they apparently considered her theirs, as well. She broke down, crying silently.

Miles knew she was a strong woman. She had endured much in her life and didn’t take to overt signs of affection. He handed her a handkerchief and placed a supporting hand on her shoulder.

She looked up at him affectionately for a moment, then her expression hardened into its usual, stern lines. “Well? Are you going to get Healer August or not? I need to know when I’ll be let out of the infirmary. I have a school to run.”

Miles chuckled and stood. “I’ll be back with Sylvia,” he replied, shaking his head with repressed mirth.

Minerva watched him go. “Fool of a man,” she muttered with just a hint of a smile.

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### **Ministry of Magic, Constable Headquarters (Jan 25th)...**

The door to his office opened and Amelia poked her head in. “Michael? Are you busy?”

O’Dalley looked up and smiled. He had been smiling a lot in the last few hours. He knew they had gotten lucky, but he’d take luck if it meant no more killings.

“Come in Minister,” he said with a wave of his hand.

Amelia stepped into the office and noted the bloodshot eyes and exhausted demeanor of her chief Inspector.

“Long night,” she commented.

“Aye,” O’Dalley’s replied softly. “It started out on a hell of a note, but ended well, I think.”

The door to the office opened again and Barney entered, carrying a tray of coffee and pastries. O’Dalley stood and offered Amelia a cup of coffee before helping himself to one.

“What’s the latest word?” asked Amelia. She had wisely resisted the impulse to hover around people doing their jobs.

“Minerva is resting comfortably, according to Healer August. Once the dagger was removed, they were able to repair the damage and stabilize her rather quickly. Sylvia thinks she’ll be up and about in a day or two. As to Harry and his people, most are exhausted, nothing that a good sleep won’t fix. Harry slept for a few hours, then he got up and has been keeping an eye on Minerva and his people. Healer August tried to make him take a potion and go back to sleep, but he told her that he’d rather stay awake.

“The Irish have been trying to determine what to do with Miss Quirke. She’s a minor, which complicates matters tremendously. As near as we’ve



been able to figure, we think the dagger came to her by way of an uncle, who never made it out of Britain. I haven't met with her parents yet. I'm not looking forward to that.

"Orla presents us with an unusual dilemma, Minister. She's insane, totally and completely. And that leads us to several questions. Did she willingly accept the dagger? Was she insane to start with? Did she have Death Eater leanings?" O'Dalley's shrugged. "Ultimately I don't think we'll ever know the answers to those questions. The Irish want to see if one of their Empaths might be able to help her. Frankly, I think they're wasting their time. In the meantime, I still need to speak with her parents and explain the situation to them."

Amelia frowned. She understood that O'Dalley had to deal with Orla's parents. It was one of the more unpleasant facts of life as a policeman, muggle or magical. "So the Irish are handling this, then?"

O'Dalley nodded. "We really don't have any legal rights to interfere, Minister. Our job is to protect the people of Haven, but it's the job of the Irish to administer justice," he reminded her.

"Good enough, Michael," she said, then she stood. "Let me know if there is anything the Ministry can do to help."

O'Dalley hesitated for a moment, then he nodded. "There is, Minister. The school is going to need some Empaths and I'll need your permission to authorize some overtime. I know it's late, but for the sake of the children, we're going to need to post some extra constables at the school for a week or two."

Amelia looked thoughtful and she adjusted her monocle. "Approved. Get it set up right away," she replied before leaving his office.

*I like working for someone who isn't afraid to make a decision, O'Dalley thought to himself. That's something the Minister and Lord Potter have in common.*

His door opened again and Barney ushered in Orla's parents. He frowned and rose to greet them. Catching the murderer also meant devastating a family and being the deliverer of such news was never easy.

## Hogwarts Castle...

Voldemort sat on his throne, his mood thoughtful. Things had been going very well for a while now. He held full control of the island of Britain. And now, thanks to Brother Chung of the Iron Wand Tong, they might have an idea on finding a way to drop the ward around the island.

He glanced down at his scepter and smiled thinly. *Severus has been exceedingly cooperative, he thought. This scepter is better than I ever imagined. I never would have thought of using one.*

He stood and walked over to a work table, where he examined a list of the books he and Brother Chung wanted to examine. *Perhaps, he mused, perhaps I should ask Severus to assist with this project. I could offer him his freedom in exchange for his help. I don't have to tell him I mean freedom from life, do I?*

A Death Eater stood nearby, ready to leap to his master's command. Fortunately for him, the mask hid his wince at the sound of the Dark Lord's chuckling.

"Send for Mulciber," Voldemort snapped. "We have plans to make!"

The Death Eater bowed once and darted from the room as fast as his feet would take him. He vowed to himself that tonight he was going to get seriously drunk.

## The Infirmary, Haven School of Witchcraft and Wizardry...

"Well?" asked Minerva, somewhat waspishly.

Sylvia August looked down at her patient. "Don't you get uppity with me, Minnie. I know all your secrets, including the crush you had on your fifth year defense professor."

Minerva paled and glared up at her. "You promised you'd never speak of that again. Merlin, what was I doing, telling you about that?"

Sylvia chuckled. "You were telling your dorm mate and best friend what a hunk you thought Professor Larson was. Besides, *you* promised never to mention it. I never made any such promise."

Minerva glared at her and Sylvia laughed. "Oh, very well. You are recovering very nicely. Once we got the blade out, healing you became a simple matter."

Healer August's eyes teared up and she turned away from the bed for a moment. "Damn you. Do you know what I nearly had to do? I nearly had to kill my best friend to save her soul. Don't you dare put me through that again!"

Minerva blinked back tears of her own and bit back a protest. It wasn't as though she'd done it on purpose.

Sylvia straightened and she looked at her patient once more. "You're healing well. Follow my instructions and I'll let you out of here the day after tomorrow. Refuse to listen to me and I'll keep you in here for two weeks."

Minerva swallowed nervously. She never questioned her friends abilities as a healer.

August looked at her for a moment, then she nodded to herself. "Good, now I have some visitors who would like to say hello before they leave the school."

Sylvia adjusted the blankets around Minerva, who glared at her, trying to tell her with a look that she wasn't an invalid. Unfortunately, her glares didn't work on the senior healer.

"You may come in now," called Sylvia.

Harry Potter stepped into the curtained off area, leading Ginny Longbottom.

McGonagall was surprised to see the dark circles under the girl's eyes.

"How are you feeling Professor?" she asked.

"I'm getting better, thanks to you and Mr. Potter," Minerva said softly. "Please sit, Mrs. Longbottom."

Harry shot her a grateful look and he nudged Ginny over to a chair.

"The others will be by to see you later in the week, Professor. Healer August didn't want too many visitors tiring you out, but she felt it was important that Ginny and I see you," Harry said.

"Well, this is a switch for us, Harry," Minerva said with a hint of a chuckle. "Normally you're the one in the hospital bed."

Harry grinned at her.

"How are you feeling, Ginevra?" asked McGonagall pointedly.

Ginny winced, hearing her given name. "I'm alright, I think. I think I'm still a little shocked by what happened. Tom is evil, but this was evil of a different sort..." She trailed off.

"I don't think any of us will understand exactly what Mrs. Longbottom went through, Minerva." Sylvia said softly. "I was present and it shocked me to the core. It was obviously very painful for her. I'm releasing her into her husband's care today. All of the Brotherhood members have returned to the manor, except for these two, who insisted on seeing you."

Minerva looked up at Harry and Ginny in curiosity.

"We wanted to make sure you're all right, Professor," Ginny whispered. She tried to blink away the tears that threatened to fall.

Touched, Minerva reached out and took Ginny's hand. "Thanks to you, I am, my dear. I owe you and your friends my life."

Ginny broke down and Minerva sat up painfully and reached out to hug the young woman.

She looked at Harry and he mouthed a "thank you" at her. Healer August nodded approvingly.

Later, when Harry and Ginny had left, Minerva turned to Sylvia, the question obvious.

"She needed that, Minnie. Don't begrudge her the display of affection. What she did last night was terribly painful. Your hug was just her way of affirming that it was worth it."

McGonagall nodded thoughtfully. The last twenty four hours had been an eye opening experience for her and she had much to think about.

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## **Residence of Amhar Coeur de Lion...**

At the knock on his door, Amhar pulled the curtain aside and peeked out the window. Spotting Andrew Korwin, he opened it and the former Councilor slipped inside. Since the dissolution of the Wizengamot, Amhar had grown increasingly worried. The loss of power disconcerted him greatly.

"Have you heard the news?" asked Korwin in a hushed tone.

"News? What news?"

"The word is they caught their murderer. It was a student. At least, that is what they're claiming."

Amhar sat in his favorite chair and motioned for Korwin to sit. "Did they now? Interesting. Potter and his people are performing dark art magic and they're busy locking up school children?"

Korwin nodded unhappily and he looked at his feet for a moment. "They offered me a position in the Ministry records department."

Amhar cocked an eyebrow at the news. "And did you accept it?" he asked with a sneer. From what he had heard, most of the neutral members of the Wizengamot had accepted positions with the Ministry, usually in positions well beneath their former stations.

Korwin looked up at Amhar hopefully. "Do you think I should?"

Amhar stared at the man as though he had three heads and Korwin misread his expression.

"It's not much. But I'm a trained genealogist, so they are willing to pay me a little extra, which I hope I can use to seed my election campaign. I was also hoping that Ms. Murphy might be interested in helping to that effect."

"Election campaign?" Amhar said with a sneer. "Do you really think these sheep are going to vote for either of us? Why should we stoop so low, for the matter. Remember who we are, Andrew."

Korwin clutched nervously at his hat and his Adam's apple bobbed in his throat.

Amhar could see that the man was terrified. He was faced with the prospect of having to earn a living and it terrified him.

Amhar listened half-heartedly to Korwin and realized the man was going to be useless to him.

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### **Hogwarts Castle, Chamber of Secrets...**

Harry slid off the box he was sitting on and fell to the floor, sliding for another foot. He winced and was sure he had ripped his pants. He mentally cursed portkey travel and damned the inventor of the method. But he was stuck for now, at least. Hermione would kill him if he ripped another pair of pants.

He climbed to his feet and looked around. The chamber was dark. "Lights," he commanded in parseltongue. The torches along the walls flared to life.

With the chamber now lit, he glanced at the boxes of supplies he had left for Peeves and frowned. He had expected the boxes to be nearly empty.

"Peeves must be taking a vacation," he muttered to himself.

"I wish that were the case, my Lord, but I fear we have lost Peeves," a voice said from behind him. "We expected you to visit earlier. We have much news, little of it good."

Harry whirled and spotted the Bloody Baron floating a few feet away. He bowed to the Baron and conjured a chair, table and some parchment. Sitting at the table, he looked up at the Baron. "Very well, my lord Baron, please share your news with me." He pulled a small quill from his pocket, preparing to write. He wanted to make sure all of the news was recorded properly.

The Baron floated closer. "Red Eyes was having problems with his wand. He was trying to focus too much power through it and came very close to burning it out entirely. He commanded the traitor to craft a replacement for him."

Harry blinked in surprise and started to write as the Baron spoke about Voldemort's scepter.

At one point, Harry looked up in shock. "You mean he used his own blood as one of the core foci? And the phoenix feather from his own wand?" he asked with a smile. If this was true, Voldemort had just made a major mistake.

The Baron nodded somberly. "Aye, and a powerful thing it is. We discovered that he used the scepter to kill Peeves."

Harry dropped the quill and stared at the Baron. "What?" he asked numbly.

The Baron shook his head sadly. "Four centuries and three score years has the castle put up with Peeves. And now, with him gone, this place is less."

Harry hung his head for a moment, then he looked back up at the Baron. "Peeves was a valuable member of your family, Baron. His loss will not be easy to overcome. I and the others share your loss. I am sure when the Headmistress hears the news, she will send word to you."

"I thought only you were capable of coming to this chamber, my Lord?" asked the Baron.

Harry motioned to the boxes he had brought with him. "Among the supplies for Peeves, I brought a portal that will allow any to come to this chamber, as long as they have my approval or approval from the Headmistress."

Harry walked over to a box and opened it. With a wave of his hand, the frame of a portal flew from the box and attached itself to one wall. He reached into the box and lifted the custom control pedestal and placed it next to the portal, while the Baron looked on with interest.

"You are familiar with apparating, my Lord Baron, and you've learned about portkeying, which is something wizards have only done in the past hundred years. This is a portal. It's a way of moving people and material from one point to another, without the violent landings involved in using portkeys."

"Remarkable!" exclaimed the Baron. "Who invented such a thing?"

Harry blushed and scuffed one foot against another. "I'm afraid I did, sir. The portkeys always ended up causing me problems. With portals, I can simply step from one point to the next, like walking through a doorway."

"Can anyone use this Portal, my lord?" asked the Baron.

"No, this is a modified portal. It is currently keyed to only a few locations. My home and the Ministry operation center, to be precise," he replied, then he made a few fine adjustments to the pedestal.

"Before I return home, my lord Baron, I must ask that you command the ghosts to fully explore the castle and be ready to help us construct a map. Specifically, we are interested in man sized paths to and from the chamber to the main part of the castle," Harry said.

"We will be ready when you return, my Lord," replied the Baron.

Harry bowed. "I will return in a couple weeks. At that time I will bring some others to help make the map and I will recharge your stone."

When the Baron nodded, Harry stepped through the portal and disappeared.

The Baron blinked in surprise. It was unlike any form of transportation he had ever seen before. He turned, hearing several popping sounds.

The Baron peered around worriedly. Were it not for the fact that the chamber were protected, he would say wizards were apparating into the chamber!

Slowly a form took shape not far from him.

"Peeves?" he whispered incredulously.

"Your Baroness! Oh, most lugubriousness! Oh, how I have missed thee! Let me count the ways!" Peeves chortled happily.

"One!" shouted a form taking shape next to Peeves. He turned and grinned at the duplicate poltergeist.

"Two!" shouted another Poltergeist on the other side of Peeves.

"Peevesy knows red eyes is bad bad news. So Peevesy calls in help!" Peeves told the Baron.

The Baron blanched and floated backwards a bit as a third voice chimed in. Now that he understood what was happening, he could see several more poltergeists, just waiting their turn to become visible.

*Lord Potter is never going to believe this,* the Baron thought.

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### **Padfoot Manor...**

Hermione looked up and smiled at Harry when he entered the study, then her smile faltered.

"What's wrong?" she asked worriedly.

"Voldemort has solved the problem with his power. Hang on a second, I want Remus to hear this," he replied, then he grabbed his medallion and used it to summon Remus.

He walked over and helped himself to one of the biscuits on her desk.

"Winky brought those for me, you know," she said teasingly.

"I think she'll forgive me. If not, I'll have Dobby make you a new batch," he replied, taking the seat behind his desk. He turned and looked out the window, seemingly lost in thought.

"Harry, you're starting to worry me," Hermione said.

She smiled feeling a silent apology bubbling across their bond.

"*What is it?*" she sent impatiently.

"*To be honest, I'm not sure. Something I remember hearing is nagging at me. I'm not sure if it's good or bad though,*" he replied.

The door opened and Remus poked his head into the doorway.

"Remus! Thank goodness," Hermione exclaimed. "He's being positively enigmatic and refusing to tell me what the problem is. He wanted to wait until you arrived."

"Honestly, I'm not that bad," Harry protested.

"Yes, you are," they both replied.

Remus chuckled. "Honestly, Harry, you're like your mother in more ways than I thought. Your father couldn't keep a secret for long. But your mother? Merlin, that woman was like the rock of Gibraltar. When she had a secret nothing could pry it out of her."

Hermione nodded and crossed her arms. "That's him to a tee, Remus. I have a mental link to his mind and there are times when I know less about

what he's thinking than others do!"

Harry scowled at them both. "If you're finished having a go at me, I'll tell you what is going on."

Hermione turned to Remus and looked at him innocently. "I'm finished, how about you?" she asked.

Harry buried his head in his hands and groaned.

"I don't know. I suppose I'm done, but I could have another try," Remus quipped.

"You two are evil. You know that, don't you? Evil," Harry said, then he turned to Remus. "Behave yourself or I'll trade you in on a puppy."

He turned to Hermione. "And you!"

She arched an eyebrow at him. "Trade him in on a puppy if you like," she replied haughtily, while jerking a thumb at Remus. "But the only thing you'll trade in with me is a bed for a couch," she continued over Remus' protests.

He sank back in his chair. "I give up," he muttered.

Hermione and Remus grinned and she stood from her chair and walked over to him. She pushed his chair back and promptly sat on his lap. When she kissed him, Remus studied the ceiling, noting the excellent paint job.

"Now, tell us," Hermione said after coming up for air.

Harry wrapped his arms around his wife. He leaned against her for a moment. "Voldemort, thanks to Snape, has replaced his wand. Apparently it never occurred to him to make a staff. Instead he opted for a scepter."

"A scepter?" Remus exclaimed in surprise.

Harry nodded. "That's nothing. The scepter seems to be really powerful. According to the Baron, Voldemort killed Peeves."

Hermione sucked in her breath and gripped Harry tighter. Remus bowed his head. He'd always liked the pranking spirit.

"According to the Baron, the scepter has three cores, like my staff. But listen to this, he used his own blood as one of the cores."

Remus walked over to one of the chairs and sat down heavily. "His blood," he repeated.

Harry nodded. "Yes, his blood."

"I don't understand," Hermione said.

"His blood, Hermione. What are the limitations on wand use? Or, more importantly, what would your arithmantic equations say about a power conduit that matches the power source?" Remus asked.

Hermione looked at him, nibbling on her lip while concentrating. Suddenly her eyes flew wide. "OH!"

"It won't mitigate everything, but it's nice to know your enemy can make dumb mistakes," Harry added.

"Don't get overconfident, cub. It's still a powerful weapon," Remus cautioned.

When Harry nodded, Remus stood up. "I think I want to look into this further. I'm going to drop by the library and see if we can locate information confirming this."

"Maybe I should help him," Hermione said as she watched him leave the room.

Harry pulled her a little closer and nibbled on her neck. "Later," he breathed against her skin and she shivered from the sensation.

She wrapped her arms around him and laid her head against his. "Much later," she agreed.

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### **Haven, The Korwin Cottage, Late Evening (Jan 28th)...**

Andrew Korwin sat scribbling at a desk in his small bedroom. He had been keeping an up to date journal of everything that had happened to him since he had been rescued from Azkaban Island. He couldn't help it, it was the historian in him. And while the daily comings and goings of his life might appear to be inconsequential to others, to him it was important.

He closed his book and carefully placed it in his desk. It was charmed so that only he could read it.

He sighed, then stood and stretched. Since Murphy had broken off contact near the beginning of the month, he had waited breathlessly for his controllers to contact him. He had prodded Amhar a few times in the past few weeks, hoping to find something he could give his masters, but he had come up empty handed each time.

He poured himself a stiff drink and took a deep swallow. He decided he'd take the position offered by the Ministry and almost immediately felt better, as though a weight had been lifted from his shoulders. He placed his glass on the table and turned to head into the bathroom when a red

flash of light hit him and he slumped to the floor.

Korwin awoke a few minutes later, confused. His arms were bound behind his back and he was silenced. He looked around wildly, his eyes bulging, when he spotted a tall, broad figure standing off to one side of the room.

The man eyed him for a few minutes without speaking, then he reached into his pocket and removed a skinning knife.

"I'm afraid you've lost your usefulness to us and our cause, Mister Korwin. Normally, Ms. Murphy would give you a warning. You know, something simple like broken kneecaps or having your daughter raped, but I'm afraid we have no time for pleasantries. You've become a liability and a risk we can no longer afford."

The man walked closer and Korwin struggled with his bindings. He tried screaming but he couldn't even hear himself. Still bound, he fell from his chair and tried to crawl away from the man.

"I'm sorry for this, Mister Korwin. We had such great hopes for you, too," said the man.

Andrew mewled and looked pleadingly at the man.

Lugo stepped over him, and with a deft movement, sliced Korwin's throat open. He stepped back quickly to avoid the fountaining blood. He had killed many times in his life and knew how to do it quickly, efficiently and with a minimum of mess landing on himself.

Andrew looked up at the man, his mind gibbering in fear. Even as his vision dimmed, he refused to believe this was happening to him.

Lugo walked over to the cabinet and pulled out the bottle of fire whiskey. He took a long pull on the bottle, then placed it back in the cabinet. He glanced at the body on the floor, and satisfied that Korwin was dead, he pulled out his wand and proceeded to use it to conceal all evidence.

It was something he was an expert in. His started by casting a spell that laid thousands of fingerprints all over the room. It was very difficult to remove all traces of being at the scene of a crime, so the next best thing was to hide the evidence by burying it under a mountain of misleading information.

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### **Ministry of Magic, Office of the Minister (Jan 29th)...**

"Neville Longbottom is here to see you, Minister."

"Thank you, Rose. Please send him in," Amelia replied, smiling at her secretary.

When Neville entered, she waved him to a chair and waited while an elf served tea, using the time to observe him closely. She hadn't taken the opportunity before and now she needed to quickly form an opinion of the young man.

Amelia could see that in many ways, Neville and Harry were cut from similar cloth. Both were humble men, committed to what they perceived as their mission in life. While Neville wasn't as powerful as Harry, the past year had instilled self confidence, which showed. Neville knew what he was all about.

"You asked to see me, Minister?"

"Yes, I did, Neville. You don't mind me calling you Neville, do you?" she asked.

Neville smiled shyly and shook his head. "No, not at all, Minister."

She nodded and leaned back in her chair. "I'll get straight to the point, Neville. We intend to send a delegation to France in the hopes that we can influence some of their neutrals in the French Ministry. I wanted to send Harry, but that's not possible since the French have issued a warrant for his arrest."

"What?" he exclaimed.

Amelia smiled. "I take it Harry didn't tell anyone then?"

Neville, too shocked to answer, just shook his head.

"Well, we're ignoring the warrant. For that matter, the French Ministry has isolated itself from the Wizarding Community by this action. Not a single nation is willing to honor their warrant."

"Excuse me for asking, Minister, but what is the charge?"

"Harry refused to provide the French with the potion to cure someone passing through the death ward. It is our written policy that the potion will be available to any country, providing they allow us to interrogate the person or persons who are ill. The French refused to allow us to question a group of Germans that arrived illegally. There were eight of them that were too sick to escape from the customs officials. They subsequently died under French care. I'll also note that another twelve did escape back to Germany, where they also died. But in their case, they never sought healer assistance. The Germans have made no move against Harry."

"So the warrant is politically motivated," Neville said.

Amelia nodded. "Yes, we think so. In any event, we had planned to send a delegation to Paris in the hopes of talking to some of the more influential members of their government. The French are supporting Voldemort. Not openly, of course, but their policies are clearly obstructionist in nature."

Neville nodded thoughtfully. "Yes, I can see that. And my role?"

"For the most part you will be the military attaché to the delegation. You will attend all meetings, both formal and informal. The Ministry will be picking up the cost of the trip, so if you want, bring your wife with you. There will be enough after hour parties and the like to keep her busy, as well."

"Who will be heading the delegation?"

"Ambassador Mortimer Howe will be the official leader. He's been briefed by Department M. You and a team of three others will leave here the day after tomorrow for a seven day trip."

Neville nodded and sipped at his tea.

"I want to be perfectly clear about this, Neville. The French are only one small step from being openly hostile to us. Our goal is to prevent them from taking that step. However, it does mean that unless the Ambassador specifically orders you, you are to tell them nothing about our military capabilities or needs.

"The muggle Ministry is concerned that the French might make a move following the war. Britain will be in a much weakened state. Our job is to try to prevent that. Barring that possibility, we hope to sow as much confusion as possible among the French Ministry," Amelia said tensely.

"I didn't realize that things had gotten as bad as all that," he murmured.

"Neither did we until we received notice of their warrant," Amelia said.

"Alright, just one question. Why me? I can understand why you aren't sending Harry, but why me?" he asked.

"Two reasons, Neville," Amelia said with a slight smile. "First and foremost, Harry recommended you. I wanted someone with firsthand knowledge of the fighting, preferably someone from Harry's group. Your Brotherhood has achieved an interesting status among the allied nations and elsewhere. Let's be honest with each other. You are all far too young to be in the roles you currently fill. Harry a brigade commander? He's not even twenty. But the Magical Ministries recognize the imperatives placed upon us by prophecy.

"Because of that imperative, you and your friends have seen more action against Voldemort and his Death Eaters than most of the older men you are commanding. That gives you a degree of credibility, even with the muggles, that you would not have had otherwise."

Neville smiled. He had expected this and it thrilled him to know that Harry thought him capable of doing this.

"And the second reason?" he prompted.

Amelia smiled thinly. "You're not related to the Malfoys," she said succinctly.

Neville chuckled. "Actually, I do believe the families converged three centuries ago, but I don't think that saying Lucius is my sixth cousin, five times removed would help."

Neville and Amelia shared a laugh, but both knew the decision had been made for purely pragmatic reasons. Harry thought he could do it and he was the next logical person for the job. Remus would be rejected due to his former condition and Tonks wouldn't go without him. The Grangers were an unknown. Terry wouldn't want to leave Susan and she had stated on many occasions that she would never return to France after their attack there.

And Draco Malfoy was out of the question, for a variety of reasons, first of which was the danger his father posed to him if he left Haven.

Neville stood, placing his cup on a small table. "Well, I guess I should return to the manor and let Ginny know we'll be taking a trip."

Amelia held out a hand and smiled. "Thank you, Neville. Your government appreciates what you and your friends have done for us."

Neville shook her hand and left the office.

Amelia leaned back and breathed a sigh of relief. *One problem down*, she thought to herself. *Only ten million more to go.*

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### **Haven, The Korwin Cottage (Jan 29th)...**

"Andrew?" called Amhar from the open door.

He frowned. He had received a note, unsigned, to meet Korwin at his cottage. But when he arrived he found the door ajar.

He looked around nervously for a moment. It was still early morning and not many people were on the street. In fact, Korwin's cottage was fairly isolated, a point which added to Amhar's discomfort.

He pulled his wand and carefully nudged the door open with his foot.

The cottage was laid out exactly like his own. He was in the hallway leading to the kitchen. To the right was the door to the living room. The bedroom

and bath were on the left side of the hallway.

"Andrew?" he called louder.

And was met with silence.

"I got your note, Andrew," he said nervously.

He cautiously looked in the living room area. He noted with annoyance that Korwin seemed to have finer furniture than he did.

Moving back into the hallway, he slowly moved towards the bedroom. Again he nudged the door with his foot.

There, on the floor, in a drying pool of blood, lay Andrew Korwin.

"Oh, shit," Amhar whispered. He backed away from the body, making sure he touched nothing.

The closet door opened with a loud creak. He whirled and fired without thinking.

*"Reducto !"*

The beam arced out from his wand, striking the door and splintering it. What remained fell off the broken hinges with a loud crash. A tall broad shouldered man fell face first from the closet. He had been hiding in there, presumably waiting for Amhar to show up.

Amhar blanched and dropped his wand. "Shit, shit, shit," he muttered, stumbling forward to look at the man. Kneeling by his side, he turned him over and gasped. The man's face was in ruins, thanks to splinters from the door, but even with that handicap, he recognized Lugo, one of Marne Murphy's chief lieutenants.

He turned away and vomited on the floor and his wand. Gaining his feet, he stood shakily, staring down at Lugo. When the man coughed once, it was enough to break Amhar from his morbid examination.

"Oh, fuck!" he muttered. Turning away quickly, he sprinted from the room. He ran from the cottage, tearing down the street without looking where he was going. In his rush, he ran into a young woman, knocking her down. She scowled and started yelling at his retreating back. But he didn't slow or even look back.

The woman, the wife of an American Auror and a former Auror herself, stood and dusted herself off. She looked down the empty street where Amhar had disappeared, then turned and looked at the cottage with the open door he had come from. Her instincts screamed that something was very wrong.

Within thirty minutes the street would be jammed with Aurors from the Irish Ministry, crime scene investigators and constables controlling the curious onlookers. Inside the cottage they found a body, a badly injured man who was later identified as one of Ireland's leading mobsters and a wand owned by a former member of the British Wizengamot.

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### **Padfoot Manor...**

Harry walked into the dining room hoping to find himself some lunch. It had been a hectic morning and the afternoon promised more of the same. After the morning briefing, he and Draco had worked up a training schedule for the brigade. The Americans had assigned the command staffs that they had requested, so they would start meeting soon. There were plans to be made.

"Good afternoon, everyone," Harry called out, then he slid into his favorite seat next to Hermione.

He nodded to the chorus of hellos he received, then he glanced over at Hermione, who was looking entirely too smug.

Picking up the sandwich that appeared on his plate, he bit into and closed his eyes in real pleasure. Dobby always knew what he wanted. "So, *what are you looking so smug about?*" he asked his wife.

*"Don't talk with your mouth full,"* she replied primly.

*"Love, in case you haven't noticed, I don't use my mouth to talk to you like this,"* he replied.

*"I don't care. It's the principle of the thing. Besides, it's good manners."*

Harry frowned. *"Wait a second here. Only you and I can hear this conversation. It's totally private. Are you saying we need to have good manners even when we're alone together?"* he asked incredulously.

*"Of course."*

*"Let me see if I understand you. We should behave ourselves, even when we're alone, because it's good manners right?"*

Hermione paused. She knew his tone. There was a trap somewhere nearby but she couldn't see it.

*"Of course,"* she replied worriedly. She could feel his wry amusement flooding down the bond.



*So, then it would be bad manners for me to do this?"* he asked, then he reached out and touched her aura, triggering several critical nerve clusters.

Hermione's face flushed and she shivered slightly. She turned and glared at him.

*"I'm just asking for you to clarify your position, although I have to admit I've never complained about any position you've been in."*

She blushed again and stared at Harry. *"Oh, alright! I'll concede your point, but you better plan on fixing this now!"*

Harry blinked and smiled evilly at her. *"Now? Here on the table in front of everyone? Hermione I'm shocked! That wouldn't be proper would it?"*

*Two can play this game,* she thought to herself.

*"Well, the table wouldn't be as comfortable as a bed, and we'd have to push stuff onto the floor, but I'm game if you are,"* she replied.

She chuckled when Harry suddenly blushed. He stared down at his plate.

*"Would you settle for after lunch?"* he asked.

She nodded eagerly.

"You know," Remus said, "at least when James and Lily flirted, they did it aloud so that others could hear them and know what they were up to. You two sit there looking at each other and blushing. All we can do is sit here thinking that you're sending dirty thoughts to each other."

Hermione looked at him and her eyes twinkled mischievously. "We are sending dirty thoughts to each other, Remus. You don't need to listen to them. I'm sure Tonks would be willing to share her thoughts with you."

Tonks looked up from her plate. "Here? On the table? In front of everyone?"

Remus choked on his drink and started coughing, while Harry and Hermione shared an amused glance.

Ginny looked up from the parchment she had been scribbling on. "This table is too uncomfortable. But there's a coffee table in the upstairs sitting room that's..."

She trailed off and blushed furiously. Neville looked as if he wanted to climb under the table and hide.

"What are you writing, Ginny?" Harry asked, trying to get the conversation out of the realm of too much information.

She glanced down at the parchment. "Oh, this? Hermione told me to make a list of the things I need to bring on our trip to Paris," she said.

Neville looked at his wife fondly. When he had told her the news, she'd been terrified at first. But he reminded her that she'd done wonderfully when they went to New York before Christmas. She was determined to not only be a good wife to Neville, but an asset to his career. And she saw this trip as a major opportunity for her husband to shine without Harry helping him.

Hermione looked at Harry smugly, happy that Ginny liked her idea. Around the table, people started offering suggestions of things for her to pack.

Dobby appeared next to Harry and handed him a note.

He read O'Dalley's message, his anxiety growing with each passing second.

"Can I have everyone's attention please?" he asked.

Everyone turned to look at him.

"Sometime between now and midnight last night, Andrew Korwin was murdered. This morning, Amhar Coeur de Lion was seen fleeing Korwin's cottage. His wand was found near Korwin's body, and so was a badly injured man, who they have positively identified as being one of Ireland's most dangerous mobsters.

"Coeur de Lion has left Haven and, presumably, the country, but we have no proof of that yet."

Harry paused and took a sip of his drink. "Neville, they are increasing the size of the security detail on your group. I want you to check with whoever they put in charge of the detail and make sure you're all adequately covered. Coeur de Lion is dangerous and I don't want anyone getting hurt by him."

"I'll get on it after lunch," Neville replied.

Hermione reached over and grabbed Harry's hand. He smiled at her reassuringly, then looked around at the others. "For the next few days, I'm going to increase the warding on the manor. I don't want him slipping into our home unnoticed."

"I'll speak with the elves, Harry. Perhaps they can keep an eye out for him in Haven, as well as the surrounding area," Remus offered.

"Good, do that, please, Remus," Harry said with a sigh. He looked down at his half eaten lunch and his appetite evaporated.

*"Eat, Harry. I'll not have you getting sick because you were too worried to eat. Besides, you need your strength for our after lunch dessert,"* she

sent him, her tone half serious and half playful.

He smiled at her once more and picked up his sandwich. *Merlin, I do love this girl*, he thought.

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## Author's Notes:

"There were a lot of reviews this last chapter," Alyx said in awe.

"I know," Bob replied smugly. "I made an off hand comment and they crawled out of the woodwork to make themselves heard. I'm so proud of the little buggers."

"You can't call them that, they are our readers," Alyx protested.

Bob buffed his nails on his shirt. "I know, but I used this newer, faster computer to call them that. It went by so fast they never even noticed it.

Alyx stared at Bob incredulously, then she remembered there were other reasons she married him, being a Rocket Scientist wasn't one of them.

"Yes dear," She said, then fell silent hoping she'd be able to get to edit this file one last time before he posted it.

Just for the record, the bit about the pod people was not a dig to get reviews. It was Bob's attempt to explain the cliffy we...er *he* left you without getting skinned alive. Though we are always happy to hear from readers, and are thankful to those who do review, we certainly don't want you to feel obligated to do so.

To those who've just recently found our story, thanks for joining us!

Yes, Bob's computer problems seem to be solved. Granted, it took a new machine to do it, but he's certainly not complaining!

I want to state that the bloopers we have at the end of each AN is not a jab at anyone. Look, folks, if we wanted to take a poke at someone for missing a typo (and Merlin knows I've done that enough with our own work!), we would have included the author's name and the URL where the story can be found. But we don't, because that would be mean spirited and petty. Bloopers are something every writer has to deal with and if we can't laugh about them, we might as well stop writing, don't you think?

With that said, there won't be any more bloopers, at least not for awhile. When Bob's computer when belly up, it took the blooper file with it.

Kendiara: Charlie was told about his parents divorcing, but little else for a reason. Both of his parents felt that he was safer in Romania. Had they spilled all the dirty little details about the split, Charlie would have rushed back to Britain. Molly and Arthur had enough children in harms way without forcing another into danger. Sure, it wasn't the smartest thing to have done. Charlie came to more grief not knowing the details than he may have if they'd been upfront with him. But no one (well, except Bob and I) knew what was going to happen.

In this series, we've tried to show that not everyone is perfect. Sometimes people are left behind. Sometimes vital pieces of information are left out in the rush to get a job done. Sometimes the choices we make come back to haunt us. In the end, we all do the best we can with the circumstances we find ourselves in.

Master Ktulu: What do you know about Bob's deep longings? Stop looking in our windows, buddy, or I'll talk Bob into more cliffies! ~Snickers~

Did you honestly think we'd kill of Minerva? Come now, you should know us better than that! Oh, wait, maybe that's the problem. Well, in any case, she's alive. For now...

I want to state very clearly that I win many arguments, just not the ones Bob puts down in writing. Ah, the imagination is a wonderful thing, isn't it honey?

Will there be more about Hermione's clashing beliefs with the Brotherhood? Possibly, though probably not a great deal. That aspect of the story could very well take a chapter or two all on its own. I'm sure we'll address it from time to time, but don't look for an in depth expose about Paganism vs. Catholicism.

We're the cruelest, most evil authors you've run across? Thank you, we're so proud! ~Beams brightly~

Kill Peeves? What kind of authors do you take us for? Wait, don't answer that!

The wizarding world in Britain rejecting the Magna Carta was a case of the pure bloods rejecting anything muggle. As the Magna Carta was a muggle document, there was no way they were going to sign it. Being as they placed so much importance on blood, turning their noses up at someone of royal blood would have smacked of hypocrisy, and just might have given the mudbloods the wrong impression. After all, if royal blood was something to sneer at, what importance could having pure blood really be?

Yes. Yes, you're right. Bob *is* the diabolical one! I'm constantly trying to rein in his bloodthirsty ideas and scale them back to something a little less...well, diabolical. Yep, that's how it works. ~Polishes her halo~

Krystal: We'll see what we can do. We're always looking for willing victims!

MarinePotterfan: I don't think you called off the air strike in time, as Bob's old computer is kaput. He thanks you for that! His new system is a huge improvement.

DrT: It was an obvious idea to us, so we aren't surprised that someone else has thought of it too. It's fun, fresh and opens up whole new subplots that have never (or rarely) been thought of before. For what it's worth, neither Bob nor I think you stole the idea from us.

The authorities never really suspected someone from the school to be the murder. They only saw someone run in the direction of the school once, and there is a lot of ground between Haven and the school. The murder could have gone anywhere, really.

As for the blooper posted in the last chapter, yes, Bob realized there was more than one mistake made in the sentence. However, my husband has a thing for "jugs" if you will, and chose to fixate on that. I'm doing my best to help him with his problem.

Someone wanted to know where we live. After the death threats we've gotten over the cliffy from last chapter, I'm sure you understand why we're reluctant to give out that information. However, I can tell you that we're in Northern Idaho, about 60 miles from the Canadian border. If you're interested, you could probably look at a map and find the city nearest us.

The jewels Emma Granger wore were borrowed. As for the family crest, that will come later.

Leticia: Thank you ever so much for that image of Prince Charles. ~Wanders off, pale, disillusioned and nauseous~

Treck: I *am* innocent, damnit! It's all Bob's fault!

That's it, folks. For those who celebrate, we hope you all had a great Thanksgiving!

~Alyx and Bob~

*Bobmin*  
*FanficAuthors.net*

# Sunrise Over Britain

## Chapter 25 - French Fried Troubles

### Standard Disclaimer:

The crate was huge. So big in fact that it was difficult to see around it. Slowly it was pushed onto the stage.

Alyx looked up from the stage manager's position and frowned. "Now what?" she mumbled under her breath, then she walked out onto the stage. From around the far end came a huffing sound. Curious she walked around the crate.

On the far side of the huge crate she found Bob, busily trying to pry the crate open.

"What are you doing? This is supposed to be the disclaimer!" she exclaimed.

Without even turning he whipped out a piece of paper and handed it to her, then turned back to the nearly open crate.

She glanced down at the paper and read.

"ACME PREFABRICATED DISCLAIMERS! WE DISCLAIM ANYTHING! Some assembly required."

She frowned and looked up, hoping to tell him to stop playing around, but his "AHA!" caused her to back away quickly.

The side of the crate snapped away as if under great pressure. It flew at high speed into the audience and someone screamed. Alyx winced.

Then there came a rumble from the crate as thousands, no, make that millions of pieces came tumbling out, nearly burying Bob under their weight.

"BOB!" Alyx shouted. "We don't have time for this!"

Bob, waist deep in disclaimer parts, looked up at Alyx. "Don't worry, the audience is patient. Besides, this will be a really cool disclaimer when I get it assembled, now go get me the three quarter inch lug nut wrench."

Alyx stamped her foot down. "I'm not going to lug his nuts around," she muttered darkly, then she gave him her patented Alyx Death Glare (4 10D +8), but Bob countered with his shield of Wife Ignore (Infinite Uses, but use at your own peril)

Alyx sighed and banged her head against the wall, then turned to the audience.

"I'm sorry, but our disclaimer it seems will be delayed this chapter. I assure you however that we make no claim to owning anything but the computers we type this stuff up on," she said contritely.

"HEY! Do you know this is nuclear powered! How cool is that? And it comes with a remote!" exclaimed Bob.

Muttering, Alyx stormed off the stage.

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### Sunrise Over Britain

#### Chapter 25

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#### Hogwarts Castle (Feb 1st)...

Pei Chung pushed the corpse off his body and slowly stood up. He glanced down at the muggle girl, killed by his hand, and smiled briefly. Pei was a sadist with very peculiar tastes. He enjoyed his women, but more importantly, he enjoyed killing them just as they climaxed. It was the only way he could achieve orgasm himself these days. It was something he'd accepted long ago, as it had been a part of his life for the past forty years.

Stepping over the body, he put on his robes. He would meet with Master Voldemort soon. The two men were developing an interesting relationship, based partially on both mutual respect and distrust. Pei Chung had brought his entire Iron Wand tong to Britain to offer their services to Voldemort. In return, Voldemort granted him ownership of the far east.

Magically, Voldemort was clearly his superior, but Chung was older and more studied than Voldemort. That meant that Voldemort needed his expertise. It was a card he would play to the fullest.

He left the sumptuous quarters that Voldemort had granted him and walked in a stately fashion down to the Great Hall where the Dark Lord held his audiences. Behind him his two body guards fell into step.

As he entered the Great Hall, Voldemort looked up from the ancient texts he was studying.

"Brother Chung, come and see. This manuscript suggests that we might be able to open a hole in the ward, rather than trying to drop it."

Chung walked to the table and his bodyguards fell back silently, taking position by the doors. "Yes, I checked the equations last night. The ward appears to be self sustaining, drawing power from the Ley lines. The amount of power that would be needed in order to drop the entire ward would be enormous. But poking a hole should be..."

He trailed off and stared at the book Voldemort had been reading. The book lifted off the table and slowly floated away from the table.

Voldemort turned and followed Chung's gaze. His eyes widened and he pulled his scepter. "Show yourself!" he roared.

A page was torn from the book and vanish in a puff a smoke, then something giggled gaily.

Voldemort roared, seeing the precious book being destroyed.

"*Reducto*!" shouted one of his Death Eaters, thinking to help his master. The curse sailed through the empty air, then struck the book, which exploded in a spray of parchment confetti.

"*Avada Kedavra*!" snarled Voldemort, killing the Death Eater.

The laughter continued. "Blind as a bat and getting fat!" sang a familiar voice.

Peeves slowly became visible and Voldemort, spotting the pesky poltergeist, fired off another killing curse.

The curse hit Peeves squarely in the chest and the Poltergeist wailed and shook like a dervish. His entire body began to glow and he looked at that Dark Lord with undisguised glee.

"You shouldn't've done that!" Peeves proclaimed, then he split into two, and those two split into two again. Finally a fifth poltergeist appeared hovering above the four.

"Me brothers!" Peeves proclaimed loudly. Voldemort gasped and Brother Chung winced visibly. "Miffs, Irks, Hacks and Vex!"

As he introduced each poltergeist, the creature floated forward, performed a rude hand gesture, then bowed.

Voldemort growled and instantly went for his scepter. The five poltergeists split up, heading in different directions. Two of the poltergeists, Vex and Irks, paused long enough to grab Brother Chung by his shoulders, before continuing their headlong dive towards the nearest wall. They didn't seem the slightest bit perturbed over the fact that they could pass through the wall and Brother Chung couldn't. He slid to the floor, unconscious.

The last thing Chung heard was Voldemort telling a terrified Mulciber to find a necromancer or be prepared to undergo the ritual.

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### **Padfoot Manor...**

Hermione's eyes opened in the darkened bedroom and it took her a moment to figure out what had woke her up. The bed trembled and shook underneath her and she reached out in alarm to touch her husband. Harry was shivering violently and heat rolled off him in waves. He had complained the night before of feeling achy, but neither of them had thought much of it at the time.

Her touch woke him and he blinked groggily at her.

"You're sick!" she exclaimed.

"It's not like I asked for this to happen," he snapped back, then shivered again. Then the unthinkable happened and he sneezed.

The house shook and rumbled. There was a bright flash of light and a loud groaning sound from the eastern section of the manor. Hermione leapt from the bed in shock and hurriedly put on her robe. Harry sneezed again and someone screamed, a loud whining noise could be heard from the lawn. She glanced outside and saw something huge sitting on the lawn, but her mind refused to believe what she saw.

She cringed, seeing Harry about to sneeze again, but Dobby appeared and held up a hand to his forehead. Harry's eyes rolled up in his head and he slumped back on the bed.

"Mistress, please be getting Miss Narcissa. The master is ill and his magic is not under his control right now," Dobby said worriedly.

Hermione nodded and had turned towards the door when she spotted Crookshanks. Harry's uncontrolled burst of magic had given him wings and her familiar was happily gliding around the room. She shook her head and went to the door.

Before she could reach the nob, it turned and the door opened. Narcissa entered, followed by Remus and a very disgruntled Tonks, who seemed to be suffering from a transfiguration accident if the duck bill and feet where anything to go by.

Hermione blinked in confusion. Everything she'd read indicated a metamorph wasn't capable of changing into anything but humans!

Narcissa pushed Hermione of out the way and walked to Harry. She nodded gratefully to the elf. "I have him now, Dobby," she said, pulling out her wand. Casting a spell to keep Harry unconscious, she then began to pull potion bottles out of her bag.

"Hasn't anyone ever told you to go to a healer as soon as you start feeling ill?" she asked Hermione angrily. Harry was still out cold on the bed.

"But it was just a cold!" Hermione protested.

Narcissa sighed and shook her head. "Muggles," she swore under her breath, then turned to fully face the younger witch.

Hermione, you were raised by muggles; so was Harry. That's served you well in many things, but the one thing you cannot allow is for Harry or yourself to become sick. As soon as you think you're coming down with something, go to a healer. Harry's magic is out of control and it's going to take all day for the potions to put him back to rights so he can control it. It's true we don't get sick as often as muggles do, but when we do, it's more dangerous for us. And the stronger we are, the more dangerous we can be. Look out on the lawn!"

Hermione walked over to the window and gasped. The Aer Lingus aircraft was huge! The doors had been blown and the landing chutes deployed. Even now, the muggle passengers were scrambling from the plane.

"He pulled it from the sky, Hermione," Remus said softly. "I've alerted Amelia and they're sending every obliuator they can get their hands on, but this is going to be a major mess..."

He frowned as one of the engines, all four of which were still running, began to whine and thick black smoke started to pour from the back of it. Flames appeared quickly and started to lick around the edges of the cowling.

Elves from the manor began appearing all over the lawn and they pooled their magic to put out the flames. Unfortunately, they were also causing a panic among the muggles. He nodded to himself. "Now that makes sense," he muttered.

"Remus?"

"See the engine? The plane was going to crash. That's why his magic pulled it down."

Hermione blinked and stared at the crowd of people backing away from both the plane and the elves. She breathed a sigh of relief when she saw the group of wizards coming up the road to the crowd. Someone touched her side and she noted Tonks standing next to her.

"Tonks, why were you changing into a duck? I didn't think a metamorph could do that."

Tonks glared at her and Remus choked back a laugh. "She didn't. She was changing when she got hit by some of Harry's magic. I think it will wear off, otherwise we'll have to wait until Harry can undo it."

Hermione shook her head and looked at the others in the room. She grinned when she spotted Luna, who seemed to be fascinated by Crookshanks.

"Amazing. The last recorded flight of a Kneazle was over a millennia ago," Luna murmured. Fuzz looked up from her shoulder at the flying Kneazle and meeped at him.

Narcissa joined Hermione and handed her a steaming goblet. "Drink this. I'm dosing everyone, just to be on the safe side."

She took the goblet and downed it quickly. The steam that escaped her ears quickly soaked and straightened her hair, causing it lay limply along her shoulders.

Narcissa moved from person to person, handing out doses and making sure everyone took theirs. When she was done, she turned to her bag to put things away and Crookshanks sneezed, loudly. Sighing, she shook her head. "I'll send for Hagrid."

"Will he be alright?" Hermione asked anxiously.

"I don't know, Hermione. I'm a healer trainee, not an animal specialist," Narcissa said grumpily.

"I meant Harry," Hermione said, flushing.

Narcissa blinked. "Oh! Yes, he'll be fine. He'll sleep most of today and tonight, By tomorrow morning he'll never know he was sick. If he wakes, Dobby knows what to do. The potions will keep him drowsy and Dobby will see that he eats something. I'll check in on him every couple hours."

"We'll help keep an eye on him, Cissy," Emma offered, coming up to stand behind her daughter.

Dan glanced out the window and frowned. "What will they do with that mess?" he asked, pointing a finger out the window.

"The obliuators will take care of it, Dan," Remus said.

"And the plane?"

Remus frowned. "I'm not sure."

"Can I make a suggestion?"

"What do you have in mind?"

"We're close enough to the coast. Shrink the plane, move it to the ocean, then obliuate everyone and make them think they survived a water landing thanks to the skill of the pilot and co-pilot. We don't have much time, but if we do this right, everyone can be moved to the coast and 'rescued' in an hour or two. Heck, you could even return the plane to full size and sink it. That would provide the evidence the muggle authorities need," Dan offered.

Remus smiled. "Come on, Dan. I see O'Dalley out there. Let's go talk with him."

Hermione watched her father and Remus leave the room, then she turned back to the bed. Looking at her husband, she sighed wearily.

"What is it, Hermione?" her mother asked.

"I warned him only a week ago that he was pushing himself too hard. He gets so caught up in what he's doing that he tends to forget things like eating and sleeping."

"He's not always going to be like that, Hermione. Two days ago I was coming back from the school and I caught him watching a pick up game of Quidditch, mostly little kids on training brooms. He asked me if, after the war, it would be alright if he took you to some beach somewhere and did nothing but lay in the sun for a month," Emma said, smiling at the memory. "Tell me something, darling. What would Harry would do if he thought you were working yourself too hard?"

Hermione frowned. "I see your point, Mum. I could have been more assertive with him."

Emma placed an arm around her daughter's shoulders. "You're still learning. You and Harry are newlyweds. Finding out where the limits are is half the fun. I'm surprised that they didn't mention this at school. How are the muggle born supposed to know better?"

Hermione crossed her arms and ducked her head to avoid being hit by Crookshanks. "I suppose they rely on the other students to warn the muggle born."

Emma scowled. "That's a sloppy way of doing things. I think I'll mention this to Minerva next time I'm up at the school."

"How is she doing? I don't get up to the school as much as I'd like to," Hermione said sadly.

"She's recovered, but I think that brush with death has made a change in her. How can anyone go through that and not be changed?" Emma replied.

"Changed? In what way?"

"She's mellowed a little. She smiles more often now and her comments don't have that biting edge they used to have. She's quickly becoming a favorite among the first years."

Hermione shook her head. It was a difficult concept to imagine. She had a great deal of respect for the Headmistress, but she found it difficult to envision. A softer McGonagall? She'd have to see that for herself.

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### **British Embassy, 18bis rue d'Anjou, Paris...**

The phone buzzed softly and the girl picked it up. She listened for a moment before replying with a simple, "Yes, sir."

She looked up at the three men sitting uncomfortably in the waiting room. "The Ambassador will see you now, gentlemen."

She stood and walked to a door, holding it open for them. She smiled sweetly at the two older men and eyed Neville with interest. His training had bulked him up considerably. With the added muscle and his new close cropped hairstyle, he cut a dashing figure.

"Gentlemen! Please, do come in," called a man sitting behind a desk.

The young woman followed them in. She bustled about at a silver tea service, then she served tea to everyone.

"Thank you, Bonnie. That will be all for now," the Ambassador said.

He waited until the woman left the office before he spoke again. "I am Ambassador Howe. You are the gentlemen that Department M warned me about, correct?"

"Yes, sir," said the most senior man. "Allow me to introduce myself and my companions. I am Geoffrey Collington, team leader. Normally, I am attached to our Department of Foreign Affairs as a senior undersecretary. To my left is Chadwick Talbot, from our Economics office. And finally, Neville Longbottom, military liaison."

The Ambassador stood and walked around his desk. He shook their hands, then leaned back against his desk. "According to the PM, I'm supposed to be talking to the French, sounding them out about post war policies and the like, while you gentlemen will be...?"

Collington looked a little sheepish. "I'm afraid you have the easier part of it, Ambassador. The French Ministry of Magic has all but declared open war on our Government in Exile. Our job is to meet with the moderates in the French Ministry and see what, if anything, can be done to get them back to a more neutral position."

Ambassador Howe nodded and returned to his seat. "Yes, well, my staff, along with help from our Department M, have put together a briefing on the people you'll be meeting tomorrow. Tonight, however, I'd like to extend an invitation for you to join us for a welcoming bash. We don't have many opportunities to celebrate here, so we grab anything we can."

Collington nodded, looking pleased. "We'd be honored, Mr. Ambassador. May we bring our wives with us?"

Howe looked surprised for a moment, then he smiled widely. "Splendid! Since you brought your wives along, we'll see about getting some music. The ladies do love a good dance. I know this seems a bit odd, but with all that is going on at home we look for any excuse to take our minds off the troubles back home."



Neville relaxed. Ginny was going to love this!

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## Direction de la Surveillance du Territoire, 7 rue Nélaton, Paris...

"Cigarette?" asked the man.

Amhar Coeur de Lion shook his head. His trip from Ireland to France had been a harrowing one and it showed. He had dropped weight and his eyes were ringed with dark circles. He hadn't the power to directly apparate to France, so he'd had to move covertly until he could purchase a portkey. The word on the street in Ireland was that both Marne Murphy and the Irish MLE were looking for him.

He had spent nearly seventy percent of his available cash getting this far. He'd made landfall in Normandy using an illegal portkey, then he'd contacted some friends he knew in the government. That had led him to this place.

The DST, or Department of Territorial Surveillance, was in-charge of the internal security of France and the organization closely tied to the French Ministry of Magic. Not quite as violent as the DGSE, the DST still had a formidable reputation. It's opponents routinely vanished without a trace.

Amhar looked around at the bleak room. His friends had assured him that they would take good care of him, but his surroundings failed to support those assurances. The building was old, and this particular room looked like as though it hadn't been painted since the building was first built, back in 1944.

The man across from him had cold eyes. He looked at Amhar as though he was judging him.

He puffed idly on his cigarette and watched Amhar. After ten minutes of silence, he finally spoke. "What is it you want from us, Monsieur?"

"I can help you," Amhar said, seizing the chance to prove he was useful. "I know things about the British Ministry that you don't know."

The man leaned back in his chair and crossed his legs. *So, the report was right*, he thought to himself. *This coward is willing to turn traitor.*

"Pardon, Monsieur, but what makes you think you have information we are interested in?" asked the man as he casually snubbed out his cigarette.

Amhar leaned forward and placed his hands on the table. "I know things, things that will interested your people. For all his holier-than-thou attitude, Potter is no better than anyone else. He is harboring dark creatures and those using dark magic!"

"Intéressant," said the man, sound anything but. "But what have you, really? You have accusations, yes? But where is your proof?"

Amhar pulled back slightly. "I am no one's fool, sir. I have brought the proof with me, but it's safely hidden. And don't think you can send someone to toss my room at the hotel for it, either. I've hidden it someplace safe. I can help you. I know things beyond what Potter is doing, things about the current Minister and her staff."

The man lifted a sheet of parchment. "Yes, we have a delegation from your Ministry here now. They arrived early this morning. A Geoffrey Collington, Chadwick Talbot, and a Neville Longbottom."

Amhar looked up sharply. "Longbottom? He's here? Did he come alone?"

"No, Monsieur Longbottom is accompanied by Madame Longbottom," replied the man.

Amhar leaned back on his chair and smiled for the first time in over a week. "I think you will find it to your advantage to hear what I'm about to tell you, my friend," he said softly.

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## Hotel Napoleon, Paris...

Ginny walked into the large suite, humming softly to herself. She and the other women had gone shopping and she was grateful for their help. She had never payed much attention to muggles, much to her father's disappointment, and that lack was coming home to roost here in Paris. Geoffrey had called his wife, Cecilia, earlier in the day and told her that they'd each need a cocktail dress for dinner and dancing later tonight.

Ginny nearly panicked at the thought. Neville had tried on several occasions to make her understand that while the Longbottom's weren't as rich as the Potters, they were still fairly well off. In fact, Neville despaired over her attitude of pinching every knut until it screamed. He'd obtained a Gringotts card and told her to use it, but she was still reluctant to spend any money. Today, he'd simply contacted Cecilia and asked her to see that Ginny purchased a dress she looked good in.

After he had talked to Cecilia, he'd made a few other arrangements.

Ginny looked around the suite and shook her head. She was surprised that the Ministry had spent so much on such lavish accommodations for her and Neville. She didn't know that Neville had upgraded their rooms.

Walking into the bedroom, she laid her dress across the bed and opened the shopping bag she held. Taking out the new shoes and evening bag she'd bought to go with her dress, she placed them both next to the bed and smiled.

Thinking of taking a shower, she moved towards the bathroom, only to stop when someone knocked on the door of the suite.

Frowning, she drew her wand and walked to the door. "Who is it?" she called.

"Pardon, Madam, but your husband scheduled you for a masseuse before your party this evening," said a female voice.

Surprised, Ginny opened the door and a strong looking older woman bustled in, pushing a large portable table in front of her.

"Come, m'cherie. Your husband, he wants you... relâché?" the woman paused and thought hard for a moment. "Relaxed, no?"

Ginny nodded mutely, surprised at this sudden turn of events. The older woman smiled at her. "Mon, but you are a pretty one. Now, come, get undressed and up on the table," she said, then handed Ginny a large towel.

A few minutes later, Ginny was all but purring under the knowledgeable fingers of the older woman. The masseuse kept up a running dialog, prodding Ginny in half English, half French, to reveal she was a newlywed and here with her husband on diplomatic business.

An hour later, Ginny was firmly told to go take her bath because the hotel stylist would be up in an hour and a half to help her with her hair.

Bemused, she wandered into the opulent bath room. Filling the tub with hot water, she sank into the heat and moaned with pleasure.

When Neville arrived back at the suite two hours later, he had time enough to drop his briefcase before catching the redhead who flung herself into his arms.

Ginny, half dressed and wearing a plastic hair cap to protect her styled hair, grabbed him in a hug and kissed him so hard she left him weak in the knees.

Finally, she backed away and glared at him. "Neville Longbottom, just what do you think you're doing, spending all that money?"

Neville blinked and slowly came back to earth. Then he scowled. "Didn't you enjoy being pampered?" he asked.

Ginny crossed her arms and huffed at him. "That isn't the point here."

Neville steered her over to a chair and pulled her down into his lap. "Oh, I think it is, Ginevra. This has been a sore point for us since before we married. Look, we may not be as rich as Harry, but we're still rich. I've told you this before, but it doesn't seem to sink in.

"My share of the Longbottom inheritance comes to some twenty-one million galleons. Twenty-one, love, and that's grown by nearly a million galleons since Harry let me invest in Potter's Portals," he said, then he hugged her to him. "You grew up in a family where money was tight. We might not command the attention of Gringotts the way the Potters do, but we're well off, Ginny. You don't have to make your own bread if you don't want to. You certainly don't need to squeeze every knut like it's our last.

"What happened to you today is simply because I wanted you to feel pampered and taken care of. It's not something that will happen everyday. But I wanted you to know how much I love you."

Ginny's expression softened as he spoke and she slid a hand up to caress his cheek. "You silly man," she whispered. "You don't have to spend a fortune on me to tell me how much you love me."

"I know, but that isn't going to stop me," he replied, grinning. He knew this was one argument she couldn't win. Ginny had blasted into his life, forever changing him. He marveled at the changes his friends had brought about in him and smiled to himself. *If only Great Uncle Algie could see me now*, he thought. His great uncle had fled the country when the troubles started, moving in with a distant relation in Canada.

Laughing, she poked him in the chest. "You need to get washed and dressed. And don't drink too much wine tonight. I have plans for thanking you later that require you being awake."

Ginny climbed off his lap and stood up, hands on her hips, giving him a mock glare. It would have been more impressive if she weren't dressed in her bra and panties, and trying to hide a smile.

"Hey, that happened only once," he protested. "Besides, I was helping Draco. You know I'd do anything for a friend."

"Yes, I know, but that doesn't include drinking two bottles of wine," she said sharply. "Now, go get ready."

He stood and laughed softly, then gave her a quick kiss on the cheek before heading into the bedroom. Once inside, he frowned, looking at the two trunks. Ginny had split their stuff between the two and he still wasn't sure why she thought he needed a trunk all to himself.

He opened the trunk and reached in, only to pull out an oar. He stopped and stared at it. *An oar?* he mused. Placing the oar off to one side, he reached inside the trunk again and withdrew a ski pole.

Neville frowned and picked up the oar. Carrying the odd equipment, he walked out into the living room again. "Gin? Why do we have a ski pole and an oar with us?"

Ginny looked up from the book she had been reading. "You know, I wondered that myself. I made the list of things to bring with us like Hermione suggested, then Remus suggested items to carry in case of an emergency. I thought he was putting one over on me, but even Tonks agreed it was a good idea and started suggesting things to put on the list. Then Harry made a few suggestions and Hermione got into the act, as well. Although, now that I think about it, I have no clue what kind of emergency would require *Hogwarts: A History*."

Neville made a strangling noise in his throat, then he shook his head ruefully. "Honey, you've been had again."

Ginny's expression darkened as she contemplated her never ending prank war. Her pranks were fiendishly clever and usually quite embarrassing. Her problem was that no matter how hard she tried, she couldn't see a prank coming even if it waved a flag and blew a whistle. Her brothers had learned not to prank her because of her return salvos, but Remus was usually capable of side stepping her return attacks, letting others get caught in them.

Neville walked back into the bedroom hoping to find his suit in the trunk full of strange stuff.

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### **Padfoot Manor (Feb 5th)...**

Harry stared down at the parchments in front of him as everyone filed into the room. This was their first morning briefing since his illness. He had been mortified to discover the extent of the damage he had caused. Tonks' failed morphing had taken all day to wear off, and Crookshanks still had his wings, though only because he flew away whenever someone approached him. Hermione already had a plan for capturing the flying feline, but privately he thought her plan resembled something he'd once seen in a cartoon.

Surprisingly, the incident with the airplane turned out to be the easiest item to fix. Dan's plan worked exactly as predicted and the pilot and co-pilot were being hailed as international heroes. No, the damage done to the manor was where the problem lay. During one of his sneezes, he had conjured a whole new wing to the manor. The elves weren't pleased by the sudden addition of twenty new bedrooms, and they were still waiting for an engineering company to survey the new wing to see if it was structurally stable.

He sighed and looked up at his grinning friends. He knew what was coming.

"So, Harry, pull down any airplanes I need to know about?" Amelia asked with a laugh.

Caleb, Draco and Remus chuckled wickedly. Harry groaned and placed his head into his hands.

"I'm not going to live this down am I?" he asked, his voice muffled by his hands.

He looked up and was surprised to see Charles Stanton entering the room. He took a seat behind Caleb.

"Shall we get on with the briefing, then? You can hold your insults and jokes until later," Harry said.

"Very well," Amelia said. "But remind me later. I think I still have a few jokes to use."

Remus snorted in his tea, spraying himself and trying to contain his laughter. This was a side of Amelia she rarely showed. Harry grinned at the Marauder's discomfort.

"The Irish have returned Miss Quirke to Haven Hospital where Healer August is still trying to help her. The Irish tried but failed. She's insane and cannot stand trial, and her ability to control people makes her extremely dangerous. The Irish felt that perhaps the close proximity of her parents might help," O'Dalley said, getting the meeting underway.

Harry sighed and bowed his head slightly. "I wish we had known about Orla before we destroyed the dagger. We might have done it differently and helped her in the process."

"Harry," Hermione chided gently. "You know we've talked about this."

He looked at her defiantly. "Yes, I know. We can't save everyone. But she was safe, dammit!" he exclaimed, then he pounded his fist on the desk. "She was safe in the school, away from the war!"

"Yes, she was safe, Harry," Charles Stanton said calmly. He leaned back and stretched out his legs in front of him and his expression grew thoughtful. "I don't think there are many instances in history where anyone has done what you've done. The evacuation at Dunkirk or the evacuation of the Dutch Jews in World War II might be close. Nearly overnight, most of the Jews were moved, just hours ahead of the Nazi arrest teams. In both of those instances, people were moved to a place of relative safety.

"That's the key word, Harry, relative. Orla Quirke was a smart witch who, through no fault of her own, found herself involved in the war. The war sought her out deliberately and destroyed her, despite her being 'safe'. You and your people have done something unique and it's only been done a few times in history. You moved a small, but significant portion of the Wizarding population of Britain to safety. I've seen the reports. When you count in the people rescued from the camps you have brought nearly twelve percent of the wizards in Britain to safety. And that, my young friend, is nothing to sneeze at."

Harry peered at Charles and wondered if the comment was a hidden dig at him. With a mental shrug, he decided it wasn't. Charles had a different type of humor and dry wit wasn't part of it. He nodded to his American friend and turned back to Amelia.

"What's next?"

"I've heard from Geoffrey Collington. He's the head of our mission to Paris. They've met several times with moderate members of the French Ministry. So far, they have very little to show for their efforts. The simple fact is the moderates are heavily outnumbered and they are already supporting us. Mr. Longbottom filed a concise and compelling analysis concerning the state of the French Ministry and their interaction with the Muggle government, which frankly has me astounded. He's picked up on nuances that Collington and Ambassador Howe have missed entirely."

Amelia frowned and pulled out a parchment. "He also sent a coded message that we haven't been able to decode. It's addressed to you, Harry."

Harry reached across the desk, but Amelia held the note close to her and looked at him with a little anger in her eyes. "We're suppose to be working together. This sort of thing sets a bad precedent."

He leaned back in his chair and blinked in surprise. "You are right, Amelia. I asked him to send me a report of whatever he felt like reporting on. I'm surprised he coded it, and *not surprised* that your people couldn't break it. I apologize for this and I'll talk to him about it."

Amelia's eyes widened. She glanced at Hermione, who stared back with calm eyes and a blank expression. His stressing of the words told her exactly who was responsible for that code. It bothered her that the Brotherhood had seen fit to devise a secure communications that even her people couldn't break. Reluctantly, she held the note out to him.

He took the parchment and muttered something that sounded like a mix of English, Gaelic and Latin.

Harry scanned the letter quickly, then handed it to Hermione. She made a quick copy before passing it to Amelia.

"Neville is worried that the French Ministry has too much control over the muggle government. Part of his evidence for this is the inclusion of muggle security officers in the detail that has been tailing their group," Harry said while Amelia read.

"He's also concerned about the safety of their mission. They attended a welcoming party at the French Ministry the second night they were there. He reports that during the party they were subjected to multiple scans that were hard to detect and nearly impossible to determine what they were looking for. He says it's almost certain that their charmed objects have probably been detected."

"When are they due to come home?" Remus asked, worriedly.

"Not for another three days. They're supposed to leave for Haven on the eighth," Amelia replied absently. She was rereading Neville's letter again.

"Can you recall them early?" Remus pressed.

Amelia frowned. "Not really, Remus. Remember, this is a diplomatic mission. Recalling them early can be misinterpreted."

Remus turned to Harry. "I don't like this, it smells wrong."

Harry nodded unhappily.

"What are we worrying about? They all have diplomatic passports and diplomatic immunity," offered Hermione.

"Passports and immunity. Paper and words. This is the same group of people who put an international warrant out for my arrest despite my passport, and my Ambassador status. We're looking at what? The potential for at least six hostages?" Harry asked bluntly.

"Twelve, Harry. Don't forget the DPG detail we have watching over them," Caleb said.

Suddenly the tension in the room skyrocketed.

"Would they do that? Just to get at Harry?" Hermione asked breathlessly.

"In a heartbeat," Amelia answered, then she looked at Caleb. "What do you recommend?"

Caleb looked at Harry. "Does the British Embassy in Paris have a portal yet?"

Harry summoned a book from the shelf and flipped through it. "Yes," he said after a moment. "Neville and I decided it might not be a bad idea to have one there before they left, so we installed one two days before their arrival. According to my records, it's now hooked up to the Embassy Network, the Ministry, the Operations Center and here."

"Good," Caleb replied, then he turned back to Amelia. "Contact Collington and have him bring the entire team, including the wives, to the Embassy. Call it a break to consult with the Ministry. Make sure everyone in the group knows where that portal is, how to work it and, most importantly, how to apparate to the Embassy."

He leaned back on his chair and grinned mirthlessly. "If something does happen, they'll be able to get away by apparating to the Embassy and using the portal."

Harry looked up from his desk. "I like it. It's not perfect, but it's better than doing nothing."

"Some of my boys have experience in hostage operations, Commander," Charles Stanton told Caleb. "I can ask them to sit down with your diplomatic protection people, maybe work up some extra training."

Caleb made a note on some parchment. "Sounds good, Chuck," he replied, then paused thoughtfully. "I know you didn't come here to discuss this. What's on your mind?"

Charles looked over at Harry. "Do you mind?" he asked.

Harry shook his head. "No, not at all Chuck."

He smiled briefly then turned serious. "American command has taken your request for the formation of a command staff for the American and Canadian forces seriously. Because of that, I'm being recalled to the States to take over as nominal head of the combined forces. I'm relinquishing

command of Stanton's raiders over to you, Caleb, effective immediately."

Harry smiled and stood. Walking around his desk, he held out his hand. "It couldn't have happened to a nicer guy. Congratulations, Chuck," he exclaimed.

Stanton blushed, but shook Harry's hand. "Yeah, the wife is pretty happy about it. She misses her family. Besides, this isn't goodbye. I'll be back in thirty days when we begin planning."

Harry looked sheepish. "I entirely forgot!" he said, turning to Hermione. "Let's put together a schedule that will slowly increase the amount of training the Brotherhood Brigade is doing. Figure we want to max out the training at twenty four hours a week for now."

Caleb looked up from talking with Stanton. "Can she do the same thing for the Raiders, as well?"

Harry glanced at Hermione. She looked surprised, but nodded eagerly.

"Be careful, Harry. I just might steal her away as my adjutant," Caleb said with a grin.

"I'm willing to help you, Commander," Hermione said sweetly. "But no one steals me away from my Colonel."

"If there is nothing else, we'll call it quits for now. Caleb, I have an idea I want to knock around with you in case things do go sour in France. I'll be by around three to talk to you about it, if that's convenient?" Harry asked.

"Three's fine," Caleb replied, while packing up his stuff.

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### Harry's study, several hours later...

Harry and Dan looked up from little figure on Harry's desk when the door opened and Hermione stepped inside.

"Are you busy?" she asked.

Dan scooped up the figure and put it in his pocket, then stood quickly.

"No, I think we're done here," Harry replied, his eyes darting towards Dan.

He nodded slightly and then smiled at his daughter. "I better go see what your mother's doing. She's found an elf that loves to swap recipes. The last time I left her alone, she was busy trading recipes for corned beef. She knows I hate the stuff, no matter how she cooks it," he said with a shudder.

Hermione watched her father exit the room in a hurry and her eyebrows raised in speculation. Then she turned on Harry. "Alright, just what are you and he up to?" she said, placing her hands on her hips.

He laughed. "I'll tell you, but you have to keep it a secret. He's trying to make a present for your Mum."

Hermione blinked in surprise. "That's right, her birthday is coming up! So, what's he trying to make?"

"He wants to enchant a stuffed unicorn, but he only has the one he picked up in New York. I tried to tell him he could buy a stuffed unicorn that would do what he wants it to do, but he says it means more if he makes it. He was impressed with the animated dragon we bought for the Johansen children."

Hermione smiled and sat on the edge of his desk. "Well, he's right. She'll enjoy it more if he makes it. But you weren't using a unicorn."

Harry laughed. "No, we weren't. He's got a bag of army men he bought somewhere. We're using them to figure out the layering of charms and enchantments. He doesn't want to risk ruining the unicorn he has."

"Harry," Hermione said, turning serious. "Do you really think Neville and the others are in danger?"

He leaned back in his chair and reviewed the information he had. Finally, he shook his head. "No, I don't think he is, unless a more dangerous element takes control of their Ministry. Right now, the people in charge are passively supporting Voldemort. It's not so much ideological leanings, I don't think. They're doing it because they know it upsets us."

She looked at him incredulously. "Your saying the French are being obstructionist simply because it annoys the British?"

He nodded. "And it angers the Americans. They get to annoy two of their greatest rivals simply by dragging their feet. The only problem is, this time the French find themselves leading a parade that no one else joined. They have received universal condemnation for their policies, and their arrest warrant for me was rejected by every member nation of the Avalonian Council. Their policy is isolating them internationally. Some nations have gone so far as to imposed tariffs and extra duties on their exports."

Hermione shook her head, hearing her husband talk about international politics. It is something she never would have dreamed possible in their first year. Suddenly a thought occurred to her and she giggled.

He eyed her suspiciously. "What's so funny?" he asked.

"I was just thinking about a certain first year Harry Potter and imagined him spouting off on international politics."

He winced. "Merlin, I was so naive back then. I thought Dumbledore was never wrong."

"And Ron was your very best friend."

Harry paused and his expression turned reflective. "No, I can honestly say I didn't think that. But only because there were things in his world I couldn't relate to. Ron was my best friend, true, but so were you. I don't think either of you was placed any higher than the other."

Hermione looked hesitant. "Do you miss him?"

Harry looked down at his desk, his hands clasped together tightly. "Yes, I do," he whispered. "I know what he became, but I'm certain that he was my friend, at least for a while. I miss my friend."

He looked up at her and his eyes flared with power. "I curse this damn war and what it's done to us! I know it's had some good. It brought us together, but Ron would still be alive if it weren't for this damn war and Dumbledore."

He stood and walked over to the window, staring out.

"You don't know for that a fact," she said gently. "Ron was terribly insecure about himself and tended to react, usually badly, rather than think things through. Yes, he probably would be alive now if it weren't for Voldemort, but that's not your fault. I miss him, too. Sometimes I want someone to fight with, and it's not the same with you. The fights between Ron and I made me angry, but they didn't really mean anything. With you, it's different. I don't want to fight with you."

He continued to look out the window, but he smiled to himself.

*"It's the bond you created. You know that, don't you?"* he sent to her.

She looked up at him sharply. *"What do you mean?"*

*"You and I are so mixed together, that I sometimes wonder where Harry ends and Hermione begins, love. Our bond did that. We don't fight because each has a part of the other inside us. Oh, we may get angry, and exchange hard words sometimes, but we're drawn back together by the bond. The piece of you inside me makes it so I hurt when your hurting. And the piece of me inside you does the same. It's the reason why even when we're angry, we still work out our differences."*

*"So you're saying we can't even have a good fight once in a while?"* she sent back, sounding almost disappointed.

He turned away from the window and walked over to her. He brushed the back of his hand against her cheek. *"I'm sorry. But honestly, I'm glad we don't fight like that. I know it can't always be perfect, but I'm going to try."*

Hermione quickly stood and embraced him. *"I'll settle for you just being my Harry. Perfect is a nice goal, but you're too good, Harry. You spoil me enough as it is. I can live without perfect."*

She held him against her and slowly slid her hands around to cup his bum. She realized that the conversation had brought up some bad memories for him and a little groping would lighten his mood.

He buried his head against the nape of her neck. *"You minx,"* he sent with a mental chuckle.

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## The Bastille, Paris (Feb 7th)...

The people of France took pride in the architecture of their country. There were parts of Paris that were truly breathtaking in scope and beauty. And there were other parts of the country that no self-respecting Frenchman would admit existed.

The chamber was hidden deep in the Bastille and only accessible through a series of trapped tunnels. Few knew of its existence outside of the government and fewer still would admit to it. The chamber was dank and cold. It was a bleak place where bleak business was conducted in hushed tones. It predated the Bastille by several hundred years and, in times past, Kings and Princes visited this place and came away humbled.

This was where the shadow government resided and it was where France had been ruled despite its monarchies and its revolutions. Louie XIV had come here to borrow money, and the Vichy Government was crippled even before it began. The members of the shadow government influenced France, sometimes covertly and sometimes openly through individuals. Napoleon had been an agent of the shadow government.

In the past hundred years the makeup of the shadow government had slowly changed as it became more aligned with the Wizarding world. That didn't mean that the Ministry of Magic was controlling things. It meant that, for good or for ill, Wizards were running France at the moment.

One such wizard was Jean LaRoche, Inspector General of the Ministry's Department of Magical Law Enforcement and an official operative of the Direction de la Surveillance du Territoire.

LaRoche stepped into the chamber and calmly walked to the center of the room. The arena style seating was carved out of the natural rock of the chamber, making the seating cold and uncomfortable. LaRoche wasn't there for comfort, however.

Standing in the center of the arena, he couldn't see the occupants and they couldn't see his face. An obscuring charm took care of that. He could only hear them. Members arrived and left singly, and no one knew who their fellow members were, except for the leader.

Report," intoned a voice.

"To date, I have met three times with the Englishman, Coeur de Lion. He is an arrogant fool, but one with useful information."

"How so?" asked a voice from the opposite side of the chamber.

"He described the make-up of the mission sent by the Haven Government exactly. He even went as far as to point out personality flaws that we can take advantage of. But I must caution all, up until now we have been passive in our support of the Dark Lord. If we move against this Haven mission, we will be committing ourselves."

"Is this an acceptable risk?" called someone.

"Yes. I want to know that as well. What will the international community think of our actions?" asked another.

"Monsieur Malfoy is asking for more visible support, and he begs that we send him our Necromancer or find him one," called a third voice.

"Brothers! Please. We have much to discuss, but let the report be finished first," said the voice of the leader.

The room fell silent and LaRoche nodded in acknowledgment of the command. "I have arranged for the English to extend their trip by at least two days. That will give us time to make our decision and decide what to do."

"What will you do if we decide for Lord Voldemort?" called a voice.

LaRoche made a dismissive gesture. "Should the council decide, then we shall detain the English mission on a charge of espionage. I have men ready to plant the necessary proof at my say so. And once detained, we can arrange to drag our feet legally. If we are to do this thing, then we must revoke the recognition of the British Government. That will instantly negate their diplomatic status. Then we can do with them as we wish. Interrogate them? Send them to Britain?" he said, then shrugged. "I would say get what information we can from them, then send them to Voldemort as proof of our support."

"Risky. What of the response from Haven? And what of Potter?" called a voice.

"Potter is but one man, and barely a man at that," LaRoche answered easily.

"That one man killed hundreds and destroyed the British Ministry building in the process," said another voice in protest.

"Yes, but he caught them by surprise. Honestly, what do you think he will do? Storm our Ministry?" LaRoche answered with a broad smile.

A ripple of laughter ran through the chamber.

"And what of the other Englishman? This Coeur de Lion fellow?" asked someone.

"I have him contained in one of our safe houses. I will learn all I can from him. Once his usefulness is at an end, we shall do something creative with him."

Another laugh ran through the chamber.

"Excellent report," called the leader. "Does the council wish to vote on this now?"

LaRoche moved away from the center of the arena, taking a spot on a stone bench while the debate raged in the chamber.

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## 17 Rue Dupin, Paris...

Amhar paced nervously. He had been holed up in this little ratty apartment, loaned to him by an acquaintance he knew in the French Ministry, for nearly a week now. The apartment was stocked with food, albeit food he was unused to preparing himself. He could hold his own in the kitchen, even if he rarely did, but some of this stuff he just didn't know how to cook.

He was reluctant to go out much, and he didn't have much money. Besides, Paris had become one of the places that people fleeing Britain flocked to. The French didn't want them here and they encouraged them to move on, but they did allow people time to catch their breath. As such, he didn't want to stumble upon someone from Haven here in Paris. He already knew about the Haven diplomatic mission, but he wasn't sure if anyone else was in the city.

The little contact he had had with the gentleman from Department of Territorial Surveillance didn't make him feel very comfortable. The man seemed to be testing him. On his second day in Paris, he had spent the day with Monsieur LaRoche, describing Potter and his cronies in detail. The only thing he got for his efforts beside a meal and a headache from the man's cigarettes, was information that the Irish had placed a warrant out on him. Right now, they only wanted him for questioning in the death of Andrew Korwin. It seems that Lugo wasn't cooperating with authorities in their investigation and his lawyer was preventing the use of Veritaserum on him.

"Hallo? Is anyone home?" called a voice.

Amhar whirled around and stared at the face in the fireplace. He breathed a slight sigh of relief seeing it was LaRoche again calling from the floo.

"Monsieur LaRoche, what a pleasant surprise!" Amhar said.

“Oui! I have talked with my... partners and they are grateful for your information and help. They said they would like to hire you on as a consultant to aid them in dealing with the British. I have been told to give you this,” he said, then his hand appeared out of the fireplace, holding a small bag filled with coins.

Amhar greedily accepted the bag.

“My partners, they say there will be more coming. This is just a small advance with their thanks for the information you've provided thus far.”

Amhar mentally weighed the bag, figuring it contained at least a thousand galleons. *It's a start*, he thought.

“In a few days, Monsieur, I will call upon you again. We will need your expertise to help ask the right questions.”

“I am at your disposal, sir,” Amhar said.

“Excellent, Monsieur. I will contact you. In the meantime, enjoy your time in our city,” LaRoche said, then he pulled his head back out of the fire.

Amhar stared at the empty fireplace for a moment, then opened the pouch and started counting. It was a little better than he expected, nearly fifteen hundred galleons. He smiled and fingered the coins happily. First stop was a store that sold good English food.

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### **Office of the Minister of Magic, Haven...**

“Come in, Michael,” Amelia called.

O'Dalley entered the room looking rather smug with himself.

Amelia leaned back on her chair and looked at him carefully. “I take it you have some interesting news for me? Merlin knows I could do with something good right about now.”

O'Dalley deflated a bit. “Well, good is relative I suppose, Minister. But we have uncovered some interesting information with the help of the Irish. For starters, it seems that Andrew Korwin was working for the Irish Unspeakables.”

“Oh?” Amelia asked with interested.

O'Dalley nodded. “They haven't been as forthcoming as I'd like, but I've learned that Korwin approached them shortly after accepting a bribe from Coeur de Lion. Apparently, the good Councilor had a conscience attack and offered to dig up evidence on Marne Murphy.

It's a tangled web, but it worked like this. Coeur de Lion bribed Korwin into helping him using money obtained from Ms. Murphy. Ms. Murphy runs the local drug cartel here in Ireland, but more to the point, the Irish Unspeakables believe she was sending money and supplies to Voldemort and his forces.

“Coeur de Lion bribed Korwin, then sent pensieve memories of the event to Murphy, who then blackmailed Korwin into aiding Coeur de Lion in his quest to bring down Lord Potter and his people.”

Amelia shook her head and eyed O'Dalley. There was still a piece of this puzzle missing. “And how did we come by this information if the Irish haven't been forthcoming about it?” she asked.

O'Dalley leaned back on his chair and grinned broadly. “Ah, now that's the beauty of the entire affair. Our friend Korwin was, first and foremost, an historian who had an overwhelming opinion of his own self worth. He kept a journal detailing everything. His meetings with Coeur de Lion, his meetings with the Irish, copies of his directions from Murphy, everything. The Irish left the book behind because it was coded and charmed so that only he could read that. My boys were playing with trying to break the charms when that fellow, Bill Weasley, stopped by the office.

“He waved his wand a few times and handed us back an uncoded book! Apparently he used to be a curse breaker for Gringotts,” O'Dalley said.

Amelia grinned. There was nothing better than a case that a subject blows wide open. “So, where do we go from here, Michael?”

He frowned. “Well, legally, things are complicated. Coeur de Lion is guilty of treason and acting as an agent of the enemy of the state. However those are British charges, which the Irish, as much as they might sympathize, will not levy against him. Right now, the best the Irish are willing to do is put a warrant out for him to question him in the death of Andrew Korwin and the attack on Murphy's man.

“To be truthful, Minister, I don't think there's much we can do until after the war is done and you've moved back to Britain.”

His comment reminded Amelia that O'Dalley, as helpful and as loyal as he was, was still an Irish national and probably would remain in Haven when the war ended.

She sighed and nodded unhappily. The information he had brought to her was valuable, but couldn't be used until they were back on British soil, enforcing British law.

“You've done a wonderful job, Michael. You and your people are to be commended. Make sure you tell them I said so. There might not be much we can do right now, but as soon as we're home, I'll preside over Coeur de Lion's treason trial personally.”

O'Dalley bobbed his head. The praise felt good, even if the case left a slight sour taste in his mouth.



"I'll pass the word to the boys, Minister," he said as he stood up to leave.

## Haven Hospital (Feb 9th)...

Sylvia August looked up from the report on her desk when someone knocked on her office door. Taking off her glasses, she rubbed her aching eyes. "Come!" she called.

Remus Lupin pushed the door open and stepped in. "You asked to see me, Sylvia?"

"Thank you for coming, Remus. Close the door and take a seat," she told him, waving him to a chair.

Once seated, Remus examined the healer closely, then conjured a tea pot and two cups. Filling one, he offered the hot beverage to the older woman with a smile. "You look as though you could use this. Long night?" he asked.

"A few of them, actually," she said tiredly. Taking the offered cup, she sipped tea for a moment, then sighed. "Thanks, I needed that."

"What you need is several hours sleep," he told her as he filled his own cup.

She waved the idea away. "I still have some work to do, first."

"Since you asked to speak with me, I'm assuming I have some part to play in whatever it is you're working on."

"I think so, yes. I need to know as much as possible about Ginny Longbottom's talent in detecting and neutralizing dark magic."

Remus stiffened slightly. "I'm not sure I can tell you anything useful, Sylvia. Many things concerning the Brotherhood are classified."

"Yes, yes, I know that," she said testily. "But you cannot expect me to forget what she was able to do with the dagger. And don't even think about taking the memory from me, young man," she said, her eyes narrowed dangerously. "I have a very sick child in the hospital and Mrs. Longbottom may be her only hope."

"Miss Quirke?" he asked, concerned.

"Yes. She's mad, Remus. Because our healers don't have the experience needed to reach her, I called in a colleague from New Zealand. His name is Roger Scott, and he's a mind healer who specializes in reaching and healing the insane. He and I have worked with the girl for several days. He's been able to reach her a few times, but only briefly. And when he does, she begs for death. If we're understanding her correctly, the taint from the dagger is agonizing to her, and none of the pain killers we give her are helping."

"Can't you keep her unconscious?"

"We've tried, but whatever power the dagger had now resides in the girl. It's fought through everything we've given her. Last night, we did something I've always found distasteful. When the potions and spells failed to put her under, we stunned her. Early this morning, I was notified that she's fighting through even that. We're keeping her under for only thirty minutes at a time and it's taking two people to stun her."

"Is it true that leaving her conscious is dangerous?" Remus asked quietly.

"Oh, yes. On the night she was taken into custody, one of the constables did not heed the warning Michael O'Dalley gave him. When O'Dalley and his assistant, Barney, arrived, they found the man with his own belt around his neck, hanging from the window of Orla's holding cell. Ignoring the man's wand, she'd found a pocket knife in his coat and was merrily slicing the flesh from his legs and licking the blood from her hands.

"We were able to save him," she continued, "and he's since given his report to Michael, who told me about the event, mostly as a warning I think. It seems the man didn't believe that a mere child could have that much power. He found out differently. She managed to take control of him utterly. He reported that, despite the knowledge that he was killing himself, he followed her orders happily, even eagerly.

"With that information in mind, we've kept her unconscious as often as possible, and no one is to enter her room alone," Sylvia concluded.

"What do you want Ginny to do?"

"She was able to contain the dagger's power long enough for it to be removed. I'm hoping she can do the same with the taint now infecting the girl."

Remus frowned. "Contain it where? The dagger has been destroyed."

"I know that. I was hoping that we could force it into some other object or even isolate it within Orla. I don't understand Mrs. Longbottom's talent enough to form any sort of plan. That's why I asked you here today."

Remus looked into Sylvia's eyes, his expression sorrowful. "Without the dagger, I'm not sure it can be forced from the girl. And isolating the taint within her is only a temporary solution, if it works at all. Evil such as that can never be contained forever. It will break free and consume her."

"There are many people who feel the same about those stricken with Lycanthropy," she told him gently. "Yet we both know that is not the case."

He shook his head. "Lycanthropy is a disease, Sylvia. We can isolate the virus that causes it. Unless I've missed something lately, the same cannot be said for evil. If I'm wrong, tell me. I'm sure Harry will be delighted to learn we can start inoculating people against Voldemort and his followers."

Sylvia growled. "Don't get flip with me, Remus. I have a very sick little girl who needs help! If you don't like my idea, fine. Give me a better one!"

"I don't have one. But I don't think your idea will work, either. In any case, I'll talk to Ginny when she gets back."

"Gets back?"

"Yes. Neville went to France on government business and Ginny went with him. I'll talk to her about Orla when she comes back."

"Thank you, Remus," she said, smiling with relief.

"Don't thank me yet, Sylvia," he told her seriously. "Keep in mind that even if Ginny agrees to try to help the girl, she may not be successful."

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### **Padfoot Manor...**

Harry leapt from the flying carpet and grinned wildly at Dan Granger. There had been a break in the weather and for the first time in over a week the day was sunny and the temperatures were almost comfortable.

"See? Like I told you, it's like using a skateboard," Dan said.

"Or maybe surfing, Dan. It's unlike anything I've ever tried. I can see how the carpet is safe for family use, but when you're alone on that thing," Harry said, trailing off in wonder.

The carpet had been a Christmas gift from Sheik Hosary of the Egyptian Ministry of Magic. It had two primary modes of operation, single flier and family mode. In family mode, everyone sat on the carpet and one person controlled it from the rear. The carpet was spelled to prevent radical maneuvers in family mode, and no one could fall off, thanks to the sticking charms.

In single flier mode, the carpet was controlled by one person standing in the center of the carpet and shifting their weight in order to change direction and altitude.

It had been Harry's first real flight on the new carpet. Dan had used it several times, as he preferred it to a broom. Emma, however, wouldn't use either mode of transportation, choosing instead to keep her feet on the ground. She was perfectly happy to apparate, now that Hermione had taught her. Harry had laughed when he'd learned of Emma's aversion to flying. He now understood where Hermione's fear came from, though both women were perfectly comfortable on muggle aircraft.

Harry walked around the carpet a few times, examining it. The red and blue rug hovered in front of him obediently.

"What are you thinking, Harry?" Dan asked.

"I'm just curious. If we could make the underside of the carpet armored, could we use it in combat?"

Dan laughed and clapped Harry on the back. "I think we have enough problems fighting on the ground, Harry. Can you imagine Hermione's reaction if you asked her to fight from one of these things?"

He winced and grinned ruefully. "I guess it was silly of me," he mused, then he turned when he heard an elf pop in. The little elf snapped off a salute, then handed Harry a folded piece of parchment.

"Thank you," he said in a distracted tone, reading the note.

The elf nodded and popped away.

When Harry frowned, Dan grew concerned. "Bad news?"

"I'm not sure. It's from Amelia, informing me that the mission to France is being extended again. This is the second extension they've requested. I have a bad feeling about this, Dan, but there has been no overt threat we can point to. It's odd. Just when it seems as though the delegation is making no progress and preparing to leave France, there's a minor breakthrough and the trip's extended again."

"What do your instincts tell you, Harry?" Dan asked.

Harry sat on a lawn chair and looked up at his father-in-law. "That it's a trap."

Dan sat on a chair facing Harry and pulled out his wand. He cast a large warming charm, heating up the area around them. "Can you do anything about this now?"

Harry shook his head. "No, not until something happens. We have several plans in place depending on what happens, but this is really Amelia's bailiwick. I can't overstep my authority and order Neville and Ginny home."

"No, you can't order them home, but can't you send them a message, warning them to be doubly cautious?" Dan asked.

Harry sighed. "Already done, twice."

"Then you've done all you can do. Worrying about it won't make it better and will only make you sick. Lord knows you don't want Hermione worrying about you being ill again," he said with a grin.

Harry grimaced. He loved Hermione, but she was downright tyrannical when he was ill. He bounced to his feet. "Maybe I'll go talk to Eocho," he mused.

Dan snorted. He knew Harry was just trying to stay busy so he wouldn't worry. He nodded and stepped onto the carpet, which started moving forward immediately. "Do that, Harry. I'll be back in a bit," he replied as the carpet took off.

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## Hotel Napoleon, Paris (Feb 11th)...

Ginny was enjoying the Paris trip immensely and today was her day to host the afternoon tea for the wives. Everyday the wives gathered together and usually helped one or the other work on something their husbands had asked them to look into or research.

Early into the trip, Geoffrey Collington had asked his wife, Cecilia, to look into the way the French Magical society was structured. They were meeting with several people, but they didn't understand where those people fell in the French power structure. The wives were thrilled by the opportunity to help their husbands and enjoy themselves at the same time.

Cecilia had arranged so that each of them would cover a certain aspect of the French pureblood society, then they met every day over tea to discuss what they had learned and what they would tell their husbands. To their credit, the men quickly realized that the women had become an efficient information gathering machine in their own right and used them to find out information that the Embassy couldn't provide.

Today, an accident with a cup of tea had sent her into the bathroom in an attempt to save her new blouse. She had just finished washing her hands when she heard something.

She turned off the water and tilted her head slightly, listening. She could have sworn she'd heard shouting and a door slam.

"Where is the red headed bitch?" someone shouted in badly accented English.

"She stepped out for a moment," Cecilia said calmly. "We are wives of diplomats and have diplomatic immunity..."

Ginny winced. She'd heard a sharp thump and a bang, then the sound of Cecilia crying in pain.

She glanced around and grimaced. Her wand was out in the sitting room. She slipped out the back door of the bathroom and into the bedroom. She looked around wildly for a moment, then her training kicked in and her panic receded.

Quietly, she made her way to the door of the bedroom and opened it a crack. In the sitting room she could see Cecilia on the floor, still crying, Marjorie was sitting on a chair, visibly frightened, but trying to remain calm. Three men stood in the room and Ginny assumed they were muggles, since all three held guns.

She wasn't able to summon her wand without alerting the men to her location. That left her with wandless magic. Her wandless magic was one of the strongest in the Brotherhood.

Looking around, she saw what she needed almost immediately. She carefully noted the positions of the men in the sitting room. The three men had begun to argue over who should go find her.

Suddenly the door to the bedroom banged open and two of the men collapsed. One man was impaled in the neck by a ski pole, the second man went down with an oar to the belly.

Ginny stepped into the sitting room, her aura blazing. The last man standing lifted his pistol, then screamed as the weapon turned white hot, searing the flesh of his hand and causing the sleeve of his shirt catch on fire. Dropping the gun, he danced around, beating out his flaming shirt, burning his other hand in the process.

With the fire out, but smoke still rising from his body, the man looked around wildly. Spotting Ginny in the doorway, her aura shining brightly around her and her eyes blazing, the man snarled. "Merde! You bitch, you will pay for this!"

Ginny stepped forward and gestured. A shotgun like report seemed to bounce off the walls as the man's neck snapped. He slumped soundlessly to the floor, a look of surprise fixed on his face.

"Marjorie, see to Cecilia," Ginny ordered as she stepped over the dead man to examine the other two.

Marjorie jumped at Ginny's command, kneeling next to the stricken woman.

Ginny examined the man she had hit with the banished ski pole. The pole had gone completely through his throat, killing him in seconds. She patted him down and took his wallet.

Then she turned to the second man, the one she had hit with the banished oar.

He was curled in a tight ball, moaning. She patted him down and took his wallet, as well as a cell phone, a pistol and two knives. He didn't seem to be aware that she was there.

Finally, she grabbed her wand and stepped over to Cecilia.

"I don't know what to do, Ginny, she's in so much pain. That man," Marjorie said, pointing at the man whose neck was broken, "hit her with his gun."

Ginny frowned and ran a quick spell on Cecilia, numbing some of the pain.

"Marjorie, in the bedroom you'll find a small orange box on the dresser. Get it."

As Marjorie jumped up and ran to the bedroom, Ginny glanced over at the partially open door, then back down at Cecilia. "Ceci, you know this means our security detail is either captured or dead."

Gritting her teeth against the pain, she nodded.

When Marjorie came back with the box, Ginny took it from her and smiled grimly at Cecilia. "This is a standard field medic kit. You have broken jaw, Ceci. I'm going to give you a potion that will take away all of the pain until we can get you to a healer. If I use the bone healing potion you'll need to have it re-broken and re-set later, so let's not do that, alright?"

Cecilia nodded and Marjorie watched Ginny with huge eyes. Throughout the entire trip, Ginny had been the follower, the one who felt most out of place. But in this crisis she had taken charge in a surprising way.

Ginny pulled out a small blue bottle and uncorked it. "Take only three sips, Ceci. This will make your pain go away. Don't speak. You could cause more damage if you do."

Cecilia nodded in understanding, then drank from the potion bottle. A moment later, she sighed in relief and looked at Ginny questioningly.

"Yes, I know," Ginny replied. "Marjorie, do you remember the coordinates for the Embassy? We're going to apparate there."

Marjorie blinked and looked at Cecilia, who nodded approvingly. "Yes, I can do that."

"Ceci, can you manage it?" Ginny asked worriedly. If the injured woman couldn't apparate, they would have to rely on her untested ability to make a portkey.

Cecilia nodded after a moment's consideration. Then she struggled to stand up. With Ginny and Marjorie's help, she got to her feet.

"You two go, I'll be right behind you," Ginny said.

Marjorie looked at her in shock. "You mean we're not checking out? What about our luggage?"

Ginny looked at the woman hard. "You've got to be kidding me. Marjorie, Ceci is hurt. We don't have time for the niceties. These men are government agents. I don't know what has happened, but clearly our diplomatic immunity has been revoked. We need to get to the Embassy and out of France as soon as possible."

Marjorie looked uncertain, but she settled down after looking at Cecilia, who nodded in affirmation of Ginny's comments. Marjorie took a deep breath, then she apparated with a loud pop. Cecilia rolled her eyes at Ginny, then vanished with a much softer pop.

Ginny took one final look around, then she pulled out her Brotherhood amulet. She closed her eyes and concentrated, sending an alert signal to every other amulet. Then she dropped the amulet and vanished quietly from the room.

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## **Padfoot Manor...**

"And that's way I think it would be good for Haven and for everyone if you were to finance a team, Harry," Oliver Wood said.

Harry smiled to himself. A team wouldn't be a bad idea. It would help the people and bring in extra money from people visiting to see the games.

"Have you picked out a place for the stadium, Oliver?"

Oliver grinned excitedly. "You know me too well, Harry. There's a place not far from Haven that would be ideal for the stadium."

Someone knocked on the door and Harry held up a hand to Oliver. "Come!" he called, then looked apologetically at the man sitting across from him.

The door opened and Hermione and Remus entered.

"I'm sorry, Harry, we didn't know you had a guest. Hello, Oliver. I hear you're doing good things over at the school." Hermione said, smiling at him. Turning back to Harry, she held up several pieces of paper. "I have the schedules worked up for the brigade training, but they can wait until another time."

Harry held out his hand for the schedules and Hermione reluctantly handed them over.

"Oliver dropped by to pitch the idea that Haven form a Quidditch team and join the Irish National League. He's worked up all the start up costs, along with projected earnings for the first five years," Harry told them conversationally.

Remus and Hermione both looked interested.

"Really?" Remus asked.

Harry handed up the thick sheaf of parchment that Oliver had given him.

Taking the parchment from him, Remus flipped through it quickly. "The Gaelic Gouggers?" he asked incredulously.

"Yes, well, the name is only a suggestion," Oliver said softly.

Harry laughed. "I hope so, but I suppose it could have been worse. It could have been the Potter Pickers or something equally silly."

"Alright, forgetting the name issue for a moment, do we have the time to bother with this sort of thing? I mean, with the war and everything else going on?" Hermione asked.

Oliver's expression fell.

"Oliver told me that, in this particular endeavor, our involvement would be strictly financial. And this isn't for us. This is for Haven and the people. They need the morale boost a national Quidditch team could give them," Harry replied, defending his friend.

"It's all right here, Hermione. He's laid out the initial investment and what it would be spent on," Remus said excitedly.

Harry leaned back on his chair and thought hard.

"*You're going to do this, aren't you?*" Hermione sent him.

"*I think I am, love. It's not a lot of money, hell, it's not even something that would earn us much. But the benefits go beyond the money. The people will love it, the kids would benefit from the Quidditch camps and it's good leadership,*" he replied.

Harry leaned forward, looking at Oliver. "I'm going to do this, but I'm going to make a minor change. As general manager, you'll draw a substantial salary. However, I'm going to cut that salary by a quarter and offer you twenty five percent ownership in the club..."

Harry paused and stiffened slightly as his Brotherhood amulet pulsed wildly for a moment. He received a brief impression of red hair and danger.

Remus and Hermione were both staring at him in horror. Somewhere in the manor, an alarm began to ring.

Oliver looked around in confusion. Obviously something was wrong.

Harry stood up. "Oliver, we have a problem. Get back to me, or see Remus later to get the ball rolling. I want to do this."

"Of course, Harry. Next time we meet I'll have a list of names for you to look over for the team," Oliver offered.

Harry smiled grimly. "Fine, Oliver. I'll have one of the house elves escort you out of the manor. Wait here until one shows up."

Oliver nodded and looked around nervously. He was elated, and terrified. He knew Harry was involved in the war effort, but not to the extent of having to defend his own home!

Harry picked up his staff and left the room with Hermione and Remus right behind him.

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### **British Embassy, 18bis rue d'Anjou, Paris...**

"'ere now! Watcha dooin 'ere?" said the sentry.

Ginny whirled, her wand out and the man took a step backwards, then he pulled the automatic rifle from his shoulder.

"Put yer 'ands up where I can seeim!" the sentry said.

"Dammit, not now," snapped Ginny. With a gesture, the man suddenly found himself holding nothing.

The sentry stared at his empty hands and blinked stupidly.

Ginny sighed and shook her head. "Contact your watch officer and tell him you have a Case Apollo here."

The man blinked at her and she growled in the back of her throat. "Do it," she hissed at him. Unlike the other wives, Ginny had been briefed on certain details due to her position in both the Brotherhood and the Brotherhood brigade. She had been given certain key phrases assigned for just this mission in case of emergencies.

The sentry reached for his radio and patted his holster to make sure he still had at least one weapon. He wasn't sure it would be useful against the little red headed woman, but he felt a little safer knowing he had it handy.

Ginny walked over to examine Cecilia for a moment. She ignored the sirens that started blaring through the building.

After hitting the master alarm switch in the security office, the watch officer hurriedly looked for Case Apollo in his duty plan book. The book outlined all the possible problems he might encounter and what to do about them. Finding Case Apollo, he quickly read the steps and the reasons. He paled and immediately paged his senior officer and the Ambassador, then he put the security staff on full alert. Finally, he called the communications room and gave the proper code phrase to the senior communications officer, who started destroying the equipment.

Ginny looked up when the door to their room opened again at Ambassador Howe stepped in, along with two security men.

"Mrs Collington?" he asked

Ginny stepped forward. "Cecilia has been injured and is unable to speak at the moment. We were attacked by agents of the DST in my hotel room. I was forced to kill all three before we could escaped. Can you take us to the room Department M installed the portal in?"

Howe stared at her for a moment, then shook his head. She was barely five foot tall and she had killed three French Security Agents?

"You realize, of course, that they wouldn't have made this move unless they planned on disavowing our government," she said softly to him.

Howe nodded. "Yes, that occurred to me. Ladies, if you will follow me? We'll escort you to your Department M."

Ginny and Marjorie helped Cecilia to her feet and followed the Ambassador out of the room and up two flights of stairs before entering a nondescript office. Ginny breathed a sigh of relief spotting the portal and she immediately went over to the control pedestal. She dialed in the location she knew by heart.

"Our husbands?" she asked, turning away from the pedestal. Behind her, the portal opened with it's usual shimmering light.

"We are endeavoring to contact them even as we speak. They were scheduled to meet with Jean LaRoche of the opposition party and a member of the current Ministry. Forgive me, Mrs. Longbottom, but I must ask. Where is your security detail?"

Ginny motioned for Marjorie and Cecilia to step up to the portal before turning back to Howe. "We don't know, Ambassador. Three DST member attacked us. I can only assume our detail was either killed or captured."

"What about you, Ginny?" exclaimed Marjorie. She was terrified and didn't really understand what was happening. She didn't like the idea of Ginny motioning her towards the portal while she stayed behind.

Cecilia placed a calming hand on the other woman and she relaxed a little.

"I'll be right behind you. But it's important that you help Cecilia get through the portal and back to Haven, where the healers can fix her up," Ginny said tensely.

Marjorie nodded, took a deep breath, then stepped through the portal, Cecilia by her side.

The Ambassador gasped and stared at the portal. The two women had vanished from the room almost instantly!

"What about you and your staff, Sir?" asked Ginny.

"My people are trained for this sort of thing, Mrs. Longbottom. It's one of the risks of being in the Foreign office, I'm afraid. We'll manage. Once the Embassy is shut down, we'll try to make our way to the Canadian or Swiss Embassies."

"Be careful, Sir." With a final adjustment to the control panel, assuring it would shut down after she went through, she nodded to the Ambassador. Grabbing her medallion, she reached out for Neville. What she felt chilled her to the bone.

Terrified, she leapt towards the portal and home.

When she disappeared, the light of the portal flickered out. It would take a witch or wizard with the right control code to reactivate it again.

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## **Padfoot Manor...**

Harry, Hermione and Remus arrived in the portal room just as Marjorie and Cecilia were stepping through. They had enough time to take in the fact that one of the women was injured when Ginny stepped through behind them. She was trembling violently and trying hard to fight back the tears that threatened to overwhelm her.

"I can't feel him," she cried, then choked back a sob.

When Hermione wrapped her arms around her, Ginny leaned against her and began to weep. "I can't feel him," she cried out again.

Harry's expression hardened and he bolted from the portal room. Two doors away was the room which all the Brotherhood portkeys arrived in, including the emergency portkeys built into the medallions.

"Harry?" Remus called, running after him.

Harry stood waiting tensely in the room.

Remus entered a second behind him. "Harry, what's wrong?"

"If Neville is dead, the portkey will still bring his body back," Harry said. "Ginny normally senses him through the bond we all have through the medallions. She can't sense him now though and that means he's either dead, unconscious or someone has taken off his medallion. In any case, the medallion will return him here."

"Or bring us someone entirely unexpected," Remus added, pulling his wand. Another alarm sounded in the manor. The portkey alarm indicating that there was a medical emergency and that a portkey had been activated.

Remus raised his wand. Harry stood next to him, his hand glowing with power. He could hear the sound of people running upstairs and footsteps of people approaching the room.

With a rush of air, a person appeared in the room looking shocked and surprised.

"*Stupefy!*" Remus called out. The beam lanced out from his wand, striking the surprised man and he collapsed to the floor.

Another beam of light arced from Harry's hand and the man on the floor was bound tightly in ropes.

Harry walked over to him and pulled the Brotherhood medallion from his hand. He glanced up at Remus. Both men couldn't help but notice that the chain attached to the medallion was bloody. Harry started to search the man, relieving him of two wands, a knife, all of the change in his pockets, rings, his watch and so on. Anything could be a portkey.

The door burst open and Ginny stood in the doorway, her aura blazing. Harry frowned and stepped in front of her, protecting the unconscious form on the floor.

"Step aside, Harry," Ginny said evenly.

"No, I don't think so, Ginny. No, that isn't Neville, and yes, he had Neville's medallion on him. But right now he's the only link we have to finding him," Harry said firmly.

"Step aside, Potter," Ginny said between clenched teeth.

"Don't make me do this," Harry replied. Even as he spoke, his own aura became visible. "Ginny, you can do whatever you want to him, but only after I've found out what happened to Neville and the others."

"Ginny, don't do this," Hermione pleaded from the doorway.

Ginny gathered her power and Harry shook his head, feeling her intention. He ruthlessly threw his own magic at her, smothering her concentration, denying her the use of her own magic. She snarled and leaped at him.

"*Stupefy!*" shouted Hermione, hitting Ginny in the back. "You men amaze me sometimes," she continued, staring at Harry and Remus. "Why didn't you just stun her?"

"Oh, and she'll be so happy about that when she wakes up. Have you ever dealt with an angry Weasley?" asked Remus.

Hermione stopped short and looked chagrined. "Yes, and it's not pretty, I know. But for Merlin's sake, it's better than fighting her. We'll worry about calming her down when she wakes up."

Hermione moved Ginny over to one side of the room and an elf appeared with a small cot. She maneuvered Ginny onto the cot, then turned to watch Harry and Remus. The unconscious man had been propped up on a small stool with a sticking charm.

"Eneuvate," Remus said, pointing his wand at the man.

The man opened his eyes and looked around. He spotted Harry and paled.

"You know," Harry said conversationally, "the next time you take a portkey off someone, you should determine what triggers it has. The portkey detected the fact that Neville wasn't wearing it and judged the lack of physiological indicators as a major change in the health of it's owner, bringing you here."

"I demand to be released immediately! I am a member of the French Ministry for Magic!" the man demanded in an arrogant tone.

"Perhaps," said Remus coldly. "But since you have attacked members of our diplomatic mission, I can only assume that France is declaring war on Britain. That makes you the enemy."

"Now, Remus," Harry chided. "I'm sure our friend will be cooperative. After all, he does want to return to his homeland alive and well." Turning the man, he sat down on thin air. "Now then, where are you holding the members of our diplomatic mission?"

"I have nothing to say to you," the man replied with a sneer.

"I was so hoping you'd say that." Harry smiled thinly and the man suddenly howled in pain. Standing up, he leaned down a few inches from the man's ear. "What you feel, Monsieur, is merely a simulation of what it would feel like if I flay the flesh from your bones. It's a very old spell and I've been looking for an excuse to try it. If that doesn't work, I'll attempt to pull the information directly from your mind. I know it will work, but I'm afraid it will leave you quite insane."

Harry pulled away and looked at the man coldly.

"You cannot do this!" the man whined. "I am Jean LaRoche, Inspector General of the Department of Magical Enforcement!"

"Monsieur LaRoche, I fear you are under the impression that you have been arrested. While Mr. Potter holds a small position in the British

Government, he is, at this point, merely a concerned private citizen searching for his missing friend," Remus said in an offhand manner, then he turned to Harry and looked eager. "Are you going to try that flying spell we found?"

Harry nearly laughed, which would have ruined everything.

"Harry, he's the man Neville and the others were supposed to meet today," Ginny called from the cot she had been on. Hermione had awakened her and explained exactly what they were doing.

Harry's expression grew grave. "Remus, we must stop now."

Remus looked up in surprise. "But, Harry..."

"No," Harry replied, holding up a hand. "He is an agent of his government and their actions make this an overt act of war on Britain. I will go alert the Americans and Canadians that we will have to invade France before we can take back our country. I know the Americans will approve. As for Monsieur LaRoche, he has infiltrated an official British installation in civilian clothes. He will be charged as a spy and executed under the articles of war."

LaRoche paled and shook his head. He moaned for a moment. "No! I am no spy. I was merely following orders!"

"Perhaps if you tell me where my husband and his fellow diplomats are being held, I would be willing to plead for mercy for you at your trial, Monsieur," Ginny said in French.

Harry looked at her sharply. He didn't know what she had said.

LaRoche looked at her and hope filled his expression. "The DST Building, sub-level three, eastern end," he gasped, he did not want to die.

Harry's eyes narrowed and he did a quick silent legilimency on the man, skimming above the man's shields. He just needed to know if LaRoche was telling the truth or not.

A moment later, he breathed a sigh of relief. "He's telling the truth," Harry told Remus quietly.

"I'll alert Caleb and Amelia," Remus said, then he left the room.

Harry joined Hermione and Ginny and the redhead looked at him hopefully.

"I don't know what you said to him, Ginny, but it did the trick. We now know where they're being held," he said softly. He didn't want LaRoche hearing them.

"So what happens now?" Ginny asked in a small voice.

Harry knelt in front of her. "Listen to me carefully, Ginny. An operation is being planned even as we speak. None of the Brotherhood can be in on the op, as much as we want to be. We're too involved."

Ginny's eyes flashed with anger, but she nodded in understanding. Harry was right. They were too close to Neville to be directly involved. "What about him?" she asked, jerking her head towards LaRoche.

"We'll return him to the French in due time. Remus and I were trying to scare him into talking when you said something that convinced him to give up the information. Frankly, my immediate inclination is to send him back to the French Ministry via a dozen owls, but I doubt Amelia will allow that."

"Harry," Hermione chided and he grimaced.

"I know, Hermione. But this is Neville we're talking about, damn it. He's family!" Harry hissed back.

Ginny closed her eyes and clasped her arms around herself tightly. "Please, don't fight. I need you both."

Harry looked at her, his expression softening. "You're right. I'm sorry, Ginny. Let's go upstairs and get settled. We may have a long wait."

Hermione hugged Ginny before standing. "What about him?"

Harry winked and grinned maliciously. Then he turned and pointed his staff at LaRoche. "Somnus!" he intoned. LaRoche panicked until the spell hit him in the chest, then he slumped on the stool, held there only by the sticking charm.

"He'll sleep until I wake him up again, assuming I remember the counter spell. You know, my memory hasn't been the same since I came down with that cold. Heck, it could be years before I remember how to bring him around again," Harry said.

Hermione looked reproachful, but Ginny snickered.

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## The Bastille, Paris...

"Report!" snapped the leader.

"Sir, the agent directing our operation failed to arrive with his prisoners. The prisoners have arrived as planned, but our agent is missing. Also, the



team sent to retrieve the women has been terminated.”

“Impossible!” shouted a voice from the other end of the chamber. “We were told these women were harmless!”

The man in the arena cringed. He was LaRoche's second in command, although he didn't know LaRoche's identity.

“The three women in question were witches, and more to the point, at least one had received military training. The capture team was neutralized with precision, and all of their personal effects were removed from their bodies, including their DST Identification cards,” said the man.

“This is madness! I warned you all this was madness! You have brought us to the brink of war!” shouted another voice.

“Enough,” shouted the leader. The room fell silent.

“What of the three primary subjects?” he asked.

The man in the arena nodded. “We have captured them and have taken them to a secure location. Interrogations were scheduled to begin tomorrow, but things are happening now that are outside of our control.”

“Oh? Such as?” Someone asked.

The man turned to face the direction of the voice. “The British Embassy has been evacuated, it's personnel seeking refuge in other Embassies. And contrary to what we believed would happen, the Ambassadors for the United States, Canada, Italy, Germany and Ireland have been recalled for consultations. I also just learned that NATO has switched command codes and cut us out of the command circuits.

“Finally, the British Government in Exile is demanding an emergency meeting of the U.N. Security Council.”

A hush fell over the room as people considered what they were hearing.

Finally, one member broke the silence. “This is madness! You have brought us to the brink of war against an enemy we cannot defeat! NATO has amassed an invasion force of nearly a million men to liberate Britain. They will use it on us!”

“I disagree,” said the leader. “The other countries are posturing for effect on the world stage. No one will attack us because of our nuclear arsenal. They fear that too much.”

A murmur of agreement arose in the room.

“Let us wait and watch the events unfold. We will continue as planned,” the leader continued. Then he directed his comments to the man in the arena. “You are now in charge of this project. Do not fail us.”

The man repressed a shudder and nodded his head.

“One more thing,” said the leader. The man in the arena paused and looked up.

“Just to be safe, let us not leave any loose ends dangling.”

The man nodded. “I will take care of everything.”

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### **Direction de la Surveillance du Territoire, 7 rue Nélaton, Paris...**

As far as covert teams went, this one was extremely large. The team was composed of four ten man squads. After a briefing and a rushed mission planning session that lasted less than an hour, they arrived outside of the building as darkness descended on the city.

The team was led by Twister, the senior non-commissioned officer of the Brotherhood Brigade. The plan was be simple. Team four would enter the building and head up to the executive offices where they would then make as much noise as possible, and probably gut the upper floors of the building. Teams one, two and three would head downstairs. Team Three would set up a guard on the entrances to the sub levels. Team two would sweep the sub levels in case they were given the wrong information, while Team one would make for the holding cells in the eastern wing of sub-level three.

When some of the team leaders complained that the plan was too simple, Twister shrugged and replied, “The simpler the plan, the less that can go wrong with it.”

Twister motioned to two of his men, then pointed at the door with the sentries. The men nodded and raised their wands. The sentries crumpled to the ground a moment later.

“Contact command and tell them we're in,” Twister said to the man next to him. Then he turned and motioned to the men.

One by one, each team entered the building. They had work to do.

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### **Padfoot Manor...**

The Brotherhood were all clustered in one of the large sitting rooms. Narcissa and Amelia had joined them, along with Cecilia Collington and

Marjorie Talbot. House elves moved among the group, refilling drinks and bringing snacks.

Cecilia had been taken to a healer and her injury had been healed quickly. Her jaw was sore, and would be for the next day or two, but it was nothing compared to the worry eating at her. She knew she owed Ginny her life, but her concern for Geoffrey overrode everything else.

Harry paced off to one side and kept glancing at the large ornate clock on the wall. Ginny sat with Neville's Gran and Hermione. Her eyes were puffy from crying and she twisted a handkerchief out of shape in her hands.

Amelia approached Harry, who looked up at her, startled.

"Have you met Cecilia and Marjorie?" she asked him.

Harry turned to the two women. "Only briefly when they arrived. Please ladies, make yourselves comfortable. I fear this will be a long night."

"Thank you for letting us come here, my lord. I didn't relish the idea of staying home alone tonight," Cecilia said.

"Nonsense. No one should be alone on a night like tonight," he told her and tried to smile reassuringly. "Find yourselves a comfortable spot and relax. It's all being taken care of."

Cecilia nodded, then she dragged Marjorie off with her. Marjorie seemed to be too awed by where she was to say anything.

"I hate this waiting," he said, turning back to Amelia.

"You think you have it bad? Think of Ginny and the others. So many things can go wrong tonight," she murmured.

"What about the protective detail? What of their wives?" he asked.

Amelia sighed. "Only two of the detail were married. One man's wife is still in Britain and the other is with the wives of the rest of the detail tonight. We don't hold out much hope for them. If Merlin is on our side, we'll be bringing home more than our three missing diplomats."

Harry nodded unhappily. "And the Embassy staff?"

Amelia smiled. At least there she had good news. "All of the staff have been accounted for. They had plans in place for such a contingency. We have reports from six different Embassies reporting they are providing sanctuary for our people."

An elf appeared and snapped off a salute, then handed Harry a small note.

Ripping it open, he read it quickly before passing it to Amelia.

"If I can have everyone's attention please," Harry said, loud enough to carry in the room. "I've received word from the Operations Center that a rescue attempt is now underway. All we can do is wait and hope," he said.

Ginny stood unsteadily, then squared her shoulders and walked over to sit with the wives of the other missing men.

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### **Direction de la Surveillance du Territoire, 7 rue Nélaton, Paris...**

Team four ran up the stairs and stopped only a few floors below the top. Still in the stairwell, they disillusioned themselves and snuck out of the stairwell. From there, they broke into five two man groups to cover more area and wreak more havoc. The fact that most of the building was filled with muggles made the operation especially easy.

Twister paused and smiled as the building shook under his feet. Team four was on the job, and from the sound of it, enjoying themselves. They had been instructed to keep the deaths to a minimum, but the damage they were doing was substantial.

He looked around the corner, then pulled back. The entrance to the sub-levels would be daunting for muggles, but for wizards it was nothing. Not even the two foot thick steel door would stand up to a banishing charm. He nodded and team three stormed around the corner, firing explosive hexes at the sentries and the security cameras.

Twister and teams one and two moved around the corner, while three men from team three banished the doors. He nodded to the team leader, then he joined team one. Entering the stairway, team two followed, while three remained behind, blocking the entrance to the sub levels.

The building shook again and Twister could hear an alarm shrieking in the distance. The corridors that his men ran through were eerily silent. It didn't take long for team one to reach sub-level three. There, they slowed down, moving more cautiously and checking rooms. Finally, they found one corridor that was guarded by five machine gun carrying sentries.

Twister motioned to his men, who moved silently up behind him. They crouched down, just out of sight. He held up his hand, showing five fingers. His men nodded and braced themselves. Twister ran a quick count on his fingers. When he reached zero, he bounced around the corner. The ten men of team one were right behind him.

"*Reducto!*" he shouted.

A machine gun chattered briefly. Twister felt something pull at his shirt sleeve, but he ignored it. In less than two seconds, the sentries were dead. Three men from team one ran up to the door and tried to open it. It was locked, but a quick charm took care of the problem.

Entering the room, they found the three missing diplomats strapped to beds. Each man had an IV tube running into their arms and all three were unconscious.

“Get them unhooked from that crap,” snarled Twister.

“Nice miss, Twister,” one of his men said, fingering the hole in his shirt. A bullet had passed through his sleeve, missing him by a hair.

“Take a bag of that stuff with you,” he ordered, then he looked at his shirt and grinned at his men.

One of the medics unhooked the three men from the IV's, and collected several samples in case they needed them. Another man unstrapped them from the bed. The medic gave them a thumbs up and a portkey was placed on each man's chest and activated.

“Send out the recall signal,” Twister ordered.

Another man nodded and unslung his backpack. He rummaged around and pulled out a stone. Tapping the stone with his wand, it began to glow brightly.

“Let's torch this place on the way back to the stairwell. We'll portkey from there,” Twister ordered.

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### **Padfoot Manor...**

Harry glanced at the clock for what seemed the millionth time. An uneasy silence had settled upon the room and every one that spoke soon gave up trying to hold a conversation. Harry's hopes were sinking fast. It had been over an hour since they'd received notice that the mission was underway. There was a greater chance of something going wrong the longer the mission lasted.

He walked over to Amelia. “We need to talk about responses to this,” he said tensely.

She looked at him sharply, but. “I know. I've been wondering about it myself. What do you have in mind?”

Harry looked around for a moment, then steered her to an empty part of the room. “It's obvious that the current French government is hostile to us, so I'm going to suggest Operation Headshot.”

Amelia paled and stared at him. “You can't be serious,” she exclaimed.

“Of course, I'm serious,” he snapped back. “This is war, Amelia, and they've just declared themselves to be our enemies...”

“But assassination,” she interrupted in protest.

“It's not assassination. They're valid military targets. Besides, taking out the Minister and the department heads means we might get a government more friendly to our cause,” he pressed.

“No. We will not resort to assassination, not while I'm Minister. There are other ways of taking down the French Ministry...”

Amelia and Harry stopped when a uniformed elf popped in and handed Harry a note. With the creature's arrival, every eye in the room swung in his direction.

He opened the note and quickly scanned it. Looking up, his eyes went to the women. When he smiled, Cecilia broke down and wept.

“Twenty minutes ago, our three missing men were returned to Haven. They're in Haven Hospital, recovering. Our healers say they have been given some sort of muggle drug, but they're expected to recover fully and will probably be released tomorrow.”

Ginny closed her eyes and murmured a prayer of thanks.

“The Operations Center reports that there were no casualties among the rescue teams. Unfortunately, no sign of the missing protective detail was found.”

Walking over to the three women, he smiled. “Ladies, considering how you must be feeling, I'll make a portkey that will take you to the hospital. I don't want you apparating and splinching yourselves because you were in a rush.”

He conjured a long length of rope and murmured over it for a moment. The rope turned blue for a moment and he nodded as he gave it to Ginny.

Neville's Gran joined them and she patted Ginny's arm. “Let's go see my grandson, shall we?”

Ginny smiled up at the older woman as the other two women took hold of the rope. They vanished a second later.

Harry stared at the empty space for a moment, then turned away. Moving to an armchair, he sat down heavily and rubbed his face tiredly.

“So what now, Harry?” asked Draco.

“Ask Amelia. Personally, I think we should take out the French leadership. But she says there's a bloodless way of doing it,” he replied.

“Harry,” Hermione chided, then she shot an apologetic glance at Amelia.

Amelia smiled thinly. "I'll tell you what, Harry. If my way doesn't work, I'll personally give you a go ahead on your Operation Headshot."

He eyed her suspiciously, but nodded. "So, what do you plan?"

Amelia looked smug. "I have agreements from five allied nations that if the French were to cause any further difficulties, we'd call for an Avalonian Council. Between myself and the five others, we have the six necessary Ministerial votes to invoke a Council. I intend to see the French Ministry disenfranchised."

Hermione looked at Amelia in awe. "You can do that?"

Amelia grinned wolfishly. "Watch me."

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### **17 Rue Dupin, Paris (Feb 12th)...**

Amhar Coeur de Lion stepped from his apartment and blinked his eyes in the bright winter sun. He had been feeling slightly sluggish for the last few days, almost as though he was coming down with a cold. He had visited a healer, been thoroughly dosed and given some potions to take with him. He took them religiously, but they hadn't relieved him of the sluggish feeling.

He hoped LaRoche would contact him before he ran out of money. He hadn't seen the man in several days, but he expected he would soon. Something had happened at the British Embassy and the newspapers were all talking about it, along with a sudden cooling of relations with several countries. The papers were confused about the downturn on the international scene and were calling for an investigation.

Amhar stopped at a little cafe he had found. They served an excellent English breakfast and he made it a habit of stopping each day for his morning meal and to read the paper. The cafe was comfortable and he felt safe there.

He was reading a paper when his table rocked slightly. He looked up to see a man sitting across from him.

"I'm sorry, but this is a private table, Monsieur. There are plenty of empty tables you can pick from," Amhar said in badly accented French.

There was a puffing sound from under the table and Amhar felt an intense burning in his belly. It felt as though the wind had been knocked from him. He looked at the man across from him in surprise.

"Marne sends her very best regards," the man said in a thick brogue.

Amhar's eyes widened. Outside on the street, two automobiles collided, courtesy of the French crime syndicate. All eyes in the cafe turned to watch the spectacle outside.

The man across from Amhar fired his silenced gun two more times, then stood and walked out the front door.

Amhar's sight was beginning to dim, and his last thought was to wonder how he had been found. He never knew, and moments later was past caring, that he'd been just another loose end swept up by the French shadow government.

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### **Authors Notes:**

Dale: Since you asked so nicely, here you go. An update before Christmas.

Harry's going to be disappointed with us for not letting him kill Amhar. The French were being pushy though, so we let them have their way. In all honesty, I have to say that the method of Amhar's death is all Bob's fault. I wanted something bloody between Harry and him. But the truth is, Harry can't personally dispatch everyone, so Bob was probably right to kill him off the way he did.

Will we learn more about Hermione's lineage? Probably not, only because there isn't much you don't already know. We know the family crest on the Granger's robes threw you all for a loop, but it's not that hard to find your family's crest if you know your geneology. For example, my family crest was researched about 20 years ago. It's a falcon, sitting on a thrown with a crown in its beak. I always figured that meant, somewhere along the line, someone in the family stole a crown from some king somewhere and hocked it for beer money. ~Grin~

When will Susan's baby be born? Nine months after it was conceived, silly!

How many chapters will the story be and how far after the final battle will the story continue? Watch and read, rabbit.

How many daggers are still out there? Voldemort has a couple, the rest are probably on Ebay. Oh, and yes. All possessed blades speak Vulcan. We thought that was common knowledge!

Have we thought about putting Sunset and Sunrise on other sites like Portkey and FF.net? Well, the story started on FF.net, then got booted off (don't get me started!). Tim was nice enough to give us a home after several readers told him of our trouble and we haven't looked back since. We're not interested in posting to multiple archives, though. We're happy in our new home.

We're sorry if you feel the story is going to slowly. We're not going to rush through it though. If we did, we'd leave too many plot lines hanging. Many of our characters have taken on a life of their own and would stone us if we didn't give them airtime. I'm sure you understand. As for leaving more cliffhangers just to keep people interested – are you nuts? Do you know how many death threats we receive after each cliffy? ~Shudders~ That's not interest, that's anger!

Thorfinna: It's possible. There aren't a lot of sick, twisted couples out there, after all. ~Snicker~

Wait, now folks are complaining that there's nothing to complain about? ~Bangs head on desk~

Will the other poltergeists stay at Hogwarts after the war? You'll have to ask them. We're not speaking to them at the moment. Vex and Miifs dropped Dung Bombs in our toilets for not giving them more air time this chapter.

Dazza: Hey, leave my horns out of this!

MonkeyAxman1302: Will we explain the comment about Voldemort's scepter? Yes, but in a later chapter. I can tell you that your idea is wrong. You'll have to keep reading!

Yes, Draco is technically a Black now. But remember, the other former students of Hogwarts have had several years of dealing with him as Draco Malfoy. They're going to slip up from time to time. I've been married for several years, yet old school friends still call me by my maiden name, even though they know I'm married.

Will Orla remain insane? You'll find out next chapter.

Lugo got through the death ward around Haven by walking. He's not a marked Death Eater and as far as he's concerned, he's done nothing wrong in his business dealings with Marne's cartel. It is, after all, just business. The ward didn't trigger because the man doesn't think he's evil. Interesting loophole in the wards, wouldn't you say? ~Grin~ And before you all jump to the conclusions I know are buzzing around in your minds, remember this. You can't take advantage of a loophole if you don't know it exists, and the few who have discovered it are either dead, don't realize what they've discovered, or are in custody.

We'll get back to Britain when the time is right, folks. Remember, they're still acting under prophesy and their return has been scripted, much like their departure was. Hold tight, the time is coming, although Bob says he's open to bribes on that issue. Send him donuts or pizza and he'll consider accelerating the plot.

That's it for now, folks. We probably won't get the next chapter out until early next year. We have family coming in a few days and will be a bit too busy for writing.

For those who celebrate, we wish you warm and happy holidays!

~Alyx and Bob~

*Bobmin*  
*FanficAuthors.net*

# Sunrise Over Britain

## Chapter 26 - The pain of loss

### Standard Disclaimer:

Alyx closed the door to the theater and paused. She could clearly hear the screams coming from the stage area.

Curious she walked up to the stage to find Bob, racking a person she didn't recognize.

The strange man was tied down and Bob was busy pulling the fingernails off using a pair of white hot tongs.

"What are you doing?" Alyx asked. The man looked at her, hope filling his eyes.

"Nothing, just playing."

"Playing?!?" she exclaimed. "Bob you are torturing that man!"

Bob looked up from pulling out a fingernail. "I am?" he asked.

"I don't understand," Alyx complained. "Is he a guest disclaimer?"

Bob frowned, then hit the man in the kneecap with a hammer. "I don't think so. This is Dale, a reviewer who wanted to know what we've done for him lately. So I'm showing him," he replied with a grin.

Dale moaned piteously and Alyx suddenly looked intrigued. "You sure we can't use him for a disclaimer?"

"Nah, I pulled all his teeth already," Bob replied.

Alyx frowned. "Dammit Bob, you're wasting good material!" she snapped, then she sighed and turned to the audience. "Do I really need to remind you folks that we don't own Harry Potter and the Potter universe."

Out in the audience Harry leaned over to Hermione and looked down her blouse before remembering why he was leaning. "Remind me to never raise my hand when they ask for a volunteer from the audience."

Hermione nodded, her eyes shining with interest at what was happening on stage.

Alyx turned back to Bob and eyed Dale for a moment frowning. "I'll heat up the oil," she said simply.

Bob watched her walk off the stage. "Gawd I love that girl," he muttered.

Dale whimpered and swore he'd never annoy another author again.

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### Sunrise Over Britain

#### Chapter 26

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#### Haven Hospital (Feb 12th)...

While the Paris police were being alerted to the murder of a foreign national in one of their cafes, another person was just beginning to wake up.

Neville opened his eyes and looked around groggily. He seemed to be having difficulty controlling his actions.

A face swam into his field of view. He recognized it as Danni, the healer who often helped out up at the manor.

"Don't try to move around, Neville. You were given a muggle drug and it's still wearing off. You should be fine within a half hour or so."

Danni straightened up and looked at Healer August.

"Is that the last of them?" asked the Senior Healer.

"Yes, Ma'am. Mr. Longbottom, we think, got a stronger dose of whatever it was they gave him. Probably because he was the only one to show signs of a fight."

Healer August approached the foot of the bed and Danni adjusted it with her wand so that Neville was sitting up and could look at her.

"Mr. Longbottom, I know you are confused, but you are safe now. Do you understand? You're back in Haven and safe." Healer August said clearly.

Neville blinked a few times, then nodded. "Wha appen'd?" he said, slurring his words.

"You and your party were attacked. You were captured and given a muggle drug. About eight hours ago you were rescued and brought back to

Haven along with the other members of your group. Your wife is well and waiting outside until we're done here.

"Quite a resourceful young woman you married, Mr. Longbottom, but I'll leave her to tell you the story. Needless to say, she's been here all night and is exhausted. I'll let her in for a few minutes, then I'm sending her home with orders to sleep. She'll be back later, I'm sure. You should be released tomorrow, but I expect you'll be having a few official visitors this afternoon."

August sniffed loudly as if the thought of official visitors disturbing her patients annoyed her greatly. She then reached down and made a notation in his chart and handed it to Danni before leaving the room.

Neville settled back in the bed and closed his eyes for a moment. He could already feel things returning to normal, but it was an unsettling sensation.

The door opened and Ginny walked in quietly. Her demeanor puzzled him. She seemed subdued, which was very unlike her.

"Gin?" he asked, pleased that he hadn't slurred her name.

She smiled and walked over to stand near the head of the bed. She looked at him for a moment, then threw herself on top of him, weeping. He wrapped his arms around her and, for the first time, noticed that he had a heavy bandage around his neck that crinkled and poked him uncomfortably.

After a few minutes her emotional storm passed and she sat on the edge of the bed wiping away her tears. "I was so worried about you."

"I'll be fine. Healer August said this should wear off soon," he replied. "Is everyone else alright?"

"Not really, Nev. They weren't able to find any trace of the security detail."

Neville frowned. Six men had vanished, thanks to the French.

"And the others?"

"Geoffrey and Chad were found in the same room as you. The group that tried to capture us wasn't so lucky. I wasn't in the room when they broke into our suite. I managed to get the drop on them, then we apparated to the Embassy where we sounded the alarm before coming home," Ginny said in a rush.

The last twenty hours had been an emotional roller coaster for her and she was finally coming down from it. She wrapped her arms around herself and shivered slightly. She was only now coming to realize how much had been at risk.

"So, what's happening now?" he asked, reaching out and caressing her arms, trying to comfort her with his touch.

"It's all confused," she replied, getting off the bed and starting to pace. "Harry is fuming and most of the Brotherhood are fuming right along with him. Draco wanted to try boiling oil on our prisoner. Luna wants to give him to Fuzz. Hermione is walking around muttering about placing a permanent shield charm on the Brotherhood medallions to prevent this sort of thing from happening again. Harry wants to assassinate the French Minister and Amelia has called for something called a Council of Avalon."

Neville sat up with a start and stared at her in astonishment. "WHAT?"

She stopped her pacing and looked at him, irritated now. "Weren't you listening to me? I said Harry is angry," she said, starting to tick off points on his fingers.

Neville interrupted her. "No, no. Tell me about the prisoner and the Council business?"

Ginny stiffened and tried to glare at him for interrupting her, but between her confusion over what was happening at the manor and the relief she felt in having her husband safe, she couldn't manage it. Sighing, she raked a hand through her hair. "Amelia called for something called a Council of Avalon and we have a prisoner. It's how we found out where you were being held so quickly."

"What's his name?"

"Cockroach. No. The roach? I don't know. I was roach-something," she replied, looking at him in confusion. *Why couldn't he concentrate on important matters?* she thought. *It must be the muggle drug.*

"LaRoche?"

"Yes, that's it," she replied, smiling brightly.

He leaned back in the bed, grinning. "Get a hold of Harry, Gin. Let him know that LaRoche isn't just a member of the French Ministry, he's the Inspector General of the MLE, and a major player in their ruling party. Someone might want to slip him some veritaserum. He's the official we were supposed to meet. We were told he was the Minister's personal representative."

"So what happened to our group happened with approval of the government?" said a voice from the doorway.

Neville turned to see Remus leaning against the door jam and he nodded to the older man.

"Good, that makes things a lot clearer. I was concerned we were dealing with a sub faction of the ruling party. Amelia will be able to parade



LaRoche around at the Council as proof positive.”

“I can't believe she's calling for a Council,” Neville said softly.

“Would you prefer Harry's way?” Remus asked sharply.

“Harry's way has a certain direct charm to it,” Ginny muttered.

Both men looked at her with reproach. “Blood thirsty wench you have there, Neville,” Remus commented with a grin.

Neville looked at Ginny warily while she scowled at both of them. “She's not normally like that. I think she's just upset about yesterday.”

She rolled her eyes. “Sure, talk about me like I'm not standing right here. And yes, your damn right I'm upset! You run off and get yourself captured, nearly getting yourself killed. Where would I be without you? What would I have done? I don't even have a child yet to carry on your name!” she nearly shouted at him. She placed her hands on her hips and glared at Neville.

Remus grinned. “I think that's my cue to leave. I'll be back later with Amelia, Neville. We want to talk to you about what happened.”

Neville barely noted Remus leaving the room. He had his hands full with an angry red headed witch.

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### **Padfoot Manor, Harry's Study...**

Harry walked into the study and saw only Hermione. He had been a little late and expected most everyone else to be in place for the morning briefing.

“Where is everyone?” he asked. She was bent over a huge scroll with a complex arithmantic equation scrawled across it.

He leaned over and examined her work, noting it was for a rather weak shield charm.

“Amelia firecalled this morning and asked if we could put off the briefing until later in the day. She wanted to oversee the debriefing of the diplomats,” she paused and looked up from her equation. “I would have thought you would be visiting Neville this morning, anyway.”

Harry shrugged. “I thought about it, but Ginny's been with him since last night. I figured they deserve some time to themselves. Neville's going to have enough people asking him what happened without me adding to it. Besides, I'll find out from Amelia.”

Hermione looked pleased at his reply and was about to say so when a house elf popped in, holding a note. The elf looked around and spotted Harry. She snapped off a salute, then handed him the note before popping out again.

“Remind me to pick four elves to give to your parents, Hermione, but only after I make them watch Monty Python's Flying Circus for a couple weeks,” he grumbled.

She laughed softly and watch him.

Harry unfolded the note and looked at it in confusion.

“What's wrong?”

“It's a note from the ghosts of Hogwarts,” he replied. “They want to see me.”

She put down her quill and looked at him. “I thought they couldn't send messages without Peeves to help them.”

“They can't. Or at least they shouldn't have been able to. I'll pay them a visit and find out what's going on.”

She pushed back from the desk and stood up. “Not alone you aren't.”

“What?”

“Harry, don't be daft,” she said in exasperation. “Peeves is dead, so they don't have a way to send you messages, yet somehow managed to do just that? Doesn't that strike you as suspicious?”

“Hermione, the Chamber is under a *Fidelius* charm, or have you forgotten? If the enchantment had been broken, as the caster, I would have felt it.”

She leaned back against the desk and nodded pensively. She nibbled on a quill for a moment. “Alright, Harry, but be careful.”

He smiled and started to rummage through one of the drawers.

“What are you looking for?”

He looked up from his desk drawer. “I keep a portkey in here for the Chamber. I don't want to activate the portal I placed in the Chamber until I know it's clear, and my portkey will only let me activate it. HA! Here it is.”

He held up a large skeleton key with a pink ribbon tied to it. Hermione smirked at his choice of ribbon colors. He walked over to her desk and looked at her equations again.

"You know, if you invert this rune you'd get improved power focus and boost the containment effect," he told her smugly, then grinned and activated the portkey, vanishing before she could say anything.

Hermione glared at the empty space where he'd stood a second earlier, then she turned back to her parchment. Sitting down once more, she bent over the equation and scanned it carefully. She made a quick notation and nearly growled. Picking up her wand, she waved it over the parchment, inverting one of the runes.

"I hate it when he's right," she muttered.

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## Hogwarts Castle, the Chamber of Secrets...

"Lights!" Harry hissed in parseltongue.

The torches along the walls flared to life, lighting the gloomy chamber. He looked around for a moment, then walked over to the table where the crystal that contained the power for the ghosts lay. After a moment of examining the crystal, he frowned and raised his hand. His power flared and a thick rope of energy snapped from his palm to the crystal, refilling it.

When he finished he leaned against the table and breathed heavily.

"Thank you," said a voice from behind him. He whirled, ready for combat, then relaxed, seeing the Bloody Baron.

He bowed slightly. "My lord Baron, I received your note, but I admit to being puzzled. I was under the impression that none of the ghosts could affect anything corporeal, unless you possessed a body, and you can't bring a possessed body into the chamber."

The Baron nodded and smiled grimly. "Things have changed, Lord Potter. When you were here last, we assumed, incorrectly, that Peeves had been killed. Peeves is still with us, although I hesitate to say he is alive."

Harry blinked in confusion. "He's become a ghost?" he asked, lost.

The Baron chuckled softly. "No, my lord. Peeves is still Peeves, but is Peeves alive? He is, after all, a mischievous spirit of nature."

Harry nodded. "I don't know the answer to that question. But perhaps when the war is over, we can sit down and discuss it. I'm pleased to know that Peeves is back with us. I shall start bringing in more supplies for him."

The Baron looked pained for a moment. "My lord, Peeves has asked you here today because he has a request." Turning away slightly he bellowed for the poltergeist.

Peeves suddenly materialized over Harry. He tried to hide the water balloon, but he couldn't do it fast enough.

Harry smiled warmly. He was genuinely happy to see the poltergeist unharmed. "I am glad to see you, Peeves..."

He trailed off as another poltergeist appeared, then another and another, until five spirits stared down at him. Harry nervously noted that they all held water balloons in their hands.

"Oh, Merlin," he muttered.

"Pesky Potty Poopsie! Peevsie is back! And he brought his brothers!" Peeves said proudly, then he did a back flip in midair before coming down to Harry's level, where he poked the man in the chest. "Booming things is nice, but we wants digging things!"

"Digging things?" Harry asked, feeling stupid.

"Him stupid," said one of the other Poltergeists.

"Yeah, lets eat him," said another.

"No, no, no. Pottyboy is smart, him just surprised. Now we wants digging things. We want to make holes!" exclaimed Peeves.

"Digging things," Harry repeated again. "Do you mean shovels?"

"Shovels!" crowed all five poltergeists and they degenerated into an aerial acrobatic frenzy, chanting 'Shovels' over and over again.

Harry couldn't help but grin, but he also wondered what they had in mind. He knew better than to ask.

"I'll have some shovels sent over today or tomorrow," he promised.

The poltergeists stopped their frenzy and turned to look at Harry in amazement. They had never met a human that actually aided them in their work.

"See?" Peeves proclaimed to his brothers. "Potty is good people."

"Make him honorary poltergeist!" Miffs exclaimed.

Harry cringed and three poltergeists swooped down, kissing him wetly.

Peeve watched with pride as Harry was inducted as an honorary poltergeist. The Baron grimaced and fled the room. There were limits to even what a ghost would watch.

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### **Padfoot Manor, Harry's Study...**

Hermione looked up as a whooshing sound signaled Harry returning to the study via portkey. He had been gone for nearly two hours.

When he appeared, she leaned back on the chair in shock.

Her husband now wore a pair of pink hotpants and his hair had been braided. If that wasn't enough, he was painted, half orange and half green. A miniature storm cloud hovered over his head, raining on just him. A giant fluorescent "P" blinked madly on his bare chest.

"Don't ask." he snapped and walked from the room.

Biting her lip, she tried very hard not to giggle at his back and the fuzzy purple tail that swished from the seat of his pants.

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### **Parliament Building...**

Joseph Meade walked into the office carrying a large stack of dispatches and letters for Lucius. Unlike Akers, who Malfoy had killed, Meade was useful enough that Lucius kept him around. He was one of Malfoy's chief aides, and a commander of Malfoy's legion.

Lucius accepted the stack of parchments, leafing through them.

"There's a dispatch from that Irish bitch, Murphy, and another from our contact in Haven. Also, I received a notice from one of our field commanders. He's complaining that someone is using magic to sabotage our operation in Plymouth. I've tasked a quarter legion to scour the area."

Lucius frowned. The docks in Plymouth were being used to smuggle material and supplies in from the continent. If anything happened to them, they would be in trouble, as it would cut off one of the principle sources of supplies.

"Only a quarter? Plymouth is a big city," Lucius replied.

"Yes, sir, but I don't want to cut our strength too badly. We're still having problems up north. I figure the best thing is to keep our main force nearby, in case we need to jump in either direction."

Lucius nodded in agreement. Playing the cautious hand might be slow, but it was the safest way to go.

He opened the letter from the Haven contact and read it, his eyebrows raised nearly to his hairline.

"Send an owl to Hogwarts. Ask the Master if it would be possible for me to see him tomorrow. I have important information for him," he snapped.

Meade nodded and walked to the door. "Yes, sir."

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### **Padfoot Manor...**

Amelia paused in the doorway and wondered why Hermione was giggling at Harry. He sat at his desk, scowling at her now and then.

She walked into the room and looked around, noting that even Draco and Remus were smirking at him.

"What did I miss?" she asked.

"Harry went to Hogwarts today to see what was going with the ghosts. While there, he discovered that Peeves, the Poltergeist, wasn't destroyed by Voldemort after all. Apparently, Peeves had gone off to get some of his fellow Poltergeists and decided to do it in a dramatic fashion. Harry here got inducted as an honorary poltergeist today. You should have seen him. They painted him and you should have seen the tail!" Hermione explained, before she began to laugh again.

Harry frowned at her, then turned to look at Amelia. "I'm sure Amelia will be interested in learning what I discovered," he replied frostily. He wasn't really angry, but Hermione knew exactly how to tease him.

"Yes, actually, I would," Amelia said. Harry glanced around seeing Remus, Draco and Caleb nodding at him.

"Very well, I'll start off then," Harry said, starting the briefing.

"As you are aware, we thought that Peeves, the Poltergeist of Hogwarts, had been destroyed by a killing curse cast using Voldemort's new scepter. This turned out to be false. Peeves was out rounding up help for himself. There are now a total of five poltergeists in the castle, Peeves, Miifs, Irks, Hacks and Vex."

He paused when Remus covered his face in both hands and moaned.

"Remus?"

The older man looked up at Harry, a slight grin tugging at the corners of his mouth. "What are you planning on telling Minerva when she discovers there are now five poltergeists in the castle rather than one?"

"I don't think it will be much of a problem, Remus. Peeves assured me they won't be staying on after we drive Voldemort out. More to the point, however, the Baron had some interesting information for me. It turns out that Snape has been taken off brewing potions for the ritual. Voldemort is reaching the limit of the ritual and soon won't be able to continue using it."

"So what is Snape doing?" asked Hermione.

"According to the Baron, he was investigating ways of extending the number of times Voldemort can undergo the ritual, but was pulled off the assignment to help Voldemort and someone named Pei Chung in breaking through our ward on the island. Apparently, they think they might be able to punch a hole in the ward, a temporary breach."

Draco started leafing through his document folder.

"Is that possible?" Amelia asked in alarm.

"Possible, yes. Easy to do? No. The wards are partially powered by Ley lines and by the parchment that contains the map. The beauty of the ward we erected is that as long as the map remains protected and untouched, no power on Earth can break that ward."

"But he's not trying to break the ward, he's trying to punch a hole through it," Amelia pointed out.

Harry nodded at her and grinned.

"What my husband is not pointing out is that, while the theory of punching a hole in wards is a well known and clearly defined process, no one, but we few, knows about the map. No matter how much power they pump into the ward, unless they also cast on the map itself, they won't be able to punch a hole in the ward. As it stands, the more power they pump into punching a hole, the stronger that local area will become," Hermione explained, watching Harry's smug expression melt away.

He glanced at her sourly, though he had to admit that the idea of converting any attempts to break the ward into something that would actually increase its power had been her idea.

Amelia nodded, now that she understood. "So, where is the map? And when the time comes, how hard will it be to remove the ward? It took a full coven to create it."

Hermione glanced at Harry, who nodded. "The map used to be in a locked drawer of Harry's desk. I convinced him to move it. It's now kept by Gringotts in a high security vault guarded by dragons. As for removing the ward, that's easier than creating it. All we need do is burn the map."

Amelia stared at Hermione in astonishment. "That simple?"

Hermione nodded.

"AHA!" Draco exclaimed. "I thought that name sounded familiar."

He waved a parchment he had pulled from his folder. "Harry, do you remember when you told me about that letter from your Sheik friend and how he noted that the Crimson Jihad and another group had vanished?"

Harry nodded, puzzled by the swift change of topic.

"Pei Chung, age one hundred and six," he said, reading from the parchment. "He is currently the leader of the Iron Wand Tong, an Asian criminal group composed mostly of wizards and witches. According to what I've found out, they had close to five hundred members."

"Pei Chung is a master of potions and charms," he continued, then he paled slightly and looked up nervously. "He also has some peculiar tastes, which I don't think I need mention here."

"Where are you going with this, Draco?" asked Amelia.

"Think!" Draco snapped. "We killed at least a thousand Death Eaters on our raid on the camps. Then we hear about two criminal groups that vanish without a trace? The Iron Wand Tong and the Crimson Jihad. Just a guess, but that's nearly a thousand very fanatic people. Now we learn that the leader of one of those groups is at Hogwarts? Voldemort has been reinforced."

Caleb frowned and nodded. "It makes sense," he said softly.

"So we killed a thousand and he replaced them," Amelia said softly.

"Damn, it's going to be a bloody fight then," Harry muttered.

Hermione made a strangling noise and everyone turned to look at her. She stood unsteadily.

"BEFORE THE RAM IS GORED BY THE BULL THE TIME OF PROPHECY WILL END... AS THE TRUMPETS OF WAR SOUND THEIR CALL THE BLOOD OF THE BROTHERHOOD WILL FLOW... BLOOD WILL MEET BLOOD AND BLOOD WILL FIGHT BLOOD... THE ANCIENT VOICES WILL BE SILENCED FOREVER AS A SINGLE CRY HERALDS THE COMING OF A NEW AGE... BEFORE THE RAM IS GORED BY

“THE BULL THE TIME OF PROPHECY WILL END...,” she intoned.

Harry stood quickly and walked over to her. Both Remus and Draco were scribbling furiously. He glanced over to them. Draco passed his sheet to Remus who compared the two copies. All the while Hermione continued to repeat the same thing over and over again. Remus gave Harry a thumbs up.

He reached over and gently touched Hermione on the shoulder. She blinked and swayed dangerously. He caught her in his arms as she slumped down and he gently placed her back on her chair.

Remus summoned a house elf, who brought Hermione a cup of her favorite tea. He handed it to Harry who in turn held it to her lips. She sipped gratefully and smiled weakly.

“It happened again, didn't it?”

Harry nodded and she shook herself, trying to snap out of the lethargic state she was in.

“Do you want to continue, or can I help you to our room where you can lie down for a while?” he asked quietly.

She held out a hand imperiously for one of the parchments. “I'll stay, just give me a moment.”

Remus handed her Draco's copy.

Amelia and Caleb watched with intense interest. Hermione's prophecies had carried them quite a ways in this war and allowed them to save thousands. But this was the first time anyone outside of Harry's inner circle had seen her give a prophecy.

Harry watched her intently for a moment, then he engaged his mage sight, checking her aura carefully.

“*Stop that, I'll be fine,*” she sent him.

“*I know you will, but it's not going to stop me from worrying about you,*” he replied.

“*Well, you don't have to treat me like I'm an invalid or something,*” she snapped.

Harry's expression changed and he looked away, hurt. He retreated from her mind pulling back and trying to occlude his emotions from her. He stood and walked back to his seat.

She looked at him sharply and realized she had been unfair to him. “*I'm sorry. I didn't mean it like that,*” she sent.

He looked over at her and smiled weakly. “*It's alright...*”

“*No, it isn't alright. This scares me, but I shouldn't take it out on you.*”

“*We'll talk about this tonight or after the meeting, if you want. I know you didn't mean it.*”

“*Alright, but we're going to talk about this,*” she replied, her mental tone was uncertain.

Harry sat at his desk and sighed tiredly. Remus quickly made duplicates of his copy of the prophecy and passed them out.

Hermione scanned the parchment and shook her head in aggravation. “What is it about magic that makes things like prophecies speak in riddles? Blood will fight Blood?”

“I agree it's pretty vague,” Remus said quietly. “Most prophecies seem to become clear only after the fact. In any event, I'll speak with Eocho about this and we'll see what we can figure out.”

Amelia nodded and turned to Hermione. “Are you alright, Lady Potter?” she asked gently. Witnessing the birth of a prophecy was, in her opinion, a rare experience and an honor.

“I'll be fine, Minister. I don't know why, but these things always make me feel surprised and shocked when it's over,” Hermione replied.

Amelia nodded and looked towards Harry. “Do you want to put this off until tomorrow?”

He glanced at Hermione, who shook her head, before replying, “No, I think we can go on.”

Amelia sighed. “Very well. Having spoken with our people, we've learned that the diplomatic mission was ambushed when they reached the home of Jean LaRoche, who is apparently a functionary in the French ministry.”

“Not just a functionary, Amelia,” Remus said, interrupting her. “He's a personal friend of the Minister and his unofficial representative.”

Amelia raised an eyebrow and scribbled a note on the her parchment.

“Yes, well, that clears up a few things. From what we were able to find out, our two men were dropped almost immediately by full body binds. Your Mr. Longbottom put up quite a fight. If it weren't for the damage reported by the healers, we probably would have never known about the fight. When

pressed, he admitted to killing two of his attackers, but he was badly outnumbered and trying to defend his two downed companions. It was an unenviable position to be in."

"Apparently, they ripped his medallion off his neck, Harry," Remus added. "I spoke with him earlier. He doesn't remember it happening."

"That explains how we ended up with LaRoche. Now the question is what do we do with him?" Harry asked.

"Nothing, for the moment," Amelia replied.

Harry turned and stared at her incredulously. "Amelia, six of our security men are missing and presumed dead. A diplomatic mission was attacked and we have one of the people behind it in our hands and we do nothing?"

"You know what I mean," she said angrily. "We don't hurt him. I want him as part of my proof for the Council."

Harry sighed and stared at his desk top for a moment. "Alright, I think it's time you explain this Council, Amelia. Even Hermione didn't have much information about it."

The Minister laughed lightly. "I'm not surprised. The Council isn't a secret, it's just not common knowledge because it can undermine a Ministry's authority with the populace."

She leaned back in her chair and picked up her cup of tea. She took a sip and looked pensive for a moment. "The Council was formed in 1455, just following the end of the One Hundred Years war. Its one single purpose is to keep wizarding countries from going to war against each other.

"In the One Hundred Years war, Britain and France fought over land that Britain owned on the continent. Unfortunately at the time, the muggle governments knew about our world and actively courted our aid in their wars. Wizarding help in that war is one of the reasons it lasted as long as it did.

"The Council, named for the famed island of Avalon of Merlin's time, is designed to keep wizarding governments from going to war. It is, in a word, a court where the Ministers of the other countries are the judges and executioners.

"The Council is rarely called, and rarely will they invoke the worst case, disenfranchising a government. A verdict to disenfranchise is a death sentence for every department head in that particular Ministry.

"There are four actions a Council can take. It can elect to do nothing, which would mean we failed to prove our case. At that point, the other government would be within their rights to invoke a Council against us," she told them seriously, noting their surprised expressions.

"They can censure the offending government," she continued, "which is little more than a slap on the wrist. That would be a public relations victory for us, but have little effect on the French other than to annoy them further.

"They can decide to place the entire country under an interdict for a limited time span, typically five to ten years. During that time, no country will trade with France. No one will buy their goods, and most importantly, no one will be allowed to travel to or from France via any wizarding method. That effectively stops the pure bloods from leaving, while the muggle born and half bloods can leave via muggle means. It's rare that the muggle born or half bloods agree with the policies of the pure bloods running the government.

"Finally, they can disenfranchise the government. This invokes an oath that every Ministry official takes when they assume a manager role and will result in their death if they fail to resign their posts within seventy two hours after the Council's declaration of disenfranchise."

Amelia paused when she noticed Harry's grin.

Operation Headshot would have killed maybe a half dozen, but if they succeeded, there was a potential for them to bring down the entire government.

"Before that grin gets too wide, Harry, not everything is going to go our way. For one thing, as the defending Government, the French get to decide where the Council will be held. It will most likely be held somewhere in France.

"The leader for this Council will be Okobe Umtumba, an African shaman and a pacifist. He holds the tie breaking vote and a lot of power. Some call him the next Dumbledore. And don't frown at me, Harry. Unlike our Dumbledore, Umtumba is a light-sided wizard and his phoenix hasn't abandoned him.

"I met Chief Justice Umtumba once, many years ago, and I couldn't help but come away feeling just a little humbled by the man. He's not arrogant or supercilious, it's just that there is an aura about the man, something that makes you want to trust him," Amelia said quietly.

"So when will the Council meet and what will you need from us?" Harry asked.

"The Council will meet in eight days, but we will not be allowed to attend for the first two days. The same rule applies to France. We cannot attend the Council until the twenty second of February. The Council needs the two days to work out procedural issues and ensure the Council chamber will be as secure as possible. Fortunately, the five other nations that issued the call for the Council will be there representing our interests. What I need from you is your Brotherhood. All of them."

Harry blinked and stared at her. "The Brigade or just our core group?"

Amelia chuckled. "The core, Harry. We're going to court, not invading France."

There's a nice idea," Draco murmured.

Harry shot him a grin, then turned back to Amelia. "We'll be there. Are we allowed to bring any security?"

Amelia frowned and shook her head. "No, the Council is supposed to be entirely neutral. No fighting is allowed at the Council. That's a key point. Unless you are defending yourself, you are forbidden to attack any member of the Council, witnesses or anyone associated with the proceedings."

Harry's expression hardened. "I'm not sure I like this, Amelia. You're asking us to go to France, which we know is hostile and out for my head, I might add, and we're not allowed to bring any security? I will remind you that your very pregnant niece is a member of our Brotherhood and will be accompanying us."

"Our safety until the close of the proceedings is guaranteed, Harry," Amelia replied stiffly.

"Until the close of the proceedings? What happens then? Are we going to end up fleeing from French Security agents?" exclaimed Draco scathingly.

"Draco," Harry chided, then he turned back to Amelia. "Thank you for the information, Amelia. The Brotherhood had stood beside your government since it's inception and we will continue to support you. We'll be there." He looked pointedly at Draco and Remus, who looked back at him, worried.

"Now then, unless there is other business, I think we're done here," Harry said with a smile. Amelia was looking at him carefully and he wanted to reassure her.

Caleb gathered up his papers and walked out of the office. Amelia looked as though she wanted to say more, but seemed to change her mind.

Harry waited until she had left, then he cast a privacy charm.

"Harry, you can't seriously be thinking that this is going to turn out the way Amelia thinks it will?" Draco demanded.

"Of course I don't," he snapped as he stood up and walked to the window. "Amelia outlined four possibilities, but I can see the French going along with only two of them. The other two Council decisions are liable to force them into a corner. It will make them desperate and desperate men will act before they think," he said quietly, then he turned to face them.

"Amelia wants us there, so we'll be there, but I want everyone with at least one spare portkey using the rune sets I made. Hermione, look into creating a rune set to take down a anti-portkey ward and portkey a person. I want everyone to be able to break out if necessary."

Remus chuckled. The idea was ingenious. Harry's rune sets hadn't found much practical use, but this was a perfect use for them. A ward breaking portkey!

Hermione grinned as she quickly jotted down several ideas.

"I'll check our second skins and make sure they're in good shape," Remus offered, then frowned. "Ah, Harry, what about Amelia and her people?"

"Let's make a few extra portkeys, but I'll task Susan to grab Amelia if things turn sour." He paused for a moment. "I suppose I should tell Ginny to grab Arthur, as well. I don't want to leave anyone behind, but it may not be possible to get everyone out. Amelia and Arthur need to be protected."

When everyone murmured their agreement, Harry sighed. "Let's call for a Brotherhood meeting after dinner tonight to discuss this," he told them.

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### Padfoot Library (Feb 13th)...

Ginny entered the library and searched for the figure she knew to be there.

"You've heard?" she asked him quietly.

"I have," Eocho said as he moved towards her.

"I spoke to Remus. He'll be joining us in a few minutes."

The ancient shade nodded, but remained silent.

"I went to see her while I was visiting Neville today. I'd hardly stepped into the room before she woke up and started screaming at me."

When he still didn't comment, she began to wander the room. She touched objects here and there, ran her fingers over the bindings of the books on the shelf.

"It took three nurses to knock her out again. I could feel it in her, feel it reaching out for me. It recognized me."

Eocho merely watched her, offering nothing. When she finally faced him again, he saw the pain in her eyes and sighed. "What are you asking me, daughter?"

"You know what I'm asking. Can it be removed?"

"You've been in her presence. You know the answer."

"But if the proper receptacle were found..."

"The only receptacle capable of handling the evil within her was destroyed by the Maglios."

The door to the room opened and Remus entered. Closing the door behind him, he leaned against it and waited.

"Another dagger then," she began.

"You would willingly being another here?" he asked, studying her. "You have faced the evil within it. How long before it breaks free and finds another victim?"

"We could form another circle," she said, almost desperate now.

"Daughter," he said, moving closer to her, "you know the risks involved, the risks you'll be asking them all to make, assuming another dagger could be found."

She moved away, turning her back to him. "What's the point then, Honored Teacher?" she asked, scathingly. "We took the risk to invoke the Brotherhood Rite and were blessed with new abilities and power. And for all we've worked for, all we've trained for, we still can't save the life of a fourteen year old girl!"

"I can only tell you the same thing you've told the Maglios. You cannot save them all," Eocho said quietly.

"And now I know how much he must have hated to hear those words!" she exclaimed bitterly.

Eocho did not reply.

"You know what they'll do," she said, turning to face him.

"I do." He raised his head and looked at her. "Daughter, I know the pain this causes you. I can only ask you to believe me when I tell you that she will find no peace in this life."

"And the next?" she asked, her eyes boring into his.

"The Gods are forgiving," he told her. "The girl was an innocent. She did not willingly embrace the evil of the dagger."

She closed her eyes and bowed her head. When Remus' arms wrapped around her from behind, she leaned back against him and let her tears fall as grief for the young girl wash over her.

"If you want, Ginny, I'll speak to Healer August," Remus offered quietly.

She could only nod at him.

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### **Weasley Cottage, Haven, later that evening...**

"Mister Minister?" a small voice called quietly. "Sir?"

When a small, cool hand touched his shoulder, Arthur opened his eyelids and looked into a large pair of glowing green eyes.

Jerking away, he cursed as his legs tangled in the blankets. "What the hell?" he exclaimed.

"Mister Minister must be waking now," the voice said.

Grabbing his wand from the bedside table, he lit the tip and scowled. "Dilly?"

"Yes, sir. It be Dilly," the small elf said, her voice quiet.

"What's wrong?" he asked, looking around the room in confusion.

"Melinda do be needing you," the creature told him.

"What happened?" he asked as he tried to kick free of the bedding.

"She do be grieving, Mister Minister," Dilly told him as she reached out to untangled the blankets. "Melinda did help the Pappy Healer release the young one tonight."

"Pappy Healer?"

"She who do be in charge of the hospital," Dilly clarified, tugging the blanket out from underneath him.

"Sylvia August," Arthur corrected.

"Yes, the Pappy Healer."



Finally free of the blankets, he sat on the edge of the bed and stared at Dilly. "Healer August helped the young one... Wait, are you telling me they gave Orla Quirke Mercy?"

"That do be what they called it," the elf confirmed, her large eyes swimming with sadness.

"Oh, Merlin. That means Ginny..." He sighed heavily.

"The short, flame haired girl was unable to help her and the young one's parents wanted their child's pain to end," Dilly explained. "The Pappy Healer knows not to be alone. She is with Professor Kittycat tonight."

"And Melinda?" he asked quietly, though he was afraid he already knew the answer.

"She do be in her room. She will not speak of it to Dilly, but Dilly can feel her pain. She did refuse the Pappy Healer's offer of comfort."

Arthur cursed quietly and stood up. Searching for the robe he'd discarded earlier that night, he threw it over his pajama bottoms.

"Dilly is sorry to be waking you," the elf said softly, "but Dilly does not know how to be helping her friend."

"You did the right thing," Arthur assured her. Sliding his wand into his robe pocket, he reached out for Dilly's hand. "Alright, take me to her."

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### **Melinda McKinney's Cottage, moments later...**

Arriving in the darkened cottage, Dilly released Arthur's hand. "She do be in her bedroom," she said quietly. "Please, help her."

"I'll try, Dilly. Thank you for coming to get me."

Nodding, Dilly went into the kitchen, waiting, hoping to be called.

Moving towards the bedroom, Arthur just missed stubbing his toe on an end table. Reaching the door, he pushed it open and sighed.

The room was lit by a few candles, their light dancing on the walls. Melinda sat on a comfortable looking chair in front of her bedroom window. When the door opened, she snapped, "I told you I didn't want to be disturbed, Dilly."

"It's not Dilly," Arthur said.

She stood up and moved to him quickly. "Arthur? What's wrong? Has something happened?"

"Probably not in the way that you mean," he said, wrapping his arms around her. He closed his eyes for a moment, wondering how to approach the topic. Seeing no other way, he shrugged mentally. "Dilly woke me. She told me what happened tonight."

He felt her stiffen in his arms, but refused to let go when she tried to pull away.

"She had no right," Melinda said angrily.

"She had every right. You made her a member of your family and she loves you. Seeing you in pain hurts her."

"I'm fine. I don't need someone to hold my hand."

He leaned away from her enough to look into her eyes. "Bollocks. Sylvia was smart enough to know she'd need support tonight. So do you, though you don't want to admit it."

She twisted in his arms until he let her go. She stepped back from him and sneered. "I murdered a child tonight and you tell me I need support?" She laughed coldly.

"You didn't kill her, Melinda. Voldemort did."

"Have you noticed," she began, pacing, "that every death is laid at that monster's feet? Convenient for us, don't you think?" She shook her head. "Voldemort didn't kill her, Arthur, I did. Sylvia felt I needed to learn how to administer Mercy, so she guided me through the procedure. It was my wand, my magic, my will, that ended that young girl's life!"

"Stop it," he told her harshly.

"You know nothing of this. Go home, Arthur. I don't want you here," she said flatly, turning her back on him.

"I know nothing of this? My daughter destroyed that damn dagger and I held her as she wept over what was once a girl named Orla Quirke!" he exclaimed fiercely. "She told me exactly what that dagger had done to the girl. You didn't kill her any more than Ginny did!"

"You weren't there," Melinda began.

"That doesn't mean I don't understand what happened."

"Have you ever seen Mercy administered?" she asked, spinning around to face him.

No.”

She drew her wand, held it up and approached him slowly. “Shall I tell you of it? It’s rather simple, actually.”

He slapped her wand out of her hand and grabbed her shoulders roughly. “Enough! This is a load of shit and you know it. If you had really murdered Orla, you wouldn’t be grieving for her. The person she was died the moment she picked up that damn dagger! And don’t tell me I don’t understand. I nearly lost Ginny to something similar in her first year at Hogwarts. Had it not been for Harry, she would have died.”

“But she didn’t. Someone was there to save her. Where was Orla’s ‘someone’?” she asked, her icy mask melting into one of grief.

He wrapped his arms around her. “Oh, darling, don’t do that to yourself. You couldn’t have known she needed help. You did the only thing you could have. You released her from the pain and darkness. You couldn’t save her life, but you saved her soul.”

Melinda’s knees buckled as she began to sob against his shoulder. Swinging her up into his arms, he moved to the chair in front of the window and sat down, holding her in his arms.

“That’s it. Mourn her loss, get it out,” he murmured softly.

In the kitchen, Dilly held on to the counter and looked out the window as her friend’s grief swept over her. Staggering to a chair, the small creature sat down, bowed her head and wept for the young one and those who suffered through the pain of her passing.

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### **Haven School of Witchcraft and Wizardry (Feb 16th)...**

“I need to talk to you,” Deneb said quietly as he and Millicent left the Great Hall at lunch.

“We have rounds tonight,” Millicent began.

“It can’t wait that long. Meet me outside in the courtyard in ten minutes. You know the spot,” he told her with a meaningful look.

“We both have class,” she protested.

“Trust me, the Headmistress will forgive us for this. Remember, ten minutes!” He slipped into the crowd a moment later.

Scowling, she changed directions and headed for the infirmary, on the off chance someone was watching her.

Once the traffic in the halls had thinned out, she left the school building quickly and made her way to the courtyard.

Finding Deneb, she joined him in a small alcove tucked away behind an enormous climbing rose plant, dormant now as it waited for spring.

“What is so important? I have Ancient Runes now and Professor Ollivander is not going to be pleased that I skipped,” she grumbled.

“I overheard an interesting conversation today at lunch.”

“Overheard? My arse. One of these days you have to teach me the spell you’re using for that,” she told him.

“Hey, I need something to keep up with you,” he told her, his eyes dancing. “But we’re getting away from the point. Listen, Mindy Joyner sent an owl to her parents from the Ministry building. She told Jack Palmer that her internship is really paying off and that she was able to send off the Ministry’s attack plans, including troop numbers, to her parents. We both know what that means!”

“Yeah, it means Voldemort now has that information,” she muttered, her eyes narrowed.

“She’s not a very cautious person. She gave the information to Palmer, right out in the open. I wrote it down,” he told her, reaching into his pocket and pulling out a slip of paper. “This is the information she sent her parents. We need to get this to the Headmistress.”

“I agree, but you don’t need me to help you deliver it. Don’t get me wrong, Deneb, the information you have is important, but why am I skipping class for this?”

“Because I need your help. Jack Palmer told Mindy that he’s sending his parents an owl to report that the dagger has been found and destroyed. He’s requesting that another be sent to Haven.” When her eyes widened, he held up a hand. “It gets worse. He’s sending them the name of a third year boy. He and Mindy discussed it and decided that the third year would be susceptible to the dagger’s influence because he’s rather weak willed,” he told her, grimacing.

“Who is it?”

“I don’t know. They never mentioned a name, but both seemed to know the boy.”

“When is he sending his owl?” she asked.

“Right after class. We have to stop him.”

“No, actually, we don’t. Let him send it.”

“Are you mad?” he exclaimed.

"No, I just learned well from my time as a Slytherin," she said with a small, devious smile.

"You frighten me sometimes. You know that, right?"

She laughed. "Just keeping you on your toes." She touched his cheek for a moment, then jerked her hand back and frowned. "We need to move fast. Keep an eye on Jack when classes let out. Make sure he goes to the owlery, but don't follow too closely. I don't want him to become suspicious."

"Where will you be?"

"Owl hunting."

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### **Loading Dock #13, Plymouth England...**

There were a dozen people working on a crane that had been heavily damaged during the unrest surrounding the fall of the government. Someone had used it as a sniper nest until several reductor curses had put an end to the threat.

The nice neat control cab had been replaced with a wooden shack. It was bare of creature comforts, but it did the job of protecting the operator while he loaded and unloaded containers.

The foreman thought it was a waste of time. There hadn't been a container carrier arriving in Plymouth since April of last year.

A man operating a welding torch gave the foreman a thumbs up. He nodded and signaled to another man, who gave one long blast on an airhorn, alerting everyone that they were cutting away the last of the damaged frame and to stay away.

The foreman leaned over the railing and looked down at the ground, eighty feet below. Seeing it was clear, he signaled the welder.

The man with the torch turned back to the metal frame and his torch flared white hot. Sparks flashed and molten pieces of metal dropped to the ground like meteors. The foreman watched as the eight foot long piece of steel slowly pulled away from the frame. It fell to the ground below in a huge crash.

The foreman leaned over the railing to watch the metal fall and felt a sense of vertigo, almost as though he, too, were falling.

It took him a second to realize that he actually was falling. A moment later, he, along with most of his crew, were screaming as they plunged to their death.

The overhead crane had been hit with several explosive Hammer of God spells on both ends of the crane, cutting away the center section. One man from the crew managed to jump to the hanging edge, where he clung for nearly a minute before joining his fellows in the pile of broken metal below.

There was a moment of total, shocked silence among the dock workers that had been present, and then someone screamed. The normally strong willed men had been forced back to their jobs by the strange black robed men and they weren't about to stick around. They scattered in every possible direction.

The three visible wizards jumped for cover as arcs of spell light lanced out at them. One man pointed his wand straight up and yelled an incantation.

Alastor Moody grinned and motioned for the four men he was with to move forward. Carefully covering each other, they moved one man at a time towards the wizards. Moody looked towards the wreck of a crane with satisfaction. It was a shame the muggles had to die, but they couldn't allow the port to become operational again.

Moody stumped forward, firing as he went. His men were already in position. They had pinned down the three Death Eaters. Now all they had to do was kill them and get away.

The Death Eaters were holed up behind a container. To one side was a warehouse, and the empty dock on the other. They had no where to run.

Moody crouched behind several metal barrels, watching as the others moved forward again. Movement to one side caught his eye, but he ignored it, thinking it was part of the muggle work crew trying to escape.

A large bay door on the warehouse slid open, revealing nearly fifty Death Eaters. They poured from the building, firing as they went. A spell exploded against the barrel Moody was hiding behind and he was knocked back nearly ten feet. He struggled to his feet and looked around quickly, but couldn't see his men.

"Escape one!" he shouted, then he yanked hard on the emergency portkey pinned to his vest. At the same moment, a spell hit him in the legs. He vanished from the scene, leaving behind one leg of flesh and bone, and another partially made of wood.

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### **Haven School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, Office of the Headmistress...**

When the last class let out for the day, two breathless seventh years knocked on the office door of the Headmistress.

When the command to enter the room was heard, both students rushed in and shut the door quickly behind them.

Millicent warded the door as Deneb started the hurried explanations.

"Wait," Minerva said, holding up one hand a minute later. "You both skipped class?"

When Deneb started to explain again, Millicent rolled her eyes. "Let's try to focus on the important issue here," she interrupted.

When the Headmistress drew herself up, her face pinched in anger, the younger witch realized her choice of words had been poor. "I didn't mean that as it sounded, Headmistress," she rushed out. "I only meant that if you would let us explain what has happened, I'm sure you'll forgive us for missing one class. And if not, we'll both serve detention."

"Speak for yourself," Deneb muttered darkly.

"This was your idea, Thorntree. Live with it," she growled back.

"Will you two just get on with it?" Minerva snapped sharply.

Turning back to the Headmistress, Millicent told her what had taken place, while Deneb pulled out the paper he'd written the numbers on and gave it to McGonagall.

"You're sure about this?" Minerva asked Deneb as she glanced down at the figures he'd provided.

"Yes. If it would help, I can provide a pensieve memory of the conversation," he told her.

"It may come to that," the Headmistress told him. "Now, what about Jack Palmer? Were either of you able to get a look at the letter he wrote?"

"I did better than that," Millicent said as she reached into her robe. Pulling out a blood covered roll of parchment, she placed it on the McGonagall's desk. "I haven't opened it yet, but I'm sure it's encrypted."

Understanding lit Minerva's eyes as she realized what had happened. "Was there no other way?" she asked.

"The owl was well trained. He would not drop his delivery. If it helps, he died quickly," the young woman said quietly.

Deneb frowned in puzzlement. "I don't understand."

Minerva looked at Millicent carefully, then turned to Deneb. "Miss Bulstrode has many unusual talents, Mr Thorntree. Among them is the fact that she is an animagus. Unregistered, for now, so I ask that you keep this information to yourself. Her form, a gyrfalcon, hunts other birds, including owls. When Mr Palmer's owl refused to drop his delivery, she was forced to kill it."

"So, what's the problem?" he asked.

"I had told Miss Bulstrode previously not to sample the local domesticated species. In this case, however, it was unavoidable."

"Sample the local..." He looked at Millicent in dawning horror. "You didn't!"

She looked at him with wide, innocent looking eyes. "I was only doing what a gyrfalcon does naturally."

He shuddered. "Oh, Merlin. I kissed you just before we got here!"

Millicent rolled her eyes. "It's not like I didn't brush my teeth," she muttered.

"I think that's about enough," Minerva told them, trying to suppress her own shudder. "You're beginning to drift into an area I'd rather not know about, and we still have work to do."

Reaching for the parchment and her wand, she studied the encryption charm on the letter and nodded.. With a few muttered words, she broke the encryption and unrolled the scroll.

"It's all here," she told her students when she finally looked up from the letter. "The dagger, the name of the boy to send it to, everything." She shook her head. "Sit down, both of you. We're going to be here for awhile."

Sitting down on one of the chairs in front of McGonagall's desk, Millicent leaned forward. "Who's the boy they've offered up?" she asked.

"Dennis Creevey," she said as she scribbled out a quick note. "Chloe!" she barked.

With a small pop, a nervous house elf appeared. "Yous called, Professor?"

"I did, and I apologize for my tone. I need you to take this message to Draco Black immediately."

"Yes, Professor. Chloe wills be quick!" Taking the note, she disappeared.

"What now, ma'am?" Deneb asked.

"Now we wait. I'm not sure what Draco might want to do, but I will not allow another student to be corrupted by one of those damn daggers. If Draco

allows it to come into Haven, which I cannot imagine, I will lock this school down and ward it!"

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### **Padfoot Manor...**

When the unknown house elf appeared at dinner, the occupants of the dining room all froze for a moment, causing the already nervous elf to squeak in alarm.

"It's alright," Harry said gently. "You have a message for one of us?"

The elf nodded, then ran to Draco. "I's is told to gives this to yous, sir."

"You're from the school, aren't you?" Hermione asked.

"Yes, miss."

The Brotherhood exchanged nervous glances as Draco read the missive.

"It's from the Headmistress," he told them, look up. "It seems Millicent and Deneb have uncovered a rather disturbing plot to bring another Blade of Mordoc into Haven. She wants to see me, now." Taking the napkin from his lap, he placed it on the table and stood.

Harry pushed away from the table. "I'll join you," he said, standing up. Seeing the worry in Hermione's eyes, he kissed the top of her head as he passed her. "Don't worry."

"Call if you have need," Luna murmured as Draco kissed her cheek. "And don't walk to the school," she added, a bit louder so Harry could hear her as well. "The last time I walked that path, I found the trail of a Spotted Lurker. They're as big as a hippogriff and they like to climb into the trees and pounce on the unsuspecting victims below."

Hermione shook her head and opened her mouth to refute Luna's warning. Spotting Fuzz curled around the blond's neck, watching her with bright, unblinking eyes, she went limp in her chair and looked down at her plate.

Leaving the dining room, Draco stopped and sighed. "Alright, let's get this over with," he muttered, holding out an arm.

With a sheepish grin, Harry grabbed the blond's arm and apparated them both through the manor's wards.

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### **Haven School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, Office of the Headmistress...**

Minutes later, they were seated in Minerva's office. As Harry read over Deneb's hastily written notes, Draco read Palmer's letter.

They were both scowling when they switched documents a few moments later.

"Well, it was a good idea while it lasted," Draco muttered as he put down Deneb's notes.

"What do you mean?" Minerva asked.

"We're pulling the plug on this. The risk has become unacceptable."

"What about the numbers Joyner passed to her parents?" Deneb asked.

Harry looked up from rereading the letter. "The damage has already been done. She sent her own letter before you learned of it, so we'll have to adjust accordingly," he said quietly. They weren't cleared to know that Joyner had been deliberately given incorrect numbers.

"I'm sorry. I don't work at the Ministry, or I might have learned of this sooner," Deneb told him.

"Don't be sorry. We never would have learned of it if you hadn't overheard her conversation. Knowing about it, we can lessen the damage," Draco told him before turning to the Headmistress. "We'll have to call in our Aurors," he told her.

"Aurors?" she asked him, surprised. "Why not call in O'Dalley?"

"The aurors are military," Draco explained. "We don't want this to become a civil matter. That would require Ministry involvement. Because both have been conspiring with known Death Eaters, this now becomes a matter of treason and the military is in a better position to handle such things.

"Tobby," he called next. Reaching into his robe, he drew out a small notebook.

With a small pop, a house elf appeared and saluted. "Yous called, sir?"

"Yes, wait one moment, please." He turned to Minerva. "May I borrow your quill?"

When she handed it to him, he wrote a quick note and gave it to the elf. "Take this to Twister."

"Yes, sir!" With another salute, he was gone.

Harry shook his head. "I wish you and Dan had never started that," he muttered.

"The elves like it. Leave them alone," the blond said, grinning.

With a sigh, Harry stood up. "Are we going to do this now, Draco?"

"Yes, tonight."

"Then let's at least be smart about it. Minerva, once Twister and his friends arrive, would you summon Joyner and Palmer to your office one at a time, please? Let's not do this in front of the other students."

Minerva looked somewhat take aback by how quickly things were moving. "I had thought to wait," she began.

"It's better to take care of this now," Draco told her seriously. "Let's get them before Palmer begins to wonder why his owl hasn't come back." He looked at Millicent slyly for a moment and nearly laughed when she stuck her tongue out at him.

Seeing McGonagall's troubled expression, Harry bent down next to her and smiled. "I know this is hard for you," he said quietly as Draco and Millicent teased one another about their days in Slytherin.

"Two students, arrested," she murmured.

"I don't know if it would help to think of them as spies or not. They've been your students for many years now and I know that's how you'll see them when they're taken into custody. But please, try to remember, they made their choice."

"Did they, Harry? Does any child really have a choice when his or her parents are Death Eaters?"

"Draco should be all the answer you need. They were out of that life, away from their parents, but chose to hold on to the hate and serve Voldemort. They can't remain in the school to harm or corrupt others."

She looked at him with shattered eyes, but nodded. When the knock came at her office door, she jumped. "Come!" she called.

The door opened and five aurors entered the office. Spotting Draco, Twister went to him and waited to be briefed.

Harry reached out and squeezed Minerva's cold hand. "It will go quick," he assured her. "If you could write the first summons, we'll start."

Nodding jerkily, she reached for her quill.

In less than an hour, both students had been taken into custody and removed from the school. Deneb and Millicent had been sent to remove their belongings from the dorms and each item was thoroughly searched by the aurors.

Minerva stood at her office window, looking out over the night shrouded grounds of the school. She was heartsick, and more tired than she'd like to admit. When she felt a gentle touch on her shoulder, she turned her head and looked into calm, emerald eyes.

"It's done," Harry told her quietly. "It might best if you let it be known to the student body that the missing students were withdrawn from the school by their guardians. Keep it vague. If any students push for more information, tell them that it was a private matter."

"I feel as though I've failed them," she said.

"You didn't, their parents did."

Taking a deep breath, she nodded and turned back to the window.

Motioning the others out of the room, Harry squeezed Minerva's shoulder gently, then exited the room. Closing the door behind him, he scanned the group until he found Deneb and Millicent.

Pulling them aside, he thanked them for their efforts.

"I wish we could have done more," Millicent told him.

"You've done more than I'd ever hoped, Millicent. Had it not been for you two, another student would have been lost to a Blade of Mordoc." He looked back at the closed office door, then faced them once more. "Keep an eye on her for me."

Deneb tensed. "You expect trouble?"

"No, not really. But she took this very hard. She loves the students and she feels as though she's failed Palmer and Joyner. She's depressed over this and is still weak from the attack. Watch out for her, discreetly. If she starts having problems, contact me immediately."

When they nodded, he turned away to look for Draco.

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### **Padfoot Manor (Feb 17th)...**

Harry sat back and listened with only half his attention as Draco explained to Amelia about the spies and what was happening with them.

"I suppose I should talk to Brogan," Amelia said finally. That brought Harry's attention back to the conversation.

"Brogan? What for?" he asked.

"The Irish are our allies, Harry. We've danced around this issue several times already, but the simple fact is we have no legal right to hold these two. If we held them until we returned to Britain, a good solicitor would get them off based on their being imprisoned illegally. Brogan needs to climb down from the fence and acknowledge that these kids were spying against all of us, including the Irish. Then we can turn them over to a military tribunal, like we did with the Death Eaters from up north."

"But those Death Eaters were executed," protested Hermione. "These are children!"

"Hermione," Harry said gently, "they were planning on slipping the dagger to Dennis Creevey. Orla is dead, after killing several others. They might as well wear the mark themselves. I'm not too happy about it myself, but we can't ignore the fact that they are a danger to everything we believe in."

Hermione closed her eyes and shivered slightly, wondering what had happened to civilization that they could sit here calmly, thinking about executing two students.

Harry reached out to touch Hermione's hand when a popping sound stopped him. A uniformed elf from Draco's group appeared carrying a message, which he handed to Harry promptly.

He read the note and sighed heavily. Hermione gasped, as she felt the waves of sorrow coming from him.

"Harry?" she said, standing in alarm and looking at him.

"Draco," Harry said in a quiet voice, ignoring Hermione. "Go to the Operations Center and tell Twister he has an hour to turn out the Brigade in full dress uniform. Have the Brigade assemble in the assembly room."

"Harry, what's wrong?" Hermione demanded of him.

He looked up, his eyes glistening with tears. "Alastor Moody was killed in action yesterday. His body is being returned to us by Mathias Thrawkmort and his people," he said softly.

There was a general intake of breath.

Amelia sprang to her feet, her expression distraught. Moody and she had been partners once, back when she was an Auror. "An hour? Excuse me, I will see you all then."

Harry nodded absently.

"I should go to," Caleb said softly. "I'll make sure the Raiders are ready."

Caleb left with Draco right behind him.

Harry stood and walked over to Hermione. Moody's loss was causing a lot of conflicting emotions in both of them. As he had pointed out numerous times, he never had been a Professor of theirs, but he had worked tirelessly for them, once he had broken away from Dumbledore.

He took her by the hand. "We have to go get dressed," he said softly, then he looked to Remus. "Will you tell the others?"

Remus nodded and walked from the room.

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## Haven Operations Center...

Harry stood with Hermione and the other members of the Brotherhood. Unlike Harry, they were wearing their Brotherhood Brigade uniforms and cloaks. Harry wore the uniform gifted to him by the King.

Not far away stood Amelia, Arthur and nearly half of the old Wizengamot. Behind them stood the Brotherhood Brigade and Stanton's Raiders.

A small bell chimed, signaling the arrival of a portkey from Britain.

"Troop! Attention!" shouted Twister. The old Auror was having difficulty controlling his emotions. He and Moody had attended both Hogwarts and the academy together. They had covered each other's backs and each owed their life to the other.

Nearly two thousand backs stiffened. In an alcove, the portkey arrived with Mathias Thrawkmort and three men of his detail. Between them was a plain pine coffin. Thrawkmort looked shocked, seeing the entire array of Haven's military forces standing at attention.

"Burial detail, forward!" shouted Twister.

A group of ten men moved forward at a precise half beat march. The strains of 'Last Post' began to play. Traditionally a song from the British Army, Harry had chosen several of their traditions to mix with those of the wizarding world for the Brigade.

The burial detail took the simple pine box from Thrawkmort and his men. One man of the burial detail transfigured the coffin into a more suitable casket, polished and gleaming. Another placed a flag over the top.

With the detail leading the way, everyone moved slowly up a ramp and out of the Operations Center to a bier that had been set up for this purpose.

The casket was levitated onto the bier, while the units reformed into ranks again. Amelia stepped forward, then she turned and faced everyone.

"Alastor Moody was a warrior from the day he left Hogwarts, almost a century ago. Dedicated, he spent his life protecting the innocent and he paid a high price for his efforts. I remember when he was injured so badly in the first war with Voldemort and the Ministry was trying to force him into retirement.

"I said to him, 'Alastor, why are you fighting so hard to stay on the job? You've lost your leg and an eye!'

"He looked at me with that crazy blue eye of his spinning wildly and he said, 'It's my job, Amelia. It's what I am. I hold back the dark.'

"I hold back the dark." Amelia repeated, then she paused for a moment.

"Five simple words with so much meaning. It's a lofty goal to which we should all dedicate ourselves. Alastor was a shining example of what it meant to be tasked with protecting our people and our way of life. He died as he lived, fighting for the light and we find ourselves poorer for his passing.

"We have lost a warrior, a patriot and a friend, but we are enriched by the fact that we knew him or of him. Alastor, you may be gone, but your name will live on among the ranks of the Aurors you trained, and your lessons will be passed to younger generations."

Amelia turned to face the bier, she bowed low and then pulled her wand. "Ut silenti etc nos narro bonus," she intoned. A bright pinprick of light flew from her wand towards the bier, where it slowly started to orbit the casket.

"Troop Tribute!" shouted Twister in a voice thick with emotion.

As one, the members of both Brigades pulled their wands, casting the spell of remembrance and reflection. The single spot of light circling the casket thickened into a great rope of light, spinning around the bier.

Somewhere in the distance, a lone bagpipe began to play the traditional 'Flowers of the Forest', while a house elf ignited the pyre. Everyone stood in silence, listening to the piper play, it's notes mixing with the sound of the fire and the steadily growing roar of the magic accelerating it.

Finally, Twister turned to the troops again.

"Brigades! Dismissed!"

In ones and twos, people began to drift away. One could see from the looks on their faces and their posture that they were still shocked. A legend had passed and in the silence of their souls they asked themselves a burning question. *"If he could die, then what makes me safe?"*

Harry stood next to Hermione, watching for a moment. Among the Brotherhood, and most of the brigades, dry eyes was a rare thing. He turned to Hermione. "I'll be right back. I need to speak with Twister," he said.

"I'll come with you."

He paused, then he nodded and grabbed her hand.

He found Twister talking quietly with one of his senior Aurors. He walked up to him and waiting politely until the old auror had finished speaking to his man. Twister was one of the few men left who could intimidate Harry.

"Twister."

"Sir?"

"Stand down the training for twenty four hours and make sure the merchants know my tab is open until ten o'clock tomorrow evening. Then let the Brigades know. But I expect them all sober the day after tomorrow."

Twister grinned wolfishly. "Aye, I'll do that, sir. The men will be pleased."

Harry nodded and he and Hermione turned away from him, walking back towards the manor. The rest of the Brotherhood fell in behind them, walking in silence. No one, it seemed, wanted to break it.

"*Do I want to know what that was all about?*" Hermione asked him.

"*The Brigade needs to blow off some steam. Just because I don't drink doesn't mean I can ask them to make the same decision. This way, they'll toast Moody, get themselves drunk enough to forget for a while.*"

"*When did you open a tab with the pub owners?*"

"*I had Remus arrange it the day we came back from Leeds. If there was ever a time I wanted to get drunk and forget...*"

"*Oh... And now? Do you want to forget now?*"



He frowned for a moment, then shook his head. *"No, the Brigade can forget, but that's a luxury I can't afford. Voldemort's bill grows daily. When I finally face him, I'll be doing it for people like Moody, Orla, Willie, Percy, Sirius, my parents... The list is long."*

*"Then how do you deal with it, Harry? Sometimes I feel like I want to scream and start throwing things,"* she exclaimed. He could feel her frustration bubbling and churning over their bond.

*"You can, if you think it will make you feel better, my heart. We all find our own path to dealing with the fear and frustration. I have you, and that helps me more than you can possibly know."*

*"I don't understand."*

He sighed and glanced at her. *"Hermione, for most of my life I was denied the one thing you've taken for granted. You knew your parents loved you. I think mine did, but have little direct proof, other than stories that others have told me. Then you came along and you gave me a piece of yourself. I'm in awe still that anyone can give something so precious. Sometimes I'm afraid I'll wake up and discover it was all a dream. You have no idea what it's like to take someone who never knew love and suddenly give it to them."*

*"No matter how bad things get, just thinking of you and your love for me makes me feel better. You have a power over me..."*

She chuckled, then grinned at the images she sent him.

*"No, not that way. Well, that too, but you have a power, Hermione. You hold my heart in your hand and could crush it if you wanted. But I know you won't. I never really thought about it, but I suppose love means being totally vulnerable to the one you love and trusting that they won't hurt you."*

*"That power goes both ways, my heart,"* she sent to him.

He slipped his arm around her shoulder and his smile broadened. *"I know it does, I know it does..."*

Behind them, another conversation was just starting.

Draco and Luna started slowing down, falling behind the group. He looked at her curiously, but he kept pace with her.

"I feel your disquiet, Dray. What's bothering you?" she asked, finally stopping along the path.

"I keep thinking about Moody. I didn't know him like the rest of you did, but I learned a bit about him through the dispatches he sent us. He's dead. Gone. And everyone talks of the next adventure, but what if there *is* no next adventure? What if he's dead and that's it. He's gone, finished, the show is closed and for what? To fight in a war that never ends? There will always be a light and dark side and they will always be at war..."

He trailed off when Luna touched his cheek.

"It frightens you, doesn't it?"

"What do you mean?" he stammered.

"Death. It frightens you."

"Doesn't it frighten you?" he countered.

Luna shrugged. "In a way, it does, but not like you think. I know death. It's part of nature, a vital part. When I die, I will be with my mother, who will be there to welcome me. What frightens me about death is those I would have to leave behind. But I know I'll see them again, when their time comes and it's my turn to welcome those I love. It would break my heart to have to leave you early, Dray. Just as your leaving me would do the same."

"But how can you be so sure there is something else? How do you know it just doesn't end?"

She shook her head and reached up to calm Fuzz, who sat on her shoulder whirring in distress. With her free hand she touched him. "You are thinking too much with this," she told him, touching his head. "And not enough with this," she said, touching his breast where his heart lay.

"When you were injured, I bound our souls together, Dray. Our souls. I grabbed your very essence and refused to let you go. It is the one thing about you that is indestructible. Even the Dementor is incapable of destroying a soul. It thinks it eats them, but really they are stored and someday they will be released.

"I have touched your soul and know exactly how close it came to turning dark, though you didn't. Now we are joined and we'll spend eternity together. When the time comes to leave these shells behind, we'll still be together," she said, then she sighed sadly.

"My poor father, he hangs on because he thinks I need him. And I do. I haven't the heart to tell him to go, knowing he'd be reunited with my mother if he did. It's selfish of me, I suppose. The true tragedy of death is felt by the people left behind, devastated by the passing of those they love. Mr. Moody was a funny man, but he is happy and whole again. He had lived a long time without many of his friends, and now he is with them again.

"That is what you have to believe in, Dray. You know that souls are real, you live with your soul bound to mine," she finished softly.

Draco pulled her into his embrace, holding her tightly. Moody's death had affected him more than he wanted to admit. He had attended a number of services, but this one was close and personal. The cynic in him wanted to protest against her beliefs, but he couldn't. He needed to believe and

wanted so much for her to be right.

"Oh, Dray," she said breathlessly. "We will never be apart. Our bond prevents that."

He nodded against her hair. Fuzz, slightly upset at losing her perch, straddled both of them. Then she reached out and patted Draco on the back with her paw.

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### **Padfoot Manor, Hermione's study...**

"You wanted to see me, Hermione?" Luna asked from the doorway.

"Luna! Good, you're here. You heard about the Council we'll be going to next week?"

"Yes, I heard. It seems silly to me. I could have arranged for an infestation of pearly toed Snicksnacks for the French," replied the younger girl.

"Luna," Hermione started, then she stopped and shook her head. "Even if that were possible, you can't infest the entire country." She was determined not to let Luna get to her.

Luna smiled dreamily and walked over to the black board, where Hermione had scrawled her equations. "You've never seen Snicksnacks procreate," she murmured, eying the equations. "A portkey with a ward breaker? Fascinating." she said, then she giggled quietly.

Hermione blinked in surprise. It had taken Remus several hours to figure out what the equations meant. Had someone else done the work, it would have taken her some hours to figure it out, as well.

"Yes, that's why I asked you to come here. I thought you could help me with this," Hermione said, suddenly feeling unsure of herself.

Luna faced her and smiled brightly. "You know, you really don't need to throw plates to blow off steam. This is your release valve," she said, waving an arm towards the blackboard.

Hermione stared at her, surprised.

Luna ignored her as she turned back to the board. "You know, the approach is good, but this is time consuming and the angle is all wrong." She picked up an eraser and wiped away part of the board. She ignored Hermione's gasp and expression of anguish.

"What we want," she said, rapidly replacing Hermione's equations with new ones, "is a quick way of getting out of the Council."

"But that's what the portkey would have done," Hermione protested.

Luna nodded. "It would have, yes, but this way is better, you only need one of these now," she replied placing a final rune on the board.

Hermione stopped and stared at the board. Luna had only changed a small section of her work. Walking over to that section, she examined it, scribbling down notes on a slip of parchment and mumbling to herself.

"Yes, yes. This power tap feeds to... to what? Ah, I see. It goes to the field intensity, which controls the size of the..."

Hermione looked up to stare at Luna, her eyes were wide with awe. "Do you know what you've done here?"

Luna caressed Fuzz absently and nodded. "Yes, I've solved your problem. I'm sorry if I was rather abrupt about it, but I don't have a lot of time to spend here," she said, her expression puzzled. "Draco was upset following the service today and I had planned on spending my evening making love to him. It will help distract him. You should try it. But don't use Draco. He's mine. You've got Harry and I daresay you both might enjoy the distraction. Besides, sex is much more fun than Arithmancy. I always feel relaxed after an orgasm."

She smiled vaguely at Hermione, then turned and left the study, leaving the bushy haired witch gaping at her retreating form.

Hermione fell into the chair behind her desk and blew out a breath. She thought about what had just taken place, then grinned. Luna was brilliant, even if she was a bit dotty. Hermione recognized that Luna had her beat hands down when it came to Runes and Magical Creatures. But she was better in Transfiguration and Potions. It was the reason why she had asked her to help. The two complemented each other.

She pulled a special quill from her desk and a stack of clean parchment. She placed the quill on the parchment and tapped it with her wand. The quill jumped up and began to copy the contents of the blackboard to the parchment in a neat script. She set it to make three copies, just to be safe. Once she was sure the quill was working as it should, she sent Harry a series of images involving the bathtub, a very sheer nightgown and some chocolate.

There was a moment of shocked silence over the bond, followed almost instantly by overwhelming approval. A second later, he did something she absolutely loved. He widened the bond so that she could feel the intensity of the desire she had caused and, in turn, fueling her own.

She stood and quickly left the study, knowing her quill would do it's work and that no one would touch her blackboard.

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### **The Bastille, Paris (Feb 20th)...**

The man stepped into the center of the arena area and a spotlight shined down on him.

"Report, Monsieur," said the voice of the leader.

"Despite our best efforts, we were unable to stop the Council from meeting. We have lost much of our support internationally. Too many have sided with the British against our Lord," said the man in the arena.

"Madness! I knew this course would be madness! You have brought us to ruin!" shouted a voice.

The chamber broke into whispered conversations.

"Silence," whipped the voice of the leader. "Continue with your report," he commanded, once the chamber settled into silence again.

"The muggle government is looking to placate their counterparts by offering assurances and promises of aid, once they invade Britain. We've managed to prevent any agreements from occurring, but the trend is disturbing. I fear we are losing control over the muggle Government.

"And what of Potter and his government?" asked someone from the darkness.

"Potter and his puppet government will arrive in two days. I thought we might take them then, but we can do nothing until the close of the Council."

"Not true!" shouted one man. The chamber sank again into chaos with people shouting questions and threats.

"SILENCE!" roared the leader. This time his command was followed by a cannon blast spell. There was an enormous flash of light followed by a clap of noise. It echoed in the chamber and everyone grabbed at their ears.

"You know the process," the leader finally said into the silence. "Follow the rules," he said harshly.

A moment later, a wand tip lit up and a number appeared above the man lighting his wand. His face was hidden behind a glamour, and his voice would be magically disguised.

"Yes, member forty? You have something to say?" asked the leader.

"The rules of the Council are an absolute. We cannot directly attack Potter or his followers. But we can indirectly attack him using agents not of our government."

The man in the arena nodded in agreement. "Yes, we have used the criminal syndicates successfully before, but this is a big risk they would be taking. Would they risk it? I don't know."

"Offer them enough money and they'll risk anything," countered member forty with a haughty sniff.

The man in the arena looked toward the area where the leader sat. "Sir? What do you wish us to do? If we are found out, they will move to disenfranchise summarily."

"I think the risk is acceptable. The syndicates have provided us with people in the past who were untraceable. We can do it again," said the leader.

The man bowed. The leader had made his decision. He stepped from the arena and took his seat.

"Is there any other business?" asked the leader.

"Yes. Lord Malfoy is again asking for a necromancer."

"Send him Montrose," said the leader.

There was a moment of shocked silence. Guile Montrose was the personal necromancer of the Minister for Magic, and his son in law. Sending Montrose to Britain would terrify the Minister and remind him that he ruled at their sufferance only.

Laughter rang through the chamber as the members made to leave. The Minister had been reluctant in his help of late and this would send a clear message to everyone. Ignore the shadow government at your own risk.

The leader waited until everyone had left the chamber before he pressed an innocuous stone in the wall behind his seat. The wall swung sideways and he stepped into the well lit passageway. A few minutes later, he stepped out of the Bastille and laughed to himself. The muggles might think the Bastille was gone, but the *Fidelius* charm still protected the building.

He hailed a muggle taxi. He was getting up in years and didn't really feel like apparating any more. The head archivist of the Ministry of Magic had better things to do with his time than dealing with the aftermath of a splinching.

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## Beauxbatons (Feb 22nd)...

Harry felt several hands on him and he looked around in surprise. Neville released his shoulder and grinned sheepishly. "Didn't want you hurting yourself on landing, Harry," he murmured.

He grinned. "Thanks, mate."

He looked around and noted unhappily that everyone, including Dan and Emma, were on their feet. He was the only one that seemed to have

problems with landings. He sighed and shook his head.

"Are you alright?" Emma asked.

He smiled back at her. "I'm fine."

"He's alright, Mum. He's just annoyed because he has landing problems with portkeys. That's why so many people were hanging onto him when we left."

Emma smirked at him. "Ahhhhh..."

A set of doors opened and Madam Maxime, the Headmistress of the school, entered the room. "Welcome to Beauxbatons," she said in a rich, deep voice.

Amelia stepped forward. "Thank you, Madam Maxime."

Maxime looked at the group, frowning slightly seeing that there was a split in the group. Amelia's people, and Harry and his group, dressed in their cloaks.

"School is still in session, but we are proud to serve as host for the Council. Today there will be several meetings to address protocol, with the Council convening tomorrow. If you will follow me, I will show you to your rooms."

"Please lead on, Madam," Amelia said.

The half giant turned and led them out of the room and through several corridors. As they walked, a number of student's moved to one side.

With their hoods down, Harry and his group made for an imposing presence in the hallways. Madam Maxime parted the crowds, but Harry and the others kept them parted.

The suite of apartments they were taken to was in the southern wing of the school, as far away as possible from the French delegation, while still being in the same building.

"Was it just me or did it seem like there weren't very many boys among the students?" Dan asked.

Draco shook his head. "No wonder my father didn't want me going here. I'd never be interested in the Dark Lord with all these girls around."

Luna looked at him intently.

"But, of course, I'd never be interested in that sort of thing now," he stammered.

Luna smiled at him. "I know dear," she said simply. Fuzz opened one eye and looked at Draco, giving him an inquisitive whir before going back to sleep.

"Good save... I think," Harry muttered to Draco. Neville and Remus chuckled at his discomfort.

"Beauxbatons has always had a higher number of female students than male students. It originally started out in the fourteenth century as a school for witches. The building didn't have the complex anti-muggle charms on it that it does now, so at the time they hid themselves by pretending to be a convent," Remus offered.

Harry raised his staff and started sweeping the room for listening charms and other possible problems.

"A convent?" he said absently, motioning for Remus to keep talking.

Remus' eyebrows rose, then he nodded in approval. "Yes, they managed to avoid most of the unpleasantness of the purges. I understand that they even housed a group of Jesuit Inquisitors for a few years while they tried to purge the local area. From what I've read, it was one of the most fruitless purges run by the Spanish."

Harry motioned for him to keep talking while he walked to one end of the room, frowning.

Amelia scowled at him. She had told him they were safe and secure and he was scanning for spy magics!

"Ummm, yes. At the end of the Inquisition in this region, the Spanish left, content. And many of the witches ended up marrying the men they had been hiding from the Inquisition. As a result of that time, Beauxbatons has always enjoyed a cordial relationship with the locals. People in the area know magic is taught here, they just don't make a stink about it. In exchange, Beauxbatons provides sanctuary in times of war or plague," Remus said. He was worried. He was beginning to run out of things to talk about!

"Interesting," murmured Harry, pointing at a wall painting.

Hermione walked over to the painting and waved her wand a few times. Her eyebrows rose and she looked at Harry worriedly.

The others watched quietly until Susan, with a roll of her eyes, pushed past her aunt. She raised her wand and the painting exploded in flames.

Startled, Harry dove to the floor, pulling Hermione with him and covering her with his body. When the wave of heat passed, he looked up cautiously.

"OOPS!" exclaimed Susan, then she handed her wand to Terry. "I think I just had a hormonal magic flareup. You know how unreliable my magic has been of late," she said contritely. It would have been a perfect explanation, except for her impish grin and the fact that her magic had stabilized a while ago. She placed a hand on her swollen belly and walked to a chair with a serene expression on her face.

Harry carefully climbed off of Hermione, who was looking at him, her eyes smoldering.

"*Later, love,*" he sent to her. She grinned.

"What has gotten into everyone?" Amelia demanded. "Susan, you destroyed that painting!"

"And in doing so, she destroyed the recording charm that was attached to it. While it might have been useful to use as evidence, I prefer being able to speak freely," Harry snapped. Pushing aside his anger, he took a deep breath before continuing. "Amelia, you've let yourself become blinded by the fact that we're participating in one of our oldest courts. That painting was placed there by people who have all but declared open war on us. I said it before, I'll say it again. It's silly to think the French aren't going to do something underhanded just because we're at the Council of Avalon."

Harry turned to Draco. "Make sure you personally sweep the rooms of everyone, including Amelia's staff. If you find anything, isolate it under a privacy charm and we'll see what we can do about it. Also, since we have enough people, work up a schedule so we always have someone awake."

"Harry," Amelia said in protest.

Harry stopped and looked at her, then he ran a hand through his hair. "Amelia," he said gently. "We're in a country that attacked our diplomats and our security team is still missing and presumed dead. Whether you like it or not, we're in enemy territory."

"You know he's right, aunt," Susan said softly.

Amelia sat in a nearby chair and sighed. "I had hoped this would be an uplifting experience. Something we'd be proud to participating in."

Harry walked over to where she sat and he crouched down in front of her. "It still can be, Amelia, but we need to take some precautions. Your safety is paramount to our efforts, so is Susan's, all of us for that matter. Caleb tasked me with keeping us all safe before we left and I intend to do just that."

Amelia adjusted her monocle and peered at him. "How are you planning to accomplish that?"

Harry grinned at her and she realized that all of the Brotherhood members were grinning. She looked at them blankly for a moment before it finally dawned on her and her eyes widened. Harry had brought his Brotherhood, trained fighters who would give no quarter. Even the Grangers had been taught to defend themselves.

The French, in denying them a security detail, had allowed a group of trained killers into their midst.

She stifled the urge to laugh and settled for a rather fierce grin.

Seeing the understanding in the Minister's eyes, he looked at the others. "This room is clear, but watch what you say, all of you, until we get the chance to check every room."

He stood then and walked over to Remus and Hermione. "Good pickup, Remus," he said. "Get together with Hermione and let's see if we can work up a temporary ward on our suites. Nothing major, just a small trespass ward or something like that."

When Remus nodded and moved away, Harry turned to Neville and Ginny. "Do you sense anything nearby Gin?"

Ginny frowned. Her ability to detect dark magic and nullify it was valuable, but that didn't mean she had to like it, or the fact that people kept asking what she sensed.

She closed her eyes and concentrated hard. There was something vague, tickling at the very edge of her senses, but nothing nearby.

"No, nothing close enough to worry about, Harry," she replied.

"Good. I know you hate doing it, but check for us once a day, alright?" he asked.

She nodded reluctantly.

A knock came at the door and everyone turned. Several pulled their wands.

Having caused the sense of paranoia now washing over the group, Harry shrugged and walked towards the door, figuring it was the least he could do.

He opened it and found himself engulfed in a massive hug.

"Lord Potter!" said Sheik Alim as he wrapped the smaller man in a hug. Close enough now to be heard only by Harry, he whispered, "Be cautious, the walls have ears, my friend."

"Sheik Alim!" Harry exclaimed, nodding his understanding. "Please, come in. My wife will be happy to see you and I'm sure Minister Bones would like to meet you."

Harry led the sheik into the room, while Draco ran a quick scan of the Sheik from behind, then gave Harry a thumbs up.

"It is safe to talk in here, Alim," Harry said, pointing to the charred remains of the painting.

Alim's eyes widened and his eyebrows rose. "Ah, excellent! You are taking security better than some of the others. It wasn't until I and a few others started pointing out the recording charms that the Council realized there was a problem."

The Sheik looked around and his eyes lit up when he spotted Hermione. Walking to her, he bowed, took her hand and kissed the back of it. "Lady Potter, you are a wonderful sight! Come! All of you! Tonight we dine in my quarters! We'll break bread and talk of matters great and small."

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### Authors Notes:

Yes, we've come to the end of another chapter and it's time for the dreaded Authors Goats.

"Baaaaah!" Bob exclaimed angrily.

"What?" Alyx asked in confusion, staring at her daft husband.

He pointed at himself, dressed as a goat, and stomped one hoof indignantly.

"Oh, oops!" Alyx said sheepishly. "Sorry, folks. That should have been Authors Notes!"

With a loud pop and flash of smoke and light, Bob transformed back into himself.

Someone stop me now. I've extended the idea of Disclaimer skits to the blasted AN's! Back to business.

So Dale, still want to know what we've done for you lately? (Evil Cackle) Oh, and the Bastille wasn't destroyed, as you can see in this chapter. Have you ever been to Paris and noticed that rather large area that no one goes near? No? Seems the *Fidelius* and Muggle-Repelling charms are still working! Remember, this is a work of fiction dealing with magic. Bob and I needed the Bastille, so we simply changed history. Get used to that. It probably won't be the last time we use that trick in our stories!

Clt\_71: The authors here at FFA work very hard to put out quality stories and I don't think they'd mind if I thanked you on their behalf. I'm glad you're enjoying not only our story, but the others found here.

Azumi: We're glad you found us. Welcome to FFA!

Vidar: Writing the twins is tricky. They have a bad habit of taking control of our muse and running with it. No need to apologize for your English. It's perfectly understandable and a heck of a lot better than my Norwegian!

Srikanth: Ginny was raised in a household of seven men and two women (including herself). Is it any wonder she acts like Molly? Would you rather she burp, scratch herself in public and break wind and blame it on the dog instead? (Grin) Of course she acts a lot like Molly! Just keep in mind that she's sixteen and still finding herself. We're betting that time and Neville will mellow her a bit.

Princess Fictoria: Thank you so much for the offer. That was sweet of you. We're just glad you're enjoying story.

Melferd: Bob is beyond therapy, believe me! But thanks for the sympathy.

Hesuse: Bob and I really don't have anything against France, but I suppose we could gird ourselves up for war. What do you think? Can Bob and I take 'em? (Grins manically)

For those who asked: The new wing on the manor is still being tested by house elves. They've found nothing wrong so far, but they haven't given the humans the all-clear yet.

Harryetty: According to the British Embassy website, the offices of the Consulate-General in Paris is located at 18bis rue d'Anjou. Our mistake was in labeling the Embassy, rather than the office of the Consulate-General. The Embassy itself is listed as being located at 35 rue du Faubourg St Honoré, not 37 rue du Faubourg St Honoré. If the website is wrong, you might want to slip a note to your uncle.

Digeediva: Why would Harry have a problem with assassinating a head of state? He's not a politician and doesn't really understand the finer points of diplomacy. He's a soldier and sees a rather simple way of solving a sticky problem. Cut off the head and step over the body. No muss, no fuss. As for the wizards flu, the last time Harry had it, they caught it very early. This time, Harry didn't bother to tell anyone he wasn't feeling well and it came on with a vengeance. The upswing to that is he managed to save a plane load of people *and* add a new wing to the manor. Hey, everyone wins. Except Tonks, but we promised her we wouldn't talk about that.

Seishi: Ah, no, we're actually very glad Dumbledore, Ron and Amhar are dead. And it's not our fault France got involved in the war. Blame Voldemort! (Walks away muttering to herself)

You know, I've just realized something. Many of you are rather blood-thirsty! We'll get to the blood, guts and gore, but we can't have that in every chapter, folks, or the plot won't move forward and we'll still be writing this story a year from now! The battles are coming, but we have to move all our pawns into place first.

Musing: I'd reply, but I'm still trying to recover from your stream of consciousness there at the end of your review. Here, have a cookie and calm

down.

That's it, folks. Thanks for reading and we hope you continue to enjoy the story!

Alyx and Bob

*Bobmin*  
*FanficAuthors.net*



# Sunrise Over Britain

## Chapter 27 - Necromancers, Amy and Trials

### Standard Disclaimer:

Alyx looked up and spotting Bob holding his head in his hands she walked over to him.

“What’s wrong this time?” she asked.

“I can’t get a guest disclaimer, I thought about getting the King of the Monkey Slaves, or maybe Old Crow, but they are busy with an act in Vegas involving two monkeys, a pony and a Midget named Brutus. Then I asked Rupert Grint to see if he want to make a cameo appearance and he wouldn’t even return my call!”

Bob stood up and started to pace. “Musings of Apathy has been told by Professor Sprout that no more Hufflepuffs will be allowed to Disclaim anything. Dorothy still isn’t talking to me since I gave that cooking lesson using Toto as an example of microwaveable food. And there’s no HOPE for Jeconias despite the fact that we do give him a nod in this chapter.”

He stopped and moaned piteously. The disclaimer was in serious trouble and he knew it.

Alyx’s expression lit up and she walked over to Bob. She whispered in his ear and he looked up at her hopefully.

“Do you think we can pull it off?”

“It’s worth a try,” she said with a shrug.

The curtain closed on the stage and the house lights dimmed. Slowly the curtains pulled back and sitting out on the stage was Sean Connery.

Bob grinned widely.

“Say the words,” Alyx hissed.

“Bond, James Bond.”

“That’s not right,” muttered Bob in confusion. “He’s supposed to say that JKR owns the Potter Universe and we’re merely playing in it. And that we don’t own anything in the Potterverse.”

Bob turned to look at Alyx who had melted into a large messy puddle. “His voice is sooooo sexy,” said the Alyx puddle.

Groaning Bob hit the switch opening the trap door on the pit filled with mutant sea bass with fricking lasers on their heads, dropping Connery to a watery death. Then he stood and went to get a Wet/Dry Vac to clean up the mess that was Alyx.

“Next time we’ll go with my idea. Vegas showgirls prancing naked over the corpses of Snape, Riddle and Ron,” Bob muttered under his breath.

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### Sunrise Over Britain Chapter 27

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#### Beauxbatons, Southern France (Feb 22nd)...

The Sheik led Harry and his friends to a large tented pavilion in one of Beauxbatons outer courtyards. With so many representatives present, a number of them had opted to bring accommodations of their own.

Stepping inside the tent Harry wasn’t surprised to see it was much larger inside, as well as compartmented.

“Interesting tent, Excellency,” Harry murmured.

Sheik Alim glanced around casually, then turned to Harry and grinned. “My first wife picked it out. It doesn’t look like much from the outside, but inside there is room for my staff, my wives and twenty of our children.”

Harry stared at him in astonishment. The Sheik had to be nearly one hundred years old.

Alim noticed Harry’s stare and chuckled, then he glanced upwards. “I have been blessed with many sons and daughters, my lord, but I can only travel with a small portion of them. Some of my sons have gone into politics, like their father. Others into business, and some I employ in the Ministry, helping me and my cousin, the Minister.”

Harry shook his head in wonder. “Somehow I can’t see my wife having twenty children.”

Hermione nodded and muttered under her breath at Harry’s comment and he winced slightly.

Alim laughed and passed Harry a tray with chilled fruits on it. “Children are a blessing, no matter how many you have. But come, let us talk of

business. The tent is, how would our American friends say it? Clean?"

"I understand, Excellency. We'll be conducting daily sweeps of our quarters, as well. But might we impose on your generosity and use your tent for important conferences?" Harry asked. He glanced to Amelia, who nodded in approval.

"Yes, we have made the offer to a number of our friend on the Council. The Chief Justice was most upset to discover that his quarters were similarly tapped. He has since moved into quarters not far from this tent. Complaints and protests have been lodged and the French are claiming no knowledge of any attempts at spying."

"Has the Headmistress of the school said anything about it?" Harry asked.

"Madam Maxime, I fear, is stuck in an unenviable position. She is the official hostess of the Council and Headmistress of the school, but she is also French and a half breed, holding a position of considerable authority. I believe she is truly upset with the discovery of the charmed portraits, but she cannot make too much noise about them because her position is not secure. The pure bloods in the Ministry would enjoy finding a valid reason to remove her from her position. Complaining about the spying would give them such a reason," Alim replied.

"Well I don't want to get her in any further trouble," Harry said. "I only know her from the Tri-Wizard tournament. A friend of mine, however, seemed quite taken with her."

Alim glanced at him and grinned. Then he turned to Amelia. "Madam Minister, I have spoken with the Chief Justice. He is anxious to meet with you and Lord Potter privately in the next few days."

Amelia frowned. "Privately? But isn't that a breach of protocol?"

"Ordinarily it could be considered as such, but the rules of conduct are somewhat fluid in regard to the Council. Tomorrow we will hold the opening ritual to sanctify the Chamber of Justice. The real trial will begin the day after when you start presenting your case. Please, do not mistake this for any sort of favoritism on his part. He also plans on meeting with the French Minister."

Alim grinned broadly. "He asks for Lord Potter to be present, because, well, he is something of a fan of yours, my friend."

Harry groaned and shook his head ruefully while everyone laughed.

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## Hogwarts Castle...

The babble of voices echoed throughout the Chamber of Secrets, making it impossible to understand what was being said.

When the Bloody Baron arrived, his eyes widened at the chaotic sight before him. The many ghosts of Hogwarts were gathered in the center of the Chamber, moaning and shrieking. The five poltergeists bounced off the walls, alternating between spewing obscenities and gibbering in terror.

Unsure of the cause of the chaos before him, the Baron tried to call the others to order. When that didn't work, he pinched the bridge of his nose, then took a deep breath, though he didn't actually breath anymore. "I will have order here!" he roared, causing the others in the Chamber to jump in fright.

Into the resulting silence, the dripping of water and the creaking of the castle above could be heard.

"That's better. Now, what is this about?" the Baron asked.

As the ghosts of Hogwarts took a collective breath to answer the question, Peeves shot down from the rafters and stopped in front of the Baron. The panic in his eyes was evident.

"Peeves?" the Baron asked quietly. "What is it?"

The poltergeist leaned in closely, his eyes boring into the Baron's. "NECROMANCER!" he screamed in terror, only inches from the Baron's face. His four brothers began to bounce off the walls, adding their voices to that of Peeves.

The Baron jerked back, startled. "What?" Unable to concentrate over the din the chaotic spirits were creating, he bellowed for silence once more.

"Sir, if I may," Nearly Headless Nick interjected into the silence. "The lovely Penelope would, perhaps, be better able to explain what has happened. She is, after all, the one who overheard the Dark Lord."

The Baron watched as the former student came forward at Nick's urgings. She curtsied prettily, then wrung her hands.

"My dear, what have you overheard?" he asked her kindly.

"My lord Baron, I was watching Voldemort in the Great Hall as he held an audience with several members of his inner circle. They were discussing the need for a necromancer. Lucius Malfoy arrived late and was nearly cursed for it, but the news he brought changed the Dark Lord's mind. Malfoy has found a necromancer. The man is French, and is due to arrive any day now!"

A moan rose up from the Chamber's occupants.

"We will not do this!" the Baron announced sternly. "Panic solves nothing. A necromancer is but a man, and we've dealt with men before."

When Peeves began to gibber, the Baron waved him away, irritably. "We will need to watch for this man. He cannot be allowed to work his magic within the castle walls. As he is not here yet, we have time to plan. It should be a simple thing, to dispose of such a creature."

As those within the Chamber began to calm, the Baron looked around, slyly.

"But is disposal enough? I think not. Perhaps it is time for us to send a message to this *Dark Lord*," he said, scornfully. "And let him know that the spirits of Hogwarts will not allow him to infest our home with his filth without cost!"

A roar of approval rose up, echoing through the Chamber. The Hogwarts dead gathered around the Baron to plan their next moves.

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### **British Quarters, Beauxbatons, Southern France (Feb 23rd)...**

Harry rolled out of the bed and shook his head groggily. He didn't care for the mattress in their room. It was too soft in his opinion and left his back feeling bent out of shape.

Standing and stretching, he tried to work the kinks out of his back. After dinner last night he and Hermione had returned to their room and had fallen asleep very quickly. They had stayed late, enjoying the Sheik's hospitality and conversation.

He turned, hearing a knock at the door. Picking up a robe, he wrapped it around himself and walked to the door.

"Who is it?" he said softly. Hermione was still sleeping.

"It's me, Ginny. Neville's with me," came a voice.

He opened the door and the pair slipped into his room, looking very worried.

"What is..."

"Legilimens!" Ginny said sharply, aiming her wand at Harry.

Harry scowled and tightened his shields for a moment until he realized she wasn't trying to get at his memories, she was trying to give him one!

Opening up his shields slightly, he allowed her memory to pass through. His eyes widened as he saw her wake up uneasily. She reached with her talent and recoiled from the dark object, a vase, planted in their bed chamber. She didn't know what it did, but it was dark magic and it was clearly upsetting her.

He nodded and his eyes narrowed, looking around his own room. He walked over to the bed and nudged Hermione.

"*Wake up love, we have a problem,*" he sent to her.

Hermione stretched and blinked in confusion.

"*Problem?*" she replied. Even her mental voice sounded groggy.

Harry refrained from laughing and nodded.

"*Ginny's found a dark object in her room. It wasn't there when she went to bed. We swept the rooms!*"

Hermione frowned and started to get out of bed until she realized what she was wearing, or rather, what she wasn't wearing. She blushed heavily. Although they had gone straight to bed, the location of Beauxbatons in southern France, not far from the Mediterranean sea, made for warm nights. She had retired wearing only her knickers.

Harry glanced in her direction and grinned, then he turned to Neville.

"Nev, mate, turn around for a moment," he said, trying not to grin. Privately, he whole heartedly approved of her choice of sleepwear.

Neville blinked, then he blushed more heavily than Hermione. He spun on his heel and closed his eyes. Ginny laughed at both of them, while Hermione threw on her heavy nightshirt, then a robe over that.

Harry smiled and reached with one hand, summoning his staff to him. With the staff in hand, he started scanning the room.

Seeing what he was doing, Ginny closed her eyes and used her ability to reach out and help him search the room. Then she shuddered slightly and pointed at another vase.

He nodded and started to walk over to it, but he could feel it pushing him away. His eyes couldn't rest on the vase for more than a few seconds at a time.

"Strange. Hermione, I can't even look at this vase for a few seconds," he complained.

"It probably has an aversion charm on it, something like a Notice-Me-Not charm, but stronger. Harry, we need to gather everyone and talk about this."

He frowned at her. "How can we gather everyone if these things are listening in?"

"We don't know if they are listening. They might have another use."

"True enough," he replied.

Hermione walked over to the desk and scribbled out two notes. She passed them to Harry, who quickly read them before passing them to Ginny.

Ginny read the first note.

*Wake everyone and hand them the second note. Say as little as possible until we can gather in a safe place.*

She showed the note to Neville, then nodded at Harry. The second note was even more succinct.

*Dark Objects found in bedrooms. Say nothing. Get dressed and meet in front of Sheik Alim's tent in thirty minutes. -Harry*

Ginny and Neville slipped quietly from the room while Harry glared at the offending object.

Hermione frowned and backed away. She could feel the power building as the aversion charm fought with Harry for dominance. The air in the room suddenly turned hot and oppressive. Harry's eyes glowed with power and a faint aura appeared around the black vase.

Hermione gasped, seeing the vase clearly now. With all of its power being focused at Harry, she was able to examine it.

Harry leaned towards the offending object and there was a ripping sound in the air. The vase suddenly shook violently and Harry fell to the floor as all resistance suddenly ceased.

Hermione leapt to his assistance. He struggled to his feet and looked at her with a goofy grin. "Guess I showed it, right?"

"Right, Harry, you just proved yourself stronger than a vase. Would you like to try the door next?" she replied sarcastically. "You idiot! You don't know what that thing is capable of doing. For all you know it could have exploded in your face."

Harry winced. "I'm not going to apologize. We need to bring one of them with us so the others can see what we're talking about. Besides, I overloaded only one enchantment on it. My sight tells me there are still a number of other, active enchantments."

Hermione peeled out of her robe and nightshirt, then she put on her bra. She turned and Harry, without thinking, batted her hands away and hooked her bra himself.

She turned again to face him, smiling. "Thanks. Oh, and don't pick that thing up with your hands. Well, what are you waiting for?" she asked when he just stared at her. "Go get dressed, you big oaf!" she said with a mixture of affection and exasperation.

He chuckled, then started to pull out a pair of black jeans and a yellow t-shirt from their trunk. As he reached for his robe, he heard Hermione snort.

"What?" he asked, his eyes glowing with humor.

Reaching out, she pulled his shirt down a little further and rolled her eyes as she read the latest message. "Harry, really! 'I'd like to see things from Voldemort's point of view, but I can't seem to get my head that far up my ass'? Are you trying to provoke a response from our hosts?"

"No, this is my response to their gift," he told her, nodding toward the vase.

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### **Thirty Minutes Later in Sheik Alim's Tent...**

Harry walked into the walled off conference room to see a sea of concerned faces. Amelia looked downright angry. The six members of her staff looked rather put out. While Harry and Amelia had cordial relations for the most part, her staff seemed dedicated to the idea that she was more important than anyone around her and they reminded people of that constantly. They tended to remind Harry of Percy Weasley, in that they made his teeth itch with the urge to strangle them.

Harry nodded to Alim, who he had invited to join them.

"This morning, Ginny located an enchanted object in her bedroom. She notified me and with her help, I found another in my bedroom."

Harry paused and looked around. "These objects were not there last night when we swept the rooms," he stated with finality.

Amelia leaned forward. "How did they get there then? I thought we warded the suites," she asked angrily.

Hermione shook her head. "We didn't have much of a chance to erect any significant wards Amelia. We only warded the main door with a simple trespass ward."

"Then there must be another way into the suites," someone from Amelia's staff suggested.

"Or they are using house elves," Draco said dryly. "We use them, why can't they?"

"House elves," Harry murmured, his eyes distant. "We don't have a ward that would stop their popping in and out."

No," Hermione mused. "But maybe the elves do. I'll ask Winky about it later today."

"Harry, why don't you show us what you found?" Amelia said. Her anger seemed barely restrained.

He nodded and placed a small iron box on the table. Opening it, he raised his hand and levitated the small black vase onto the table.

Arthur, who was sitting next to Amelia, looked at the vase in surprise, then his expression darkened. "You woke everyone up over that?" he said, then he stood, his fists clenching spasmodically. Harry stared at the older man in shock.

"Dad?" Ginny said in a small voice. This was very much unlike her father.

"Shut your hole. I can't believe you people! A stinking vase and you're all shivering like cowards in the dirt!" Arthur spat venomously.

Ginny turned away from him, burying herself in Neville's embrace. Neville's expression also darkened, but for different reasons.

"I don't care who you are. Don't tell her to shut up!" he growled.

Harry stood and gestured. Both Neville and Arthur were pushed back into their seats and bound there with ropes.

"Enough!" he said. "We're standing here facing bone fide dark enchantments and you're going to fight over it?"

"Harry," Luna chided gently. "I don't think it's their fault."

Harry looked at her for a moment, then he nodded. "Perhaps you're right Luna. Let's see for ourselves what kind of dark object this is."

Harry lifted his staff and the crystal end cap flared brightly. "Revealus," he intoned.

A small puff of black smoke rose from the vase and formed into the shape of a face.

"Tell me your secrets," Harry said in a soft voice.

"I am a soul poisoner. Exposure to me will foster feelings of anger, doubt, deceit and betrayal," came the reply in a sibilant whisper.

Everyone except Harry, Neville and Arthur stood and stepped away from the table.

"I wonder why it's only affecting a few of us?" Harry murmured.

"My lord is an accomplished Occlumens. I cannot affect one such as you," the face murmured.

Harry glanced over to Neville, who looked ashamed of himself but nodded in understanding.

Harry sighed and he raised his hand, intending to obliterate the foul vase.

"Harry! Don't!" Remus urged.

He looked over at his friend. "Why not? This is designed to start us fighting among ourselves, Remus."

"I know that. I just think we should return them to their proper owners before we destroy them."

Harry looked at him blankly. Alim stepped up to the table and waved his wand, muttering something in Arabic. A bright blue translucent bubble surrounded the vase.

Alim looked sheepish, then he shrugged. "Often antiquities are cursed with such area effect spells. The bubble contains the effect so that we may converse without it's influence."

"Thank you, Excellency," Harry murmured.

"Alright, with the effects contained, everyone should sit down again. Harry, please release Mr. Weasley and Mr. Longbottom," Amelia said, taking charge.

Harry waved a hand and Arthur was suddenly free. Neville looked at Harry hopefully, but Harry stared back for a moment, his expression blank.

"I expect you to be attending to your occlumency exercises, Neville, or I will set Eocho on you," Harry said in a serious tone. Neville nodded and looked ashamed of himself.

"Very well then," Harry replied, then he released him.

Ginny shot Harry a grateful glance. "I'll help him, Harry. It won't hurt me to work on my own," she said, pointedly ignoring the fact that her talent demanded she work on her occlumency almost daily.

"Remus, you had an idea you wanted to present?" Amelia asked, focusing everyone back on the matter at hand.

"Yes. We have two problems that I see. First is to figure out how the vases got into our quarters, and second, what to do with them now that we have them."

"I take it that you have an idea as to what to do with them?" Amelia asked dryly.

Remus grinned. "Yes. Madam Minister, I do. Two can play this game as well as one, don't you agree? These vases were meant to disrupt our group. I say we return the favor."

Amelia frowned. "How do you expect to return the favor? It's not like we can hand these things back to the French and smack them for placing them there."

Remus grinned maliciously.

"Uh oh, I know that grin. What have you got in mind, Remus?" Harry asked.

He leaned back in his chair. "Back in my younger days, I discovered just how uncomfortable a school librarian could make one feel for returning a book late. And since it was up to me to do most of the research for my fellow pranksters, I was usually the one who got in trouble for returning the books late."

Hermione watched Remus and frowned as he spoke. There was nothing worse than an overdue library book in her mind. Well, maybe Voldemort, but certainly not much else!

"Anyway, after one particularly grueling lecture, James pulled me aside and taught me a spell which he claimed was part of the Potter stockpile of secret family spells."

Harry looked up in surprise. "My family has secret spells?"

"All families do, Harry. There are several books of them in your heirloom vault. Your father gave me permission to look through them after we graduated from Hogwarts. We were looking for anything that could help us in the war. There's another set of books in the Black family vault, but those probably contain nothing but dark magic," Remus replied with a smile. "Anyway, this particular spell was designed to return an item to its owner. In our case, that meant returning a book to the library and when Madam Pince complained, we could always make a case that we had returned the book and she just hadn't logged the book back in."

"By the end of our seventh year, that poor woman needed a long vacation, considering all we put her through," he said with a cheeky grin. Looking around at the people in the room, the grin was replaced by annoyance. Most wore blank expressions, though Hermione, and Luna both looked upset. They seemed more outraged over the treatment of the librarian than anything else.

Surprisingly, Harry was the one who caught on first.

"I like it," he murmured.

"Like it? Like what?" Amelia asked in exasperation.

"Amelia, the spell Remus is talking about isn't limited to books. We could put a delayed explosive hex on the vase, then banish it back to the owner," Harry replied.

Amelia stared at him for a moment, then she leaned back in her chair and grinned.

"I don't want to be the one to throw sand on this most excellent idea for revenge, but can we do this? The laws of the Council are very specific. We cannot attack another member nation," Alim said with a worried expression.

"Yes, Excellency, that is true, but what proof do we have that these vases came from a member nation?" countered Hermione.

"Ah, most wonderful sophistry, my lady," Alim said with a slight bow and a charming smile.

"*Alim sure knows how to treat a lady,*" Hermione sent to her husband in a happy tone.

"*He ought to, love. He does have seven wives and twelve concubines,*" he replied smugly. Then he snickered as she watched the grin slip from his wife's face.

"Sophistry perhaps, but it does raise a valid point," Amelia said. "We have no way of knowing the source of the vases. They could have come from an individual with a private agenda, or worse, through an agent of Voldemort. The Council will have to acknowledge that we British are at war and must take steps to safeguard ourselves at all times. Even in Haven we saw the need to safeguard our people."

Harry watched Alim and Amelia discuss the finer points of what the Council would allow, then he turned his attention to vase sitting in the blue bubble in the center of the table. He extended his senses, testing and probing at the bubble, trying to see exactly how it shielded people from the vase's effects.

Finally he gestured, calling forth his staff. The crystal end cap pulsed with a bright blue light, similar to the bubble. He closed his eyes, envisioning what he wanted, then he conjured a box. It would have been an ordinary box, except that it seemed to be made from blue glass and glowed with an interior light of its own.

"Dobby," he said softly.

A pop announced Dobby's arrival. The little elf looked up nervously at Harry and tugged on one ear. "Yous called, Harry Potter sir?"

"Yes, Dobby. You know where our rooms are, here in Beauxbatons?"

Dobby nodded and smiled shyly at him.

Harry smiled back. "Good. In every bedroom you will probably find a vase like the one there on the table. It's a cursed object, Dobby, so don't touch it with your hands. I don't want to lose you. I want you to levitate the vases you find into this box," he said, handing the elf the blue box.

"When you've collected all of them, bring them to me. Remember to be very careful. If you can't do this, tell me and I'll collect them another way."

Dobby's eyes widened and he stared up at Harry, the adoration evident in his eyes. "I will do it, Harry Potter sir!"

Harry smiled. "Good. When you're done with that, why don't you and Winky take a little time off to spend together?"

Seeing the elf's puzzled expression, Harry bent over and whispered something in his ear. A moment later, Dobby nodded, smiling widely, then he lunged for Harry, wrapping his arms around one leg. Harry patted the little elf fondly on his back, then Dobby vanished with a pop.

Harry waited and hummed a little tune. Everyone else winced, discovering that while he might be the strongest wizard alive, he couldn't hold a tune to save his life.

Dobby reappeared with a pop and handed him the box. "All done, Harry Potter sir!"

"Excellent! Now off you go. Enjoy your time with Winky. We'll call if we need anything," Harry replied.

Dobby nodded and vanished again.

When Harry turned around, it was to find those in the room staring at him. "What?" he asked.

"What did you whisper to Dobby?" Hermione asked.

Harry shrugged. "I told him about a supply of eggnog and Brussel Sprouts I ordered. They're in the refrigerator at the manor."

When she just looked at him blankly, he sighed. "Hermione, eggnog and Brussel Sprouts to House Elves are like chocolate and oysters for humans. You know Winky and Dobby want to have a baby. I just...er...arranged to help them along," he stammered out, a bit embarrassed.

"So the story is true. It has been said that Harry Potter treats even the lowest among us as equals," Alim murmured with an approving smile.

Harry's expression darkened, but Alim raised his hand, stopping him from commenting.

"I mean no disrespect, Lord Potter. All are God's creatures and to see you treat a House Elf as an equal, no, as a member of your family, gives me much hope. You British have a long history of treating others as being less than equal to you. It pleases me to see otherwise. I have heard the rumors about Goblins coming to your mansion for dinner, and the Elves that call themselves Potters.

"You have a sense of honor and nobility about you, Lord Potter, one that makes me glad Egypt can call you a friend," Alim concluded much to Harry's embarrassment.

Meanwhile, Remus was examining Harry's box in minute detail. Finally he put the box down and looked at Harry. "What is this made of?"

He looked at the box and was silent for a moment. "You're going to kill me for this answer, but magic."

Dan and Emma started to snicker and even Draco chuckled at his answer.

Remus scowled at him. "Seriously, Harry, what is it made of?"

"Magic, Remus," Harry replied, scowling back. "I tried to figure out what the properties in his Excellency's spell were. Given enough time, I probably would have discovered them, but I didn't have the time. So, instead, I conjured a box that has the same magical signature as his bubble shield."

Hermione looked at him sharply, then stared at the box incredulously. Remus tapped the box and it made a thinking sound. He looked up to see Luna and Hermione looking at the box with interest.

"It's solid," he said to them.

"It can't be, Remus. You can't solidify magic," Hermione protested.

Remus pushed the box across the table to her. "You can't, Hermione. I can't. I don't think any of us can. But when has that ever stopped your husband from doing something?"

Hermione shot Harry a death glare. Just when she thought she had seen it all, he up and breaks one of the laws of magic. It was so unfair!

Harry quailed back from her glare for a second, then he grinned and looked at the others. "So, what do we do with the vases?"

"How many do we have?" Amelia asked.

Hermione quickly counted what she could see in the box, plus the one still in the bubble on the table.

Ten," she answered.

"Why don't we send one back as a warning then, and use the remaining nine as evidence?" Arthur offered.

"Sounds like a good idea to me," Harry replied.

Hermione pushed the box of vases over to Arthur, who picked it up. Examining the box intently, he finally shook his head.

"Excellency, if you would remove the shield from the vase?" Harry asked.

Alim withdrew his wand and waited for everyone to stand and move away from the table.

Remus pulled his wand out and looked to Harry. "I'll banish as soon as you signal."

Harry nodded, then turned to Alim, who waved his wand, canceling the shielding charm.

He raised his staff and pointed it at the black vase. "Praemium una minutae" he murmured. The vase took on an red tinge and began to hum.

Harry watched the vase tensely.

Everyone tensed. They had expected Harry to signal Remus right after casting. The hum rose in intensity with each passing second.

Harry waited a moment longer. "NOW, Remus!" he snapped.

"Ut vestri erus ego transporto vos!" Remus cried, and he slashed his wand at the vase. It shimmered and vanished from the room.

Everyone breathed a sigh of relief.

"Wait for it," Harry said in a distracted tone, then they heard it. The explosion wasn't that far off and the ground trembled under their feet.

Alim and Amelia rushed for the exit with everyone following.

When Amelia skidded to a halt, her group nearly careened into her. One section of Beauxbatons seemed to be on fire. Smoke was pouring heavily from some windows

"Are there any classrooms in that wing?" Harry asked in a strangled voice.

"No," replied Alim. "The classrooms are all in the outer buildings. And for the duration of the Council, the students have been told not to enter the main building unless it is an emergency. That, my friend, is one of the apartments given to the French delegation."

"What a shame," Harry said, insincerely. Behind him, several of the Brotherhood chuckled.

Amelia turned to the others. "We have the opening ritual to attend to soon."

Nodding, the others followed her back to their apartments, ignoring the chaos caused by the explosion.

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## Hogwarts Castle...

The alarm had gone out moments before and the ghosts of Hogwarts were quickly gathering in the Great Hall. They'd had several days to plan. The necromancer's arrival meant it was time to put them into action. The poltergeists were not in attendance. Their fear of the necromancer made it unwise for them to join the others in the Great Hall.

Several Death Eaters escorted a man into the hall, and the ghosts got their first look at the enemy. He was a short, stocky man with dark hair and a thin mustache and goatee. Around him glowed a deep purple aura, the mark of a necromancer. It was enough to make the dead shudder with dread. Dressed in dark blue robes, he approached the Dark Lord's throne and bowed.

"Lord Voldemort," the man said in heavily accented English. "My name is Guile Montrose, a necromancer. I have been sent by your allies in France, who tell me you have need of my abilities."

"You are correct, Monsieur Montrose," Voldemort said, smiling thinly. "We have much need for your talents here. This castle is infested with ghosts and other spirits. I want them removed."

The Frenchman's eyebrows rose in surprise. He didn't know what he had expected upon his arrival, but it certainly wasn't an abrupt, down-to-business atmosphere. However, though he'd never met the Dark Lord before, he'd certainly heard of him and was not about to protest.

Seeing the man's expression, Voldemort's eyes narrowed. "You think me uncouth, I'm sure. But this problem has plagued me for months and I am anxious to put an end to it.

"I understand," Montrose replied, bowing slightly. "I am most happy to be of service, monsieur, but I must confess, I know little of the situation here. The more information I have about the spirits you wish to be rid of, the more successful I will be in removing them."

"I thought that might be the case," the Dark Lord said, rather smugly. "I have compiled a list of the known ghosts and other spirits inhabiting the castle. We will discuss them now."



"Other spirits?" the necromancer asked.

"Yes. Five poltergeists, to be precise."

"Ah." Montrose nodded in understanding. "They can be most troublesome."

"Not for one of your skill, I'm sure, Monsieur Montrose," Voldemort replied smoothly. "I have been assured that your talents in this field are unparalleled." It never hurt to flatter the man, so long as he did his job and rid the castle of the damnable pests!

Montrose bowed once more. "I shall do my best. May I see your list?"

Signaling one of his servants with a negligent wave of his hand, the Dark Lord watched as the necromancer examined the list he'd had created, detailing the spirits of Hogwarts.

The Bloody Baron looked at Nearly Headless Nick. The Gryffindor ghost nodded in return before turning to Penelope.

"It's time," Nick murmured.

Penelope moved closer to him and closed her eyes. "I wish it didn't have to be like this."

"We all do, my dear," he told her as he wrapped an arm around her. "It will be over soon."

Unseen by mortal eyes, the Bloody Baron drifted slowly down from the rafters.

"The list is quite extensive," Montrose commented as he skimmed the information.

"How long will it take you to rid me of this problem?" Voldemort asked.

"I will need some time to study this information, but it should not be too long. A few days, at most."

"Days?" the Dark Lord asked. "I want you to start immediately!"

Montrose jerked suddenly and shivered.

Seeing the man's reaction and misjudging its cause, Voldemort leaned forward on his throne, his eyes narrowed. "You will find, Monsieur Montrose, that I get what I want, whatever the cost," he said menacingly.

Looking up at the thing before him, Montrose smiled. "If that were the case, you would not need me," he announced loudly, his voice smug.

"What?" Voldemort asked angrily.

"If it were true, and you were as powerful as you say, you would not have need of my talents. This problem you say has been plaguing you for months would have been taken care of when it first became apparent, yes?"

"You dare to speak to me this way?" the Dark Lord hissed.

Recognizing the signs, Mulciber moved away from his master's throne. He saw no sense in being caught up in the necromancer's stupidity.

The others, seeing Mulciber's actions, copied them, moving away from their master, though slowly.

"You think it takes a snap of the fingers to rid you of such beings? You are an ignorant fool, a petulant child," Montrose sneered.

Lifting his scepter, Voldemort pointed it at the man before him. "I will teach not to speak to your betters in such a way!" He gestured to Mulciber.

Stepping forward, Mulciber drew his wand. "*Crucio!*" he cried, pointing his wand at the man.

Montrose hit the floor and, screaming, writhed in agony.

With a wave of the Dark Lord's hand, Mulciber lifted the curse.

Voldemort eyed the man with contempt. "You will rise and begin work immediately!"

Climbing shakily to his feet, the necromancer smoothed his robe with trembling hands and raised his head to look at the Dark Lord. "You are a pig. A foul, loathsome thing that crawls upon its belly in the dirt. A jumped up half-blood who thinks to rule the world, when he cannot even rule his own castle! You are..."

"*Crucio!*" Voldemort bellowed, his scepter aimed at the man's chest.

"My lord!" Mulciber cried out, "you mustn't!" But it was too late.

Montrose's eyes lit up as the curse flew towards him. Making no attempt to dodge, the spell light hit him with stunning force.

As the onlookers watched, the necromancer was surrounded by light and his body seemed to expand, just before it exploded. Blood, bone

fragments and worse sprayed outward, splattering those nearby and washing the Dark Lord and his throne in gore.

Stunned, Voldemort looked at the remains of what was once the answer to his poltergeist problem and ground his teeth together.

The sounds of ghostly laughter suddenly rang out through the Great Hall, and the Dark Lord's followers cringed.

"Mulciber!" Voldemort snapped. "Find me another necromancer!"

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### **Opening Ritual, The Council of Avalon...**

Harry looked around the Chamber of Justice with interest. The building housing the Chamber had been erected behind the main building of the Beauxbatons complex. The high domed interior housed the central chamber, where all testimony would be heard, as well as containing offices, floor connections and apparation points.

The interior of the dome had been decorated as per legend, with scenes depicting the life of Merlin. Along the walls were bench seats for the Justices, and a single large bench indicated where the Chief Justice would sit.

Harry and the others filed into the huge room and he was immediately struck with a sense of awe. A court page directed them to the visitors gallery, where they would observe the ritual. Only the Justices would be on the floor of the Chamber during the opening session.

He smiled and nodded to Alim, sitting not far away. Like Harry and his friends, Alim was waiting for his cousin, the Minister, to show up with the other Justices.

The visitors gallery was situated above the main Chamber so they had an excellent view of the Chamber below.

"It's like being in a cathedral," Emma said in a hushed tone.

Dan and Hermione nodded at her comment, looking at the mural on the ceiling.

"They built this building just for one use?" Dan asked incredulously.

"Why not? We built five one hundred bed buildings for the hospital when we needed them," Harry offered.

Dan grunted and went back to examining the murals on the ceiling.

A loud gong drew everyone's attention to the floor of the Chamber of Justice. Three sets of double doors opened and the Justices walked in slowly. Each wore a white robe and carried a staff, although the staff was merely ceremonial. Harry knew the staves had no magical core like the ones he and Hermione used.

When the justices reached the central area, they slowly spread out in a circle. Harry saw that the robes weren't fully white. On the breast of each robe was a patch representing the flag of the nation for that Justice.

Another door opened and the Chief Justice entered the chamber. Unlike the others, his robe was gray, to signify his strict neutrality. In his hand he carried an old, gnarled staff that was said to contain a relic of Merlin, his hair, as a core. Harry shuddered back from the feeling of power emanating from that staff. It was unlike anything he had ever encountered before.

The staff seemed to jump in Umtumba's hands and a beam of light arced up into the visitors gallery hitting Harry squarely in the chest. He shuddered and slumped in his seat, leaning heavily against Hermione.

"Harry?" Remus said in alarm.

Umtumba grappled with the staff for a moment, then it was over. The light was gone and the moment lost. Those down on the floor of the chamber hadn't seen what happened, and most in the gallery missed it, watching the pageant unfold below them. The Chief Justice knew something had happened, however.

"*Are you alright?*" Hermione sent to him. She was worried. When the beam of light had hit him, it was as if he had ceased to exist. Their bond had vanished, though Harry had remained.

She winced as the bond reestablished itself and opened wide. She could feel his head pounding. He opened his eyes and looked around in confusion.

"*Hermione? What just happened?*"

"*You were hit by a beam from that staff the Chief Justice is carrying.*"

He leaned forward and placed his head in his hands. His temples pounded painfully.

Hermione whispered something and Winky appeared. The small elf listened to Hermione for a moment, then she vanished. A moment later she returned and handed her several small potion bottles.

Hermione was worried because the pain that Harry felt was intense enough to be interrupting his thought processes. She could feel his pain over their bond and couldn't allow it to continue.

*"Drink this,"* she commanded, pushing him back in the chair and placing a potion bottle to his lips. Instinctively, he drank, then shuddered at the foul taste.

*"Now, this one,"* she told him again, handing him a bottle.

He downed the bottle and leaned back, sighing in relief as the pain quickly receded. A faint cloud of steam drifted from the top of his head.

"Thanks," he mumbled.

*"Are you alright now?"* she asked.

She nodded to the others. They knew Hermione would talk to Harry silently and fill them in later.

*"Yes, better now. That was intense. It reminded me of the Sorting Hat, but stronger and less concerned about what kind of pain it caused. All I know is it ripped through my shields effortlessly, then paged through my memories."*

*"Why would the Chief Justice do that to you?"*

*"Hermione, you don't understand. It wasn't the Justice, he had no more control over things than I did. It was his staff."*

*"His staff?"* she exclaimed.

Harry flinched at the volume of her mental voice and she immediately laid a soothing hand against the back of his neck. The potions had relieve the pain, but the headache was still there and could break through the potions when pressed.

"I'm sorry," she said softly. He could feel her unhappiness over the bond. She hadn't meant to hurt him.

He smiled weakly. "It's alright. Let's talk about this later. Did I miss much?"

She shook her head and they both turned their attention back to the chamber floor. All of the Justices were now present.

Umtumba stood in the center of the circle, and the other Justices stood two deep surrounding him. There was a good twenty feet or more between the center of the circle and the outer circle of Justices.

In the center, Umtumba began to sing in a language Harry didn't know. He looked around and could see the others of his group were also at a loss.

"He's singing in his native tongue, asking the spirits to guide us," Remus said, then he looked sheepishly at everyone. "Amelia filled me in on what would be happening. Each of the Justices is the Minister of Magic in their country. The Chief Justice is also a powerful shaman and, as is his right as Chief Justice, he's invoking his own native magics."

Umtumba raised his staff and the endpoint glowed brightly. One by one the other Justices broke from the circle and moved to the center. Once there, Umtumba touched his staff to theirs, causing the end of their staffs to light up.

"The lighting of the staffs signifies the light of truth. The Justice staffs will remain lit until the end of the Council. The lighting also formally opens the proceedings. From this point on, all the rules apply," Remus said softly. "From what Amelia told me, from this point on, it is impossible to lie while inside this chamber. Unlike Veritaserum, which forces you to answer truthfully, you can always decline to answer the question under this enchantment. What you can never do, however, is lie."

Down on the chamber floor, the lighting continued with the last few Ministers. When all the staffs were lit and everyone back in position, they turned as one, first to the east, and bowed, then turned to the south and bowed again.

"This seems to have elements of a druid rituals in it," commented Hermione, watching as the Justices bowed through the four cardinal compass points.

"It should, Hermione," replied Remus. "They patterned it after a druid ritual for justice. Remember, this council is built upon the legends we have from Merlin's time and Merlin was the last of the great Druid wizards."

In the center of the circle, Umtumba rapped the butt of his staff sharply on the floor. A great burst of light traveled down the length of the staff and into the floor. The central chamber floor pulsated with a bright blue light that quickly moved to the walls, and then to the ceiling above. As the light hit the great dome and it's many murals, the murals came to life.

Harry and his friends gasped. It was like watching a movie! Each section of mural was a scene depicted from the life of Merlin. One could follow his life from his birth until his imprisonment in the sealed cave. Everything was there, including the Arthurian legends and Camelot.

"It's all there!" Dan exclaimed. "Look! There's young Arthur pulling the sword from the stone! Did that really happen?"

"As far as we can tell, Dan, yes, it did happen. But with the fall of Camelot, the story moved quickly into legend and from legend to myth," replied Remus in a hushed, reverent tone.

The blue light slowly faded into the walls, leaving the murals animated. One section, however, seemed to catch Harry's eye. Unlike the other panels, which depicted scenes from Merlin's life, this was just a painting of Merlin, no background, no foreground, just the wizard. He smiled benignly down on the group of Justices, then he glanced in Harry's direction. His smile broadened and Harry could have sworn he winked at him.

He shook his head. Convincing himself it was an after effect of the strange spell, he seriously considered leaving the chamber and returning to their quarters to lie down for awhile.

Sensing his discomfort, Hermione turned and looked at him inquisitively.

He smiled reassuringly at her and turned his attention back to chamber floor below. Near the Chief Justice's seat, a pair of torches flared to life, burning a dull red.

"The torches indicate the council is not in session. When they begin tomorrow, they will burn a blueish-white," Remus murmured, then he stood and stretched. "The opening ceremony is over. Tonight there will be a banquet for all the delegations. We might as well return to our quarters for now."

Harry and the others stood and followed Remus out of the gallery.

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## **Hogwarts Castle...**

The celebration in the Chamber of Secrets had been going on for quite some time. The relief they all felt knowing that they were, once again, safe within the castle's walls, was great.

Penelope, taking a break from the dancing, noticed one of their number was missing. With a frown, she extended her senses, trying to locate him.

Declining another offer to dance, she turned away from the party and left the Chamber. Allowing her senses to guide her, she quickly found herself in the old Slytherin common room. There, she found the Baron floating in front of a large portrait of Salazar Slytherin.

As she slowly became visible, she moved towards him. "What troubles you, my lord?"

"He was a great man, you know," the Baron said, nodding towards the picture. "In the beginning, when the founders of Hogwarts were all in accord, he achieved greatness. It was only later, as the partnership between the four began to fracture, that he sunk into perversion and corrupted his house with his ideals."

"I always thought you agreed with him," Penelope told him quietly.

"How could I? It is obvious, to anyone who really looks, that the idea of a pure-blood ruling class is preposterous. The great families have stagnated, become lazy. The only reason our world has moved forward at all is due to the infusion of new blood. Our world would have developed much faster, had it not had to contend with the cancer that has become the great families."

"I must confess that I am surprised to hear the ghost of Slytherin house say such things. But perhaps I carry a bit of my old house prejudices with me yet," she said, her smile gentle.

The Baron grunted, but remained silent.

Penelope watched him for a few minutes. When it became apparent he would speak no more, she turned away.

"He was an innocent," the Baron said quietly.

"Who, my lord?" she asked, turning back to him.

"The necromancer."

"How can that be? He was here at Voldemort's bidding!"

"No, he wasn't," he told her. Turning around, he looked at her with troubled eyes. "When I possessed him, I learned the truth. His wife is the daughter of the French Minister of Magic and is six months pregnant with their second child. He was contacted and informed that if he did not come to Hogwarts and do Voldemort's bidding, his wife would be gutted and her child removed and sent to him in pieces."

Ghostly tears rolled down Penelope's cheeks and she shook her head. "His own Ministry threatened this? His wife's own father would have her killed? What kind of people..."

"It wasn't the government who contacted him. He was sure of that, though I do not know how. In his mind, the group that issued the threat was shadowed, as though he'd drawn a veil over them in his thoughts." The Baron shook his head, puzzled. "The human mind is a mystery to me, at times."

"So he came here to save the lives of his wife and child," she murmured.

"Yes. And it means that I have killed an innocent man."

"My lord, that's not..." she began as she moved towards him.

"No, my dear," he interrupted, holding up one hand. "I understand the psychology of war better than you. I know, logically, that what was done needed to be done. But you'll forgive me if, for this one night, I don't feel like behaving logically. Go. Return to the celebration and enjoy yourself."

"How can I, with you here, feeling as you do?" she asked.

The Baron reached out and brushed away her tears. "Quite easily, I expect. You are young, and still carry some of the exuberance of life with you yet. Embrace it while you can, my dear. Celebrate our victory with the others and leave an old ghost to his thoughts."

Bowing her head, she nodded. "As you wish, my lord Baron." She curtsied, looked up into his troubled eyes once more, and then faded away.

The Baron turned back to the portrait on the wall and sighed heavily.

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### **British Quarters, Beauxbatons Southern France...**

Harry peeled out of his formal robe and pulled on a simple pair of jeans and a t-shirt that read "Voldemort: The reason why some animals eat their young."

Sliding his feet into his slippers, he left Hermione sitting by her dressing table and went into the main common room that connected all of their bedrooms.

"I'm stuffed," he said, then he threw himself into a chair and let out a heavy sigh.

"French food," Dan commented. "It doesn't look heavy, but it can be."

Emma looked up from some needlepoint she was working on. "You should talk, Dan. You came back and the first thing you did was unbuckle your belt."

Dan looked at her sheepishly, then he looked at his waistline. "I suppose I could do with a little exercise," he said softly.

"I could ask Twister to help you, Dan," Harry offered with a grin.

Draco stepped over to Harry and passed him a note, while Dan sputtered excuses.

After reading the message, Harry looked up at Draco. "All clear then?" he asked, relaxing into the chair.

"Yes, and I've got Toby and some of our elves watching for any elf that might pop in."

"Excellent. Thanks, Draco. At least we don't have to make up conversations now," Harry commented, grinning.

"That's a relief," Hermione said, entering the room. "If I hear one more conversation on the merits of brooms versus flying carpets, I think I'll scream."

Both Dan and Harry looked chagrined. They had enjoyed the conversation immensely.

A knock on the door caused everyone to freeze for a moment, then Luna got up from her chair and went to the door. A moment later, she escorted a tall man into the room.

"Harry, this man would like to speak with you."

Harry blinked and stood. This man was nearly as tall as Hagrid!

The man bowed slightly and smiled, his white teeth contrasting against his jet black skin.

"My apologies for interrupting your evening, but my master asks if he might have words with Harry Potter."

"Your master?" exclaimed Hermione.

The man smiled again. "Yes, I am his apprentice. In our society, an apprentice is always a bound servant to the master. Fortunately, his is a most gentle servitude."

"Who is your master?" asked Dan.

The man straightened up and shook his head ruefully. "I am sorry, I should have said so right at the beginning. My master, the Chief Justice Umtumba, asks for a few moments of your time Harry Potter."

Harry nodded and looked to the others. "I think I should go. I might even get some answers about what happened today."

"Not alone you're not," Hermione protested. "I'm coming with you."

Harry glanced at the tall man who bowed to him. "My instructions were to bring you to him, Harry Potter. If bringing along the young miss makes you more comfortable, then bring her along."

"What?!"

"*Hermione, not now,*" he sent to her. *"Just play along for the moment. Let's see where this is going. Remember, not everyone lives by our ways."*

Hermione shot Harry an evil glare, then she smiled prettily. "The young miss would be quite happy to follow Harry Potter."

Harry winced. He knew that tone and knew he was going to be paying for it later.

The man beamed a dazzling smile at them. "Wonderful. I will give you a few minutes to get dressed, then."

Harry nodded, realizing he was wearing only jeans, a t-shirt and some slippers. He turned and went back into his bedroom with Hermione right behind him.

"What are you doing?" she hissed at him angrily.

He put his shoe down and looked up at her. "Hermione, he doesn't know we're married. He called you what he did because it was innocuous. I suspect our bound friend out there is very worried that he might give offense. For now, we'll go see the Chief Justice. I don't know about you, but I would really like to know why his staff paged through my memories today."

Hermione nodded as her expression grew thoughtful.

Harry put his shoes on, then put on his Brotherhood cloak. He gestured, expanding his staff to normal size. She glanced at his staff and reached for her own.

"Ready?" he asked.

She nodded and followed them from the room.

A short while later, they were led into the same large courtyard that housed Sheik Alim's tent. The apprentice led them to what appeared to be a small mud hut.

Stepping through the curtained door, Harry and Hermione came to an abrupt halt. It looked as though they'd stepped from southern France to the African savanna. With the exception of the door, there was no sign of the mud hut.

The night sky was clear and the stars twinkled overhead. A light breeze rustled through the tall grass.

"Sweet Merlin!" Hermione whispered, then she edged closer to Harry, awed by the magic. Neither of them had expected magic on this scale when they entered the hut.

Not far away, a fire burned in a pit and a man sat in front of it, singing softly.

Harry reached for Hermione's hand and walked towards the fire.

They approached the man cautiously. Across his lap lay the Staff of Merlin.

"Welcome, Harry Potter. Please, sit and let us talk of things," said the man, then he spotted Hermione and his eyebrow arched up.

"I had not expected additional guests," he murmured.

"Chief Justice Umtumba, may I present my wife, Hermione Potter? She insisted that she accompany me, and given the circumstances I didn't think it would be wise to refuse her," Harry said softly.

Umtumba smiled. "A measure of a man can be seen in the woman he chooses for first wife."

"First and only wife," Hermione said between gritted teeth. *What is it with all these other cultures allowing for multiple wives?* She thought angrily.

Umtumba smiled, showing several golden teeth, then he laughed and conjured some chairs for his guests. "You have chosen well, Harry Potter. Please, sit."

As they sat down, a house elf appeared and served all three of them tea.

Umtumba sipped at his tea for a moment, then he looked at Harry. "Imagine my surprise, Harry Potter, when, upon entering the Chamber of Justice, my staff informed me that there was a Maglios present. I had thought, after all this time, that I was the last of the warrior kings. Can you imagine my shock and delight in finding another like myself?"

"Your staff is sentient?" blurted Hermione in shock.

Umtumba smiled. "To a point, yes. The Staff of Merlin has ever been thus. It is a guide and sometimes mentor for the bearer."

"Then why did it page through my memories today?"

Umtumba was silent for a moment, then he looked skyward.

"The Staff of Merlin is a powerful tool, Harry Potter. But unlike other tools, it contains a mind of its own that keeps its own council. I was surprised when it told me about you. I admit to being anxious to meet you anyway, but thanks to my staff, I was even more so.

"The staff recognized qualities in you that it rarely comes across, but it's been irritatingly vague with me about them," Umtumba said with a bit of a frown. "It asked me to arrange for us to meet. I had hoped to meet and talk with you after the council, but it insisted that we do it sooner."

"Is it telling you anything now?" Harry asked, leaning forward. His sight allowed him to see that the staff was pulsating with power. Unlike his own staff, which contained no power of its own, the Staff of Merlin seemed to contain its own core of power.

Umtumba closed his eyes and was silent for a moment, then he nodded. "Stretch out your staff, Harry Potter," he said in a commanding tone.

Harry stretched out his staff so that the crystal end cap was pointed towards Umtumba. He tried to suppress his own magic, but couldn't and the end cap flared with the light of his magic.

Umtumba reached out with the Staff of Merlin and touched the tip of Harry's staff. There was a blinding flash of light and a loud buzzing sound.

When the light faded the small crystal orb that served as the end cap for Harry's staff had been replaced with an large emerald that pulsed softly in the darkness.

Harry blinked and stared at his staff. It felt different, more in line with his power. It felt like an extension of his magic, rather than a mere tool for focusing.

Umtumba leaned back, his staff resting on his lap. "That explains much. The staff senses a kindred spirit in you, Harry Potter. The change to your staff is it's gift to you. It also tells me that when you are ready, it will be ready for your hand."

Hermione gasped and stared at Harry. "But that would mean that Harry would have to be..."

"Minister for Magic of his nation, and the chosen Chief of the Council of Avalon," Umtumba said with a smile. "But that is for the future which may or may not come to pass. For now, we have this council still to get through."

Harry shook himself and tried to break away from the intoxicating feeling coming from his staff.

"Harry?" asked Hermione.

"I'm sorry, Hermione. The change to my staff is remarkable. I don't think even Ollivanders could have made something as good," he mused.

Umtumba laughed. "No, as good as Ollivanders is, he cannot duplicate the effect my staff can give."

"What's it like Harry?" Hermione asked eagerly.

He smiled at her, then sent her his impression, along with the fact that he thought he might be able to duplicate the effect.

"It is a marvel to be able to mind speak with one's chosen, is it not?" asked Umtumba with a chuckle.

Harry looked suddenly ashamed. "I'm sorry, Chief Justice. I did not mean to be rude. I just gave Hermione my impression of the change and told her that I think I might be able to replicate the effect."

Umtumba arched an eyebrow. "Indeed? Then you are more powerful than I, Harry Potter."

Harry blanched. "I meant no disrespect Chief Justice."

"And I take none, Harry Potter," he replied with a laugh. "You young people are so serious these days. And as well you should be! But you need to take the time to sit back and look around you. Look up at the night sky, my young friends. Look up and take in the beauty of creation in all it's majesty."

Almost without thought, Harry and Hermione looked up. The southern cross stood out in all it's glory. A gentle breeze fluttered through the grass and the light from the fire dimmed.

"Once, a long long time ago, man looked up from these very plains and could see the hand of the Almighty at work as he crafted the night skies. All around us you can see his work. Man reached out to touch these wonders and was given the gift of magic."

Harry reached for Hermione's hand. Unknown to either of them their, chairs shifted forms allowing them to lay back and watch the night sky while Umtumba spoke. He spoke of mans place in the world and how modern magical societies had forgotten that they had an obligation and a responsibility to not only maintain their world, but to protect it. He spoke of the creatures, great and small, and how they all had their place. And it was the job of wizards to safeguard all the creatures.

Harry found the old man's words moving and instructional. Finally, he sat up and looked at Umtumba.

"The staff tells me you have come a long way, Harry Potter. Thanks in a great part to your friends and to the love you hold for your woman. You have a long way still to go, but having met you now, I can see what the staff sees. You will do well."

Hermione sat up and shivered slightly. The night had turned chilly. Harry, without really thinking about it, cast a warming charm on her and she smiled at him appreciatively.

"Sir, are you aware that we have a child of Gaia among our number?" Harry asked.

Umtumba smiled broadly. "No, I wasn't, but I would love to meet with her at some point. And when we have the time, I would like to talk Quidditch, Harry Potter. I was once quite a good beater, if I do say so myself."

Hermione resisted the urge to roll her eyes.

Harry smiled in reply. After all, Quidditch was important too, wasn't it?

## Haven Operations Center (Feb 24th)...

"Come!"

The door opened and one of Caleb's aides walked in, carrying several pieces of parchment.

"The morning dispatches, sir."

"Thank you, just leave them on the desk," Caleb said. He was uncomfortable with the man who had been assigned by the Ministry. Normally, Terry Boot worked as Caleb's personal aide while he trained in the arts of managing a war.

Caleb leafed through the dispatches until he found one that caught his eye. Opening the letter, his eyebrows rose to meet his hairline. He had never received any mail from Luna Black before, and what she was asking for was insane.

Caleb stood and started to pace the room, thinking hard. Finally, he turned and pressed a button on his desk. He had to admit, some of the muggle devices came in quite handy, once they had been charmed to work around magic.

"Send for Twister," he said into the intercom.

"Yes, sir," came the reply.

Twister entered the room a few minutes later. "You sent for me, sir?"

"Twister, good. Sit down. I have a rather strange assignment for you and Able company of the Brotherhood Brigade..."

As Caleb spoke, Twister's eyes widened. He left the office an hour later, shaking his head. *Just what did she have up her sleeve?* he asked himself. Twister had helped Harry and his friends train in hand to hand combat and he knew that Luna was one of the most dangerous people Harry had working for him. She was unpredictable, unorthodox and lethal, when she wanted to be.

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## Chamber of Justice, Beauxbatons, Southern France...

Unlike the day before, this day found the Brotherhood seated in the area designated for the British delegation.

They watched with interest as Chief Justice Umtumba entered the chamber. The tall African stood and waited in silence as the other doors opened, admitting the other Justices. When they were all seated, he took his place, sat down and gazed out at those in the chamber.

The torches behind the Chief Justice flared and their color changed to a bright blueish-white.

"The sixty third meeting of the Council of Avalon is now in session. Let no member raise a hand against another, lest ye die," intoned the Chief Justice formally.

Umtumba rapped the butt end of the Staff of Merlin against the floor three times, then he released his staff. It hovered obediently, waiting for his hand again.

Umtumba turned to Amelia, who sat behind a table along with Arthur and several other members of the Ministry.

"Madam Justice, as the injured party in this complaint, you will be granted the right of presenting your case first. Kindly remember that Justice Pierpont will have the right to cross examine your witnesses," Umtumba said. Although he wasn't speaking in a loud tone, his voice carried to every point within the chamber.

Harry glanced up towards the visitors gallery, which was packed with members of the press and other interested parties.

Amelia stood and walked around the table towards the center of the chamber floor. At another table, Gaston Pierpont, Minister of Magic for France, sat frowning. He was a thin man with a pinched face and what seemed like a permanent scowl. He looked as though he were smelling something unpleasant.

Pierpont was not a happy man. He had been forced into this trial by virtue of oaths he had taken and dismissed as being silly years ago. His chief of security had been killed yesterday while messing with some dark objects that he shouldn't have had. That news was kept strictly secret. To make matters worse, his pregnant daughter, son-in-law and his granddaughter had been missing for nearly two days.

Amelia bowed to Umtumba. "Thank you, Chief Justice," she said, then she paused and looked around for a moment. "My fellow Ministers, honored guests and members of the press. It was with a heavy heart that I invoked these proceedings. The past year has been a very difficult one for the British nation. We have become refugees while our country tears itself apart from within. My people suffer under the yoke of an evil overlord.

"Many nations have expressed their support for our cause, either with funds, material or by loaning us troops to help us return to our homeland. One nation, however, has not been so supportive. In fact, their policies suggest that they actually support the Dark Lord and his vile beliefs.

"Britain could have lived with their policies. After all they are but one country and not all that important in the grand scheme of things..."

"Chief Justice, I protest!" shouted Pierpont from his table.



“Justice Pierpont, you will have your say when the time comes. In the meantime, do sit down. Justice Bones is still making her opening statement,” Umtumba said with a slight frown. Bones had come perilously close to insulting France, but hadn't.

Amelia bowed slightly to the bench, then turned again to face the chamber and the galleries above her. “In the past months, the Ministry of France has become increasingly hostile. That hostility increased until it culminated in the kidnapping of a diplomatic mission. That mission had been sent to France in the hopes of defusing the rising tension between our two nations. Three members of the mission were captured and subjected to muggle drugs to keep them pacified. Their wives were attacked in their hotel rooms. One was badly injured, but they managed to fight their way to the safety of the British Embassy, and ultimately home. Our protective security detail is still missing and presumed dead.

“And to add insult to injury, they managed, for a brief time, to convince the muggle government to refuse to recognize the British Ministry in Exile. Fortunately, our other allies managed to convince the French not to continue with their course. I only wish I could say the same for their Ministry of Magic and the real power in France.”

Amelia paused and smiled sweetly in Pierpont's direction. The man paled and swallowed nervously. Bones' last statement suggested she might know more than she should.

“I call as my first witness, Lord Harry Potter, Ambassador at Large,” Amelia said in a strident voice.

Harry stood and threw back the hood on his cloak, under which he wore the uniform of a full Colonel. He held his staff in his right hand, the emerald gently pulsing. In a slow, measured pace he walked up to the witness box. Amelia had coached them all in how to act while on the chamber floor. She wanted to present an image, as well as present the facts.

Harry took the seat in the witness box, then he smiled up at the Chief Justice before he released his own staff, which hovered just like Umtumba's. A murmur ran through the chamber and Umtumba's eyes sparkled with repressed mirth.

“Would you kindly state your full name, rank and occupation for the record?” asked Amelia.

“I am Lord Harry James Potter, Patriarch of the Potter and Black families. I also hold the rank of Ambassador at Large for the British Ministry in Exile and Colonel of the 24th regiment of the SAS, or more commonly known as the Brotherhood Brigade,” Harry replied.

Amelia nodded her head and glanced around making sure everyone had heard him. A small murmur arose among the Justices as they realized that Harry held ranks in both worlds.

“My lord, do you remember a meeting with myself and the French Ambassador to Ireland on November 21st?”

“I do. Ambassador Delafote explained how a group of eight German nationals arrived at one of their custom points, presumably from Britain and were severely ill. We explained that we had a cure for them, but could only make it available if we could first interrogate the subjects. Ambassador Delafote refused to allow us to interrogate them, so we withheld the cure.”

“And what happened to those people, Lord Potter?”

“They died, Madam Minister,” he replied softly.

“Tell me, my lord, have any other countries received people arriving from Britain?”

“Yes, three that I am aware of. The United States, Norway and Ecuador.”

“And what happened in those cases, my Lord?”

“As per our policy, we interrogated the individuals in question before administering the cure. In two of those cases, they were people who were supporting Lord Voldemort, but hadn't been marked. The third case was a Norwegian national who had to kill in order to make his escape from Britain. In all three cases, the cure was administered.”

“Who was present during those interrogations, my Lord?”

“A member of the Haven Hospital staff was present with the cure, as well as a member of the Irish Aurory, an intelligence officer for the British Ministry of Magic and representatives of the nation in question,” Harry replied.

“So you weren't present yourself?”

“No, my involvement is minimal. I am the only one capable of imbuing the potion with the necessary magic. Every two months I go to the hospital and help create the cure which the hospital stocks, but I don't attend the interrogations.”

“What was the French reaction to the death of those eight people?”

“I was told towards the end of January that the French had placed a warrant for my arrest for my involvement in the deaths of the eight Germans, as well as my involvement in the death of Albus Dumbledore,” Harry replied in an even tone.

“Despite your Ambassadorial status and diplomatic immunity?”

“Yes.”

“Did you kill Albus Dumbledore?”

"No. We dueled and I had him beaten. He was down, wounded and bleeding, when he was killed by a Snorkack."

"Objection! The witness is not stating facts!" shouted Pierpont.

"Chief Justice, if necessary we shall prove to the court that Albus Dumbledore was, in fact, killed by a familiar of one of Lord Potter's acquaintances, but that is not the issue of this trial!" Amelia countered quickly.

Umtumba leaned back and was silent for a moment, then he looked sternly at Gaston Pierpont.

"Justice Pierpont, need I remind you that no one is capable of lying within this chamber? Lord Potter may avoid answering a question, but he cannot lie if he chooses to answer. Your objection is overruled," Umtumba said.

Pierpont sat again, glaring at Harry and Amelia.

"Let the record clearly show that the witness has stated that he did not kill Albus Dumbledore," Umtumba said, then he nodded to Amelia. "You may proceed, Justice Bones."

From the British delegation a faint whirring noise was heard and Harry couldn't help but smile.

Amelia nodded to the Chief Justice and turned back to Harry in the witness box. "My Lord, as a result of the actions taken by France you did not go on the diplomatic mission like I had originally planned, did you?"

"You know I didn't, Madam Minister. That is why you asked me for a recommendation of someone I trusted, rather than asking me to go on the mission."

Amelia nodded knowingly. "My lord, getting back to the eight German nationals in question, why did you refuse to give them the cure?"

Harry blinked in surprise at the question. "Madam Minister, it was not up to me to refuse or grant the cure. Yes, I told Ambassador Delafloate that we would be unable to help them, but only after he refused to allow us to interrogate them. It is a Ministry policy and I was following that policy."

Amelia paced for a moment in front of the witness box, while that fact sunk into the attending Justices.

"So, you were merely following policy that I had already approved and negotiated with the Irish?"

"Yes, that is correct."

"Do you regret withholding the cure, my lord?"

"Madam Minister, I regret every action I have taken which resulted in loss of life, but we are at war. They were the enemy," Harry replied in a soft tone.

Amelia smiled. "I have no further questions. If Justice Pierpont wishes, he may question the witness."

Amelia stepped back behind her table and sat down.

Gaston Pierpont stood and straightened out his robe before walking around the table to face Harry directly.

"Monsieur Potter, you are a wanted felon, no?" asked Pierpont in an oily voice.

"I am wanted by the French Government, yes," Harry replied with a frown. "But I do not consider myself a felon."

"Ah, but Monsieur, it is through your direct actions that those poor Germans died? Yes or no?"

"No, sir. Their deaths are a direct result of their own actions," Harry countered with just a touch of anger.

"*Easy, my love. He wants you angry,*" Hermione sent him. She stood and walked down the stairs to the table where Amelia sat. She sat next to her and scribbled a quick note, which she passed to Amelia.

Amelia glanced at it, grinned, and nodded slightly.

"Oh, so it is their fault then? How do you come to that conclusion, Monsieur?"

"They crossed the ward twice, once going in to Britain and once coming back," Harry replied easily. He was taking Hermione's comment to heart.

"Ah, yes, your illegal ward, which blockaded an entire country," Pierpont said with a sneer.

Harry sat silent. There was no question there as far as he could tell.

Pierpont frowned and looked at Harry. "What? Have you no comment about your ward, Monsieur?"

"You asked no question, sir. What would you like me to say? The specifics of what it does have been published by several media outlets. As far as it's internal workings are concerned, those are classified and would probably escape you," Harry replied, then he leaned back on his chair.

A low murmur of laughter rippled through the visitors gallery and Chief Justice Umtumba banged his gavel several times.

"The witness will confine himself to answering the questions," Umtumba admonished Harry.

Harry colored slightly and nodded to the Justice.

Pierpont scowled and glared at Harry. "Aren't you worried, Monsieur, that following these proceedings you will not find yourself in French custody?"

"No, I'm not worried," Harry replied, smiling thinly.

Pierpont blinked in surprise. "Why not?"

"Because I doubt your masters will give you that order," Harry replied. He slowly released his magic, allowing it to build. His eyes began to glow eerily and he stared at Pierpont, expressionless.

No one in the Justice stands or the visitor's gallery could see what he was doing, but he was clearly scaring Pierpont, who took several steps back.

"No further questions!" he muttered and returned to his table.

"The witness may step down," Umtumba said.

Harry stood, his magic once more under his firm control. He reached for his staff and walked back to the table where Amelia and Hermione sat.

"We will recess for thirty minutes," Umtumba called, then he banged his gavel.

Harry kissed Hermione's cheek. "Thank you," he said softly, taking her hand in his.

She smiled. "Come on. Amelia is going to be spending the rest of the day submitting motions. We can take a break from all this now."

He nodded and glanced up at where his friends sat. Luna leaned against Draco, holding his hand. Her free hand caressed Fuzz, who stared down at Harry with wide, shining eyes.

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### Haven Operations Center, Q Branch...

Inga sat at her desk examining the detailed plans for another of Fred and George's inventions when something occurred to her and she looked over at her sister. "Hels, have you seen Amy in the last day or two?" she asked, worriedly.

Helga looked up and frowned. "No, I can't say that I have. It's funny, I was expecting her report on the exploding groundhogs yesterday. She doesn't normally forget stuff like that."

Inga stood and walked over to the door that led to the lab area. She opened the door and looked around carefully before entering. Not seeing any obvious threat, she touched a medallion she wore and a small body shield snapped into place. It was a gift from Ginny and enchanted by Harry. By touching the medallion, she could activate a small shield that would repel many common hexes.

Helga activated her own shield, then followed her sister into the lab area. "Alright, you two, where are you hiding now?" she called in a loud voice.

Laughter could be heard from one of the cabinets and it rocked violently.

The blond twins exchanged an amused glance, then walked over to the cabinet and opened it. Fred and George tumbled out, laughing, but looking highly relieved.

"Thank Merlin! If we had stayed in there any longer, I would have ended up proposing to him!" exclaimed Fred.

"That was too much information," Inga muttered with a slight shudder.

George fussed with his hair. "I am, in some circles, considered to be quite a catch, I'll have you know."

Helga leaned down and grasped him by an earlobe, pinching tightly. George winced and twisted, trying to escape her grip. "You are already caught, George Weasley, and don't you forget it!" she said intently before releasing him.

George rubbed his ear, but he looked extremely pleased with himself. He stood and looked at the two sisters.

"I'd like to thank you both for releasing us from Amy's trap, but if I thanked you the way I'd like, Freddo here would kill me."

"Damn straight!" Fred said with a grin. "Besides, that's my fantasy you're stealing!"

The girls rolled their eyes.

"Will you two get your minds out of the gutter for ten minutes," Inga said.

"I don't know, it kind of sounded like fun, Inga," Helga murmured, then she blushed while both Weasleys waggled their eyebrows at her.

Inga threw up her hands and walked over to a cabinet. Reaching in, she pulled out a ten gage shotgun and she cocked it. The room instantly fell

silent.

"Not going to happen," she snarled. "Now where is Amy? Her report on the exploding groundhogs was due yesterday."

Fred looked down and scuffed a foot along the floor. "Right, about Amy. See, I was trying something we bought from Jeconais Jokes in Toronto."

"Oops," muttered George.

The two twins looked at each other and broke down laughing. "You didn't!"

"I did!"

"Which foot?"

"Left, you?"

"Right. So you took the Sydney tube? I thought it was back ordered!"

Inga stomped her foot and raised the gun, pointing it at the ceiling. She pulled the trigger. There was a muffled pop and flowers sprouted from the end of the barrel.

Fred walked over and gently took the shotgun from her now limp fingers. "Flower Power, love," he said, then he kissed her cheek.

Helga collapsed, weak with laughter, at the expression on Inga's face.

George shook his head and pulled his wand. It wasn't good for Helga to be laughing at Inga's expense, at least when he didn't have anything to do about causing that laughter. He fired off a quick transfiguration hex, which rebounded off Helga's shield, hitting him square in the chest.

Fred and Inga joined Helga on the floor, howling, while George looked down morosely at his pretty white dress with pink polka dots and his bright yellow parasol. All in all, it was really a stunning outfit, especially with the wired hoop skirt.

After a few minutes of struggling, George managed to return his clothing to normal and everyone sat at one of the tables, where Helga made tea.

"Alright, all jokes aside. Where is Amy?" asked Helga.

"Sydney, Australia," answered Fred.

"Reykjavik, Iceland," answered George.

The two red heads looked at each other and started to giggle.

Helga and Inga sighed and shared a sympathetic glance.

"Are you sure you want to marry him?" asked Helga.

"Are you sure you want to marry *him*?" countered Inga.

Their comments sobered Fred and George immediately.

"Look girls, it's simple, really," said Fred.

"It all started with that komputer upstairs," George added and Fred nodded in agreement.

"Computer," Helga offered.

"Right, the kornputer. Anyway, we were suffering the net," George said proudly.

"And we ran into Jeconais' Jokes in Toronto. It's a wizarding shop and we ordered some stuff from them. They had some really silly stuff, Village People Powder and Spice Girl Sauce, but the really cool stuff was their Portkey Paste. We ordered a couple tubes of the stuff," said Fred.

The two blonds leaned back in their chairs. "And?" they asked dryly. This had disaster for Amy written all over it.

"You know that prank war we've been having with Amy?" George asked in a meek voice.

They weren't allowed to prank Draco anymore, and pranking the woman you loved was a sure fire way to end up sleeping on the couch. That only left family and Amy, and while Ginny was an easy mark, her returning pranks always bordered on total warfare.

"Well, I put some of the portkey paste on her left shoe," said Fred.

"And I put some on her right shoe," added George, which caused them both to start laughing again.

The Johansen twins looked perplexed. "So where did Amy go?" asked Inga.

"It's like this, love. When she gets to Iceland and lands, the portkey on the other foot activates and off she goes to Australia," said Fred.

And when she arrives in Australia, the Iceland portkey activates," added George. "It should wear off in a few days."

Fred and George exchanged a look and began to laugh once more. A moment later, the Johansen twins joined them.

Meanwhile, somewhere over the Asian continent, a solitary voice could be heard screaming as it sped northwest at high speed. She had long since emptied the contents of her stomach somewhere over central Asia, and in doing so, had inadvertently started a new religious movement.

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### **Beauxbatons, Southern France...**

Harry leaned back on the bench and absently massaged his leg while he basked in the bright, warm sunshine. Back home it was probably raining again, with the temperatures just hovering just above freezing.

"There is a lot to be said for this kind of weather," he said softly.

Hermione leaned against him and nodded. She, too, was enjoying the warm afternoon sun. Several of the Brotherhood were nearby, ostensibly enjoying the weather, but Harry felt they may be playing watchdog on him and Hermione.

He had taken Amelia's advice. With the motions she was planning on putting forth today, there would be little need for their presence until tomorrow when the real testimony started again.

"You didn't do too bad in there this morning," Hermione said.

*"If it weren't for you, I would have lost control over my anger,"* he replied silently. *"Thank you."*

*"I know. I was angry at what he was trying to imply too, but this really was a case where you needed to remain calm. And did you see the expression on his face when you told him he wouldn't understand the details of the ward? I nearly peed in my pants trying to control my laughter!"*

Harry spun on the bench, pulling Hermione into a tight embrace. He kissed the top of her head. *"Oh, Hermione, don't ever change!"*

*"What?"*

He chuckled and nuzzled against her neck. *"Just don't change, my heart."*

The one thing he couldn't do is tell her that no matter how often she tried to come across as stuffy, she still let part of the girl inside her slip out, like her comment about what she nearly did. She tried hard to model herself after Minerva McGonagall, but Harry knew, deep down, there was a normal girl in there.

A cough interrupted their conversation, which probably was a good thing considering Hermione's confusion.

They both looked up, and up and up again until they spotted Madam Maxime standing nearby, waiting with a slight smile on her face.

He released Hermione and stood, swaying slightly as his leg strained a bit under him.

"Monsieur Potter, I hope I am not interrupting?"

"No, not at all, Madam Maxime. Would you care to sit?" he asked, and pointed to an empty bench.

"Perhaps that would be a good idea," she said. Walking to the bench, she picked it up with one hand, walked back the Potters and put it down in front of theirs. Once seated, she looked at Harry, waiting for him to sit back down.

"Monsieur Potter, as Headmistress of Beauxbatons, I am also the hostess of this council. Like the Chief Justice, the host or hostess of the council is supposed to remain strictly neutral," she said, then she paused and looked around the courtyard and sighed.

"I love my country, Monsieur Potter, but that doesn't mean I love the people running it and I know that those running things are not always working in the best interests of our great nation. I have been... approached you would say... by people that represent a force for change in my nation. They ask nothing of you except that you do not lose faith in the French people. We were a great nation once and can be again."

"In other words, don't condemn the people for what the government does," Hermione murmured.

"Oui! You do see, no?"

Harry smiled. "Madam Maxime, only a fool would condemn everyone over the actions of a few."

The half-giantess looked relieved for a moment, then her expression hardened. She looked around warily, noting that the only people in the courtyard were all wearing the same uniform cloaks as Harry Potter.

"Be careful, Monsieur. I do not know details, but I know the current government plots with your enemies against you and your delegation," she hissed softly, then she stood and quickly walked away.

"Well, that was informative," Hermione said sarcastically.

Harry looked at her for a moment. "Actually, it was. She confirmed what we only suspected," he said.

She frowned in thought for a moment. "True."

He stood and reached under his shirt, pulling out his Brotherhood medallion. He concentrated for a moment and all the medallions began to quiver.

"A meeting?" Hermione asked.

"Yes. In light of Madam Maxime's information, I think we might review our security measures again and talk about what else we might be able to do."

Hermione sighed. "I don't suppose we could make it a quick meeting?" she asked, then sent him a few, detailed images of just how much she liked his military uniform.

Harry closed his eyes and bit his lower lip for a moment. "Yes, a very short meeting, I think," he murmured.

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### **British Quarters, Beauxbatons Southern France...**

Silence. The rooms were silent except for the common room, which connected all of the bedrooms together. Ginny and Neville sat in the common room, playing a game of muggle cards and occasionally consulting a rule book. Arthur had bought the deck and the book when he was in New York.

"Gin," Neville said softly, laying down his cards.

"What?" Ginny asked in confusion.

"No, not you. Gin, you know, Gin Rummy?" Neville asked trying not to smile.

Ginny shook her head and growled low. "I'm going to kill my father for getting this game."

Neville chuckled and glanced at his watch.

"What time is it?"

"Half past two. Remus and Tonks are supposed to relieve us in another half hour," Neville replied, trying to suppress a yawn.

Ginny poured them both another cup of tea, then she picked up the deck of cards. "How about playing Polka instead?"

"Isn't it called Poker?"

"Does it matter?" she replied.

Neville shrugged. "No, not..."

He paused and cocked his head, listening. "I heard a thumping sound," he hissed, drawing his wand.

In another room, under the British apartments, two elves confronted each other.

"Yous don't belongs here," Toby said.

"I does too," protested the other elf.

Toby advanced slowly on the strangely garbed elf. They were in a support room that all wizarding buildings had. It was a place where the elves stored supplies so they could easily get things.

Toby eyed the strange elf. He had met with the Pappy for Beauxbatons earlier in the day and had been introduced to all the house elves in the school. This was clearly not a Beauxbatons elf.

The strange elf wore a towel in a toga like fashion. It had an unfamiliar crest on it, and it was held in place by a wide leather belt, which held many objects.

"I knows all Beauxbatons elves and yous isn't one of them," Toby accused.

The strange elf took a step back and realized the wall was right behind him. Two pops from behind Toby signaled the arrival other elves. The strange elf, realizing his mission was blown pulled a wicked looking blade from his belt and slashed at Toby.

Toby staggered back, his hands clutching at his throat. The other two elves rushed forward and the strange elf popped away.

Toby collapsed slowly to his knees, his life's blood spurting out between his fingers. The two elves, one from Haven and the other from Beauxbatons, tried desperately to save him, but the damage was too great, his bleeding too heavy.

Finally they stood.

"You knows what this means?" asked the Haven elf.

"I must get my Mistress. She will be most upset."

"I will take him to his master," said the Haven elf, who then levitated Toby's body and disappeared.

"Mistress isn't going to like this, no sir," the Beauxbatons elf said to himself, then he popped away.

Neville and Ginny were scanning the room, wands drawn, when the Haven elf popped into the room. He gently lowered Toby to the floor after conjuring a sheet to place beneath him.

Ginny gasped and ran from the room. Neville turned to the main door and sealed it. A moment later, Harry walked into the room wearing only his boxers. Hermione followed a moment later, wearing her robe and carrying Harry's.

Harry knelt by the body for a moment, then he looked at the Haven Elf.

"What is your name, little brother?" he asked.

"I am Private Nicodemus, Colonel Harry Potter sir," stammered the elf.

Harry smiled softly. "Do not be afraid, no one will hurt you. Can you tell me what happened?"

Behind Harry, more people came out of their bedrooms. Draco gasped and Luna steered him over to a nearby chair.

"Sir, Toby, he was checking the store rooms under the apartments. I was in another rooms when I felt the strange elf pop in. I popped into the room with a school elf. We saw Toby and this strange elf. He wasn't Haven elf, he wasn't school elf. He was strange elf. He killed Toby and popped away. We tried to fix him, Colonel sir, honest we tried," Nicodemus said, moaning and tugging on his ears painfully. "Toby was our Pappy for our elf fighters. Hows we fights now?" the little elf said in a quivering voice.

Harry knelt next to Nicodemus and pulled his hands away from his ears. "It's war Nicodemus. Sometimes we lose people we care about. We'll go on and fight harder because to do any less would dishonor Toby's memory. Dobby!"

Dobby appeared and gasped at the body on the floor.

"Dobby, I want you and Nicodemus to take Toby home. Tell Twister I want full Military honors for Toby. He was one of ours and we'll miss him. There is space in the regimental burial yard for him."

Dobby nodded, his eyes wide and tearful, while Nicodemus wrapped the body in the sheet.

Everyone tensed when a knock came at the door. Hermione quickly threw Harry's robe at him, while Neville went to answer the door.

Harry stood and wrapped the robe about him just a moment before Madam Maxime walked in. She saw the wrapped body and frowned.

"What has happened here?" she asked.

"One of our elves came upon an unauthorized elf in the storeroom below the apartments. He was killed and the unknown elf got away," Harry replied.

"You realize that I will have to take this to the Chief Justice in the morning, Madam Maxime?" asked Amelia.

"Oui, how could you not? This is too much to ignore," Maxime replied. "When I return to my office, I will instruct our Père to block all elves from entering the school grounds."

Harry nodded to Dobby and he popped away with Nicodemus and Toby.

"That might be a case of closing the barn door after the horses are gone," Harry added.

"Yes, a number of delegations, including your own, have brought their own elves. But what else can we do?" Maxime said with a shrug.

Amelia looked around for a moment, then she turned back to the Headmistress. "Regrettably, we will accomplish nothing tonight. And tomorrow's session starts early. Let's get back to sleep."

Madam Maxime nodded and left the room, while the others returned to their bedrooms. Harry turned to see Draco still staring at the spot where Toby had lain. Luna gently caressed his neck and looked very worried.

"Will you be alright, Draco?" Harry asked. Hermione moved to stand next to him. Both were surprised to see how upset Draco seemed to be. He rarely showed that kind of emotion in public!

Draco looked up at Harry and he could see the pain in his eyes. He was clearly struggling with something.

"He... he... he was my friend," Draco finally blurted. He looked shocked by what he had just said. "He was my friend," he repeated in a whisper, and a tear rolled down his cheek.

Luna moved around to his side and knelt in front of him. "Yes, he was your friend, and you'll always remember him as such, Dray," she said softly.

Draco grabbed her and pulled her into his embrace, burying his face against the nape of her neck. Luna looked up at Harry and smiled gently,

lightening her grip on Draco while he wrestled with his emotions.

"He'll be fine," she whispered to Harry.

Harry nodded and he motioned for Hermione to follow him back into their bedroom.

The situation was becoming dangerous.

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### **Chamber of Justice, Beauxbatons, Southern France (Feb 25th)...**

Chief Justice Umtumba walked out to his bench and faced the assembled Justices, his expression grim.

"Last night, an attack on the British delegation resulted in the death of a house elf. Our Hostess, Madam Maxime assures me that steps are being taken to ensure the safety of all delegations. Let me go on the record as stating here and now that any delegation disrupting these proceedings faces censure and perhaps disenfranchisement.

"If another attack occurs, I will call for six member delegations to appeal to their governments for a protective force of not less than one hundred Aurors each!"

Umtumba looked around, then his gaze settled on Gaston Pierpont, Minister of Magic for France. Pierpont paled and swallowed nervously.

Umtumba finally turned to look at Amelia. "Justice Bones, you may begin with today's presentation."

Amelia nodded. "I call Geoffrey Collington to the witness box."

Collington stood from the British Delegation area, approached the box and sat down.

"Mr. Collington, would you state your full name and occupation for the record?"

"I am Geoffrey Alfred Collington. I am currently employed as a Senior Undersecretary of Foreign Affairs for the British Ministry of Magic."

"You were sent on a diplomatic mission to France. Would you explain to this court the purpose of that mission as it was described it to you?"

"Last month you called me into your office, Minister, to explain to me about a mission you wanted me to undertake. It was to be a small, mostly informal delegation consisting of myself, Chadwick Talbot from the Economic office and Neville Longbottom, acting as military liaison. As with most missions of this type, we brought our wives along.

"Our objective was simple. We were to meet with the opposition to the current government to see if we could do anything to help their position, and we were also to meet with government in the hopes that informal meetings might result in a softening of their position towards the British Ministry and our war efforts."

"And how successful were you, Mr. Collington?" asked Amelia.

"Not very, Minister. We met with the opposition on several occasions, and while sympathetic to our plight, they were not in a position to exert much influence over the current administration."

Amelia nodded and glanced around again. "So what did you do, Mr. Collington?"

"We continued as best as we could, Madam Minister. We met with several minor functionaries within the ruling party and the government, and just before we were scheduled to leave, we managed to arrange a meeting with someone higher up in the party.

"We postponed our departure and spent several additional, fruitless days shuttling between minor people, and again, just before we were ready to leave, our request to meet with someone closer to Minister Pierpont was granted. We were to meet with Jean LaRoche, Inspector General of the Department of Magical Law Enforcement. We were told he was a personal representative of Minister Pierpont as well as a close friend."

Amelia nodded and studied some parchments on her table for a moment before turning back to Collington. "And what happened then?"

"On the afternoon of February 11th, we went to meet Monsieur LaRoche at his home. A house elf escorted us into a sitting room, where we were attacked."

"Attacked? By whom? How?"

"I do not know, Minister. My first inkling of trouble came when Chad Talbot collapsed to the floor. A second later I was put in a full body bind. Mr. Longbottom seemed to sense what was happening. He rolled out of the way and took up a position behind a couch. I was stuck and unable to aid him, but I could hear him casting and hear the screams of the people he was fighting as they fell. I don't think they expected him to put up such a fight.

"The last thing I remember is hearing many voices shouting curses, then someone stunned me," Collington said.

Amelia nodded. "No further questions," she said, then moved to sit at her table again.

"Justice Pierpont? Your witness," Umtumba said.



Pierpont stood and looked arrogantly at the witness box.

"I have no questions for this witness. In fact, I have no questions for any witnesses presented. The French Ministry of Magic refuses to recognize the British Ministry in Exile. The only true government of Britain is being prevented from joining us by the illegal and dark magic ward placed around that poor defenseless nation by Harry Potter!"

The chamber broke out in an uproar and a number of people in the visitors gallery started applauding. Umtumba banged his gavel several times to no avail.

"Arrest Potter. He's a dark wizard!" someone shouted from the visitors gallery.

"ENOUGH!" shouted Chief Justice Umtumba. His voice boomed and echoed across the chamber. People cringed and clapped their hands over their ears trying to protect hearing.

Slowly order was restored and the noise died down. The Chief Justice looked down from his bench at Justice Pierpont.

"Justice Pierpont, are you certain that this is the way you wish to go? If this is your desired course of action, I will have no choice but to rule summarily, here and now, against you and your government. Believe me, sir, I will call for a disenfranchisement," Umtumba said in hard tone.

"You cannot! We do not recognize the illegal government that convened this council!" protested Pierpont.

"Oh, but I can, Minister," Umtumba said smoothly. "Your very presence in this chamber, participating in this council, can be considered as accepting the British Ministry in Exile. Had you wished to make this complaint, you should have done it before we convened."

Umtumba looked up at the assembled Justices. "What say the council?" he called.

As one, every justice lifted their wands and the tips glowed brightly. The vote was overwhelmingly in agreement with the Chief Justice.

Umtumba looked around, noting the vote and he grinned before he turned back to the French Minister. "Well, Minister? Recognition or Disenfranchisement?" he asked.

Pierpont slumped in his chair and fanned at his face for a moment with a piece of parchment. "Recognition," he muttered.

"Does the esteemed Justice representing France wish to cross examine the witness?" Umtumba asked in a jovial tone.

Pierpont shook his head and looked up in the visitors gallery for a long moment, then he stood.

"I beg the council to grant a short recess so that we might consider what options are still available to us," he said.

"The council is in recess for one hour. The witness is excused," Umtumba said, then he banged his gavel.

He couldn't help but notice the smug grins on the British delegation.

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## **Hogwarts Castle...**

The barracks held nearly two hundred of Voldemort's hand picked Death Eaters. They were the privileged few who lived and worked around the castle full time. There was always a number of other Death Eaters around, but they stayed in temporary housing, or in the repaired homes in Hogsmeade.

It stood on prime real estate, just a hundred yards from the lake. It lay on a gentle slope between the shore and the castle walls.

For the last week there had been a number of complaints, and no small number of requests, to transfer away from the castle by the Death Eaters living in the barracks.

Mulciber was nearly tearing his hair out in frustration. Between the never ending search for a Necromancer and the complaints coming from the barracks, he was seriously stressed.

The men were complaining about strange scraping noises and dripping sounds, but no one had been able to locate the source of the noises. To make matters worse, it was beginning to keep the men up at night.

Up on the astronomy tower, the Bloody Baron slid through a wall and looked out pensively over the castle he called home. For hundreds of years he had floated through these walls, intimidating first year students and enjoying the tales the older students would tell of his grisly demise. If only they knew the truth, they would not be so afraid of him.

The castle trembled under his feet and his eyes narrowed. Four puffs of smoke arose from the ground around the barracks and then nothing. Peeves and his brothers rose from the ground, shovels in hand, miners caps on their heads. They bowed to each other and chortled merrily.

A heavy, grumbling, groaning sound was heard just before the barracks vanished from sight. A huge column of water shot skywards and the Baron could hear men screaming in pain and panic.

When the water cleared, he could see the enormous sink hole that the barracks had fallen into, as well as the Death Eaters scrambling around the edges of the hole, trying to climb out. To make matters worse, the hole was rapidly filling with water.

Now the purpose of the 'digging things' became clear to the Baron. Peeves and his brothers had discovered one of the underground springs that fed the lake was actually under the barracks, slowly carving a cavern as it wound its way down to the lake. The poltergeists decided to help it along with some judicious digging and dynamite, courtesy of Harry Potter.

The Baron shook his head and marveled at the trouble a couple of spirits could get into with the right tools. Even if most of the Death Eaters escaped the trap, and it seemed that many would, they would be a nervous and terrified lot for a while to come.

And while he wasn't certain, he thought he heard a shout for a necromancer coming from the castle.

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### **Chamber of Justice, Beauxbatons, Southern France (Feb 25th)...**

"I call to the witness box Mrs. Ginevra Longbottom," Amelia said in a loud voice.

Ginny stepped from the British delegation's area. Walking to the witness box, she turned and sat down, facing those in the chamber.

"Would you state your full name and occupation for the record please?"

"Ginevra Molly Longbottom. I am currently training to be a field medic in the 24th regiment of the SAS. I hold the rank of sergeant."

Amelia peered up at Ginny for a moment. "Don't you also hold the title of Lady Longbottom?"

Ginny blinked and turned to look at Neville, who nodded sheepishly back at her.

"I... well I guess I do, but this is the first I've heard about it, Madam Minister," she replied, then she shot a glare at her husband, who had the grace to sink lower in his chair.

A ripple of laughter ran through the justices.

"Mrs. Longbottom, you had no official standing with the diplomatic mission sent by the British Ministry, is that correct?"

"Yes, that is correct."

"And yet, from what I understand, you and the other two wives took it upon yourselves to try to figure out the hierarchy of French society?"

Ginny blushed for a moment, then she lifted her chin defiantly. "Yes. I helped my husband. There is only so much shopping someone can do, after all. Besides, they needed the help, even if they didn't know it."

Amelia nodded with a smile. "Of course, Mrs. Longbottom. Now, could you tell us what exactly took place on February 11th?"

"The ladies and I were holding our afternoon tea. We met every day to discuss what we had learned and what we would tell our husbands. On that particular day I had to excuse myself to try to repair a new blouse I had spilled tea on. While I was in the bathroom, we were attacked by agents of the French Department of Territorial Surveillance.

"They were muggles, or at least I think they were. They had only muggle weapons and devices on them."

"And what happened when you were attacked, Mrs. Longbottom?"

"As I said, I was in the bathroom. I heard a sound as if something heavy had hit the floor. I walked out of the bathroom using another door and entered my bedroom. From there, I could see Cecilia Collington. She had been injured and was half lying, half sitting on the floor."

"What did you do then, Mrs. Longbottom?"

Ginny said something softly and looked down.

Chief Justice Umtumba leaned forward and frowned. "Young lady, you need to speak louder," he told her.

"I'm sorry, sir," Ginny said, then she looked up at the surrounding judges. "I killed the three men. I knew that they had to have either killed or captured our security detail. I had no choice but to stop them before they hurt anyone else."

Amelia looked up at Ginny, her expression hardened. "You killed them. Why didn't you stun them and capture them?"

Ginny frowned. "I am a soldier, Madam Minister, not an Auror. I don't take prisoners."

Amelia smiled thinly. "Thank you, Mrs. Longbottom," she said, then she turned and bowed slightly to Gaston Pierpont. "Your witness, sir," she said.

Pierpont stood and walked around his table, puzzled. They had thought that all three women had been involved in killing their agents, not this petite child.

"Mrs. Longbottom," he said silkily. "You do realize that you murdered those three law enforcement agents, yes? They had wives and families."

"No, sir. I was defending myself and the others. It wasn't murder, it was self defense."

"My dear child, I obviously think you can hide the truth from us. Why are you protecting the other women? No one here can possibly believe that you are capable of killing three trained law enforcement officers. I know for a fact that you were unarmed at the time! Your wand was sitting on the coffee table!"

"How?"

Pierpont looked smug. "We suspected from the outset that your mission was a ruse. Your suites were wired to record what took place there," he said, then he frowned. "Unfortunately, those muggle recording devices stopped working shortly after our people entered your suite to arrest you."

Ginny scowled, remembering certain things she had done with Neville in what she thought was a private apartment and her anger flared.

"Now, I will say it again. How did you manage to overcome three heavily armed law enforcement officers when you were unarmed?"

Pierpont looked extraordinarily smug as he stepped back.

Ginny shot a glance at Harry, who grinned back at her and nodded.

She stood then and removed her wand holster. Climbing onto her chair, she stretched and handed it to the Chief Justice, amidst the ripple of laughter from those in the chamber.

"Will you hold this, sir?" she asked.

Umtumba arched an eyebrow and reached for her holster and wand.

Climbing back down, she turned to face the smug Pierpont. "You want to know how I managed to kill those muggles you sent to do your dirty work? It was like this."

Ginny raised her right hand and it began to glow. She gestured and Pierpont found himself being raised from the floor. He screamed, or rather he tried to, but he had been silenced. She gestured again and he flipped upside down. She pushed with her hand, moving him to a wall, where she stuck him.

"Like my brothers and sisters, I am never unarmed, Monsieur," she said, her voice emotionless.

Many in the chamber shuddered at the display of power, especially coming from someone so small.

She turned away from the French Minister to face the Chief Justice. She smiled demurely, although her eyes were sparkling with mischief. He chuckled and shook his head, then he levitated her holster down to her again.

Umtumba gestured with his staff, freeing Minister Pierpont, who fell to the floor with a crash.

"Do you have any further questions for this witness, Justice Pierpont?" asked Umtumba.

Dazed and still on the floor, Pierpont shook his head groggily.

"The witness may step down."

Ginny smiled brightly and resisted the urge to skip from the witness box.

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### **Chamber of Justice, Beauxbatons, Southern France (Feb 26th)...**

Harry filed into the area set aside for the British along with his friends. Last night had been surprisingly quiet. Today, he thought, would change all that. He was uneasy, though he wasn't sure why.

Amelia seemed to be very pleased with the way things were going. In fact, all of her people were. The Brotherhood, on the other hand, were of the same mind as Harry at this point; challenge Pierpont to a duel and burn down the French Ministry building.

Harry smirked. Amelia had been shocked when Susan suggested just that in order to speed things up. She actually paled when Susan suggested kidnapping the Minister's family and holding them hostage. That wasn't too bad, but then Terry suggested that they send the Minister the fingers of his family members, one at a time, until he resigned from office.

Amelia nearly exploded until she saw all of the Brotherhood grinning at her. They had been pulling her leg and doing a wonderful job of it.

Harry smiled and shook his head at the remembered scene. But he also knew there was a grain of truth in their teasing. The Brotherhood, for all its outward appearances, was a ruthless bunch.

Harry took his seat and looked around. The visitors gallery seemed especially full today. He felt uneasy and the hairs on the back of his neck started to stand up.

"Harry, *what's wrong?*"

"*I don't know. Go sit with Amelia today and tell her to be extra careful,*" he replied.

Hermione nodded and walked down to sit next to Amelia who raised an eyebrow at her. The younger witch scribbled something on a piece of parchment and handed it to her. She quickly read the note and glanced up at Harry, who was busy talking to Terry in an urgent whisper.

Harry made a hand gesture and the Brotherhood immediately rearranged their seating. Dan and Emma were now on inside seats, protected by Ginny, Susan and Terry.

*"I've told Amelia that you think something may happen today. She knows I can pass messages from you if need be."*

*"Good... Damn! We never did get around to making those ward busting portkeys, did we? Oh, damn, damn, damn."*

*"Harry, relax. Luna and I have it covered."*

*"Huh?"*

*"You'll see. If and when the time comes, we have something we can use."*

*"Alright,"* he replied dubiously.

Amelia stood and moved around the table. Walking to the very center of the chamber, she conjured a table. Arthur walked onto the chamber floor a moment later carrying a large stone pensieve. He laid the pensieve on Amelia's table, then he returned to the delegation area.

"Justices," began Amelia. "As per our motions of two days ago, I would now like to introduce into testimony the pensieve memories of one Trenton Largo. Mr. Largo, a former member of our Wizengamot, is one of our chief intelligence officers in our Ministry of Defense. The memories you will be viewing are his memories of the interrogation of Jean LaRoche, who has been previously identified as the Inspector General of the Department of Magical Law Enforcement and a personal representative of Minister Pierpont."

"Objection! We demand to be able to hear Monsieur LaRoche's testimony from Monsieur LaRoche himself!" shouted Pierpont. Up until this point, no one was sure where LaRoche had gone. To be in the hands of the British was a calamity!

Amelia turned to Pierpont. "Regrettably, Mr. LaRoche was captured in civilian clothing, in a secure military facility. At the very minimum he will be charged with espionage. Depending on the outcome of these proceedings, he may very well be executed as an enemy spy."

Pierpont gasped and glared at Amelia. "You are illegally holding a French citizen! If you do not turn him over immediately we will declare war!"

"SILENCE!" shouted Umtumba.

Both justices turned to look at the Chief Justice. Pierpont was panting, his face the color of puce, while Amelia seemed to be calm and collected.

"Madam Minister, how did you manage to capture Mr. LaRoche?" asked Umtumba.

"Chief Justice, unknown to myself, Mr. Longbottom was wearing an emergency portkey that would transport him in the event of his being injured. Mr. LaRoche unwisely removed the portkey from Mr. Longbottom's neck. When the portkey failed to detect Mr. Longbottom's life signs, it assumed that he had been seriously injured and activated, taking Mr. LaRoche to a secure Military facility.

"It was Mr. LaRoche's own testimony that allowed us to rescue our people in a timely manner. Unfortunately, we were unable to rescue our security detail and they are presumed dead. Additionally, to our immense surprise, we learned from Mr. LaRoche that the French Ministries, muggle and magical, are not in control of the country..."

"Outrageous! I will not sit here and listen to you slander my country! Chief Justice, I protest!..."

"Chief Justice, you said we could submit pensieve testimonies. If you would just allow us to playback the recording, it will all become clear in a moment," Amelia said in a loud voice, trying to be heard over Pierpont.

Umtumba looked torn, like a man trying to watch a tennis match and not sure who he should be watching.

In the British delegation area, Harry tensed and opened his mage sight. He felt a tightening in his chest as anti-apparation wards were being raised. He surged to his feet, his aura becoming visible. His sleeve tore away and Padfoot bounded from his arm, growling and snapping.

"WARDS! Shields Shields!" he shouted to the Brotherhood.

As one, the Brotherhood raised shields, Harry covering the main group, while others cast shields on select people. Susan covered Amelia and Hermione who had jumped over the table and tackled Amelia to the ground. Luna cast a shield over the Chief Justice.

Spellfire erupted in the chamber.

Pierpont fell to a badly aimed reductor. Someone was trying to destroy the pensieve in the center of the chamber and had missed. Loss of the pensieve wouldn't really have meant anything, since it was a copy pensieve and didn't permanently remove memories from individuals.

Harry raised his staff and cast a wide area stunning field, taking out a third of the visitors gallery in a single shot. Dozens of curses bounced off the shields covering the British and Harry strained to keep the shield up.

The Justices surged from their benches. Most were politicians, untrained and not capable of dueling. The doors to the chamber were blocked and sealed and it wasn't helping that the Justices were stampeding and piling up around them.

Hermione pulled Amelia under a table, then she started casting up at the visitors gallery, where most of the spells seemed to be coming from. Amelia grimaced and closed her eyes briefly. To her dying day she would never forget the image of Gaston Pierpont lying on the floor, reaching out to her, his throat torn and shredded, his blood fountaining from severed arteries.

“WHIRRRRR”

Fuzz bounded off Luna's neck and down to the chamber area, growing in size as she went. She placed herself between Hermione and the Minister and the remaining members of the French Delegation. Suddenly, she whirred and meeped angrily for a second, then her feet moved in a blur. Floor tiles cracked and pieces of tiles flew upwards behind her as she surged forward, taking down a man trying to get a shot at the Chief Justice. The man screamed briefly, then subsided into a gurgling sigh.

Harry crouched down near a bench, Padfoot only a short distance away, growling, his hackles up. Suddenly, the spectral dog bounded up the stairs of the chamber and pounced on a man leaning over the edge of the balcony. The man screamed and toppled over the edge, falling the twenty feet or so to the floor below. Padfoot fell with him, but unlike the man, climbed to his feet once he'd landed.

“NOW, LUNA!” Hermione shouted.

A reductor staggered Harry and his shield flickered. A bright blue curse hit the center of his shield and it collapsed for a moment. Harry staggered again and he twisted, raising his shield, then he started pointing at people. No wand, no incantation, they simply exploded in a shower of blood and gore.

Luna dashed down to the center of the chamber and once there, she knelt, placing an object on the floor. She tapped it with her wand and it started to pulsate with a bright yellow light. A humming sound filled the chamber and the building shuddered. Large cracks appeared in the walls and sunlight streamed in through holes in the dome.

There was one final, blinding flash of light, followed by the sound of a hundred claps of thunder. When the light faded, the chamber was silent, and empty. Only a few smoking corpses left to mark where the Council of Avalon once stood.

A moment later, the dome, weakened by the explosion, collapsed inwards, burying the chamber under tons of rubble.

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### Authors Notes:

Chris1: two words Chris.... SPELL CHECKER.

Paraniodofgov: Yeah we could turn them into frogs, but personally we think our way is more interesting.

There has been a number of guesses concerning the latest prophecy. All we can say some people have made interesting guesses, but we're not saying a thing about it. We know what it means, and so will you.... eventually.

Lurk: Next time don't read when you're tired.

Badger-Dude wrote this as a review;

woop woop wooga wooooo!

To which all we can say is, bloop bloop poopa bloop

A number of people were upset over the death of Moody. This is war! People die! It's our job to see that the other poor bastard dies for his country... wait... that's Patton I'm channeling. It was Moody's time. You can't win every battle.

Malferd, please refrain from the fan girl squees, Alyx's ears are now bleeding and I'm stuffing her head full of cotton.

“Dammit Bob! You're supposed to remove the cotton from the plant!” Alyx shouted, twigs hanging from her ears.

“Oops,” Bob muttered, running away.

*Bobmin*  
*FanficAuthors.net*

# Sunrise Over Britain

## Chapter 28 - An Elf in hot water

### Standard Disclaimer:

Alyx looked up in alarm as the building trembled and a nasty loud buzzing sound filled the theater.

“What the devil?” she said to herself, then she closed her book and stood up. She looked towards the stage where Bob stood in awe in front of a huge machine.

She cringed as steam shot from the top of the machine in a loud whistle and the machine began to bounce up and down. Curtains fell and lighting racks crashed to the stage, their bulbs shattering with a shotgun like sound.

“ITS ALIVE!” shouted Bob gleefully.

Two huge mechanical eyes opened and blinked at Bob.

Alyx hurried down the theater aisle and up onto the stage. “WHAT THE HELL ARE YOU DOING?” she screamed at him.

“WHAT?” Bob shouted back.

“WHAT ARE YOU DOING?” she shouted again.

“I CAN'T HEAR YOU OVER THE ACME DISCLAIMER MACHINE. IT'S WONDERFUL!” Bob shouted back.

Alyx stomped her foot and seriously considered hurting him, but then she realized that unless she killed him, she'd probably get stuck taking care of him. And she didn't want to listen to him whine and moan. Well maybe moan, but only the right kind of moans.

“WATCH THIS!” Bob shouted, then he pressed a button on a remote control. A slot opened in the side of the machine and a huge mechanical claw extended out into the audience. The claw plucked Severus Snape from his seat and pulled him, screaming, into the machine.

The machine bounced and tilted and bounced some more, then another door opened and a huge screen extended from the top of the machine. There was a blast of steam and the screen lit up saying.

### **WE DON'T OWN HARRY POTTER!**

The screen remained lit for another minute, then with another deafening blast of steam the screen retracted. The machine bounced for a few more seconds then opened a compartment and spat out a few smoking bones. With a huge sigh the machine fell silent and the eyes closed.

“WHAT THE HELL WAS THAT?” Alyx screeched.

“You don't have to yell you know,” Bob replied calmly.

Alyx ground her teeth. “Alright, what was that?”

Her fists were clenching spasmodically and she ached to pick up that nearby fire axe.

“Oh this is the Acme Disclaimer machine we bought several chapters back. I got it working. Would you believe this even makes curly fries!” Bob exclaimed proudly.

Alyx edged her way closer to the axe. “And what about Snape? You killed him!”

Bob peered at the charred bones. “Ok so maybe there are a few problems with the system.”

Alyx grabbed the axe and turned on the machine. “BONSAI!”

Bob shook his head. “Only my wife would attack a machine with the battle cry of a tree. Anyways, on with the story.”

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### Sunrise Over Britain

#### Chapter 28

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### Padfoot Manor (Feb 26th)...

“More tea, Bertrand?” asked Narcissa.

Bertrand Lovegood smiled and held out his cup for a refill. “So, when do you think they'll make us grandparents, Cissy?”

Narcissa smiled to herself. She really liked this man. He was so unlike Lucius. It was a shame that he had married a Child of Gaia. Because of that, she knew it would take a miracle before he could love again.

"Oh, I hope it's not too soon. As much as I would like to have a grand baby to spoil, I think it would be best if they waited until the war is over," she replied.

Bertrand chuckled. "You know that Luna will do what she wants. As far as children go, her talent may well do what it does best, regardless of what anyone else may think."

Narcissa nodded with a slight frown. "Yes, there is that. As pleased as I am with my daughter-in-law, I know what being a Child of Gaia means. She'll be fine and then one day decide it's time for her to start having babies."

"Her mother was like that. Once she was carrying Luna, she told me her grand plan of having a child every ten years until she couldn't have any more," Bertrand said. He sipped his tea and smiled at the bittersweet memory.

"So, how are things at the paper?"

"It's different, working for a paper where we actually have to report the facts. But I like it. I still manage every so often to bring back a bit of the Quibbler in our Strange Occurrences column," he replied with a smile. "Why, just the other day we managed to get our hands on a photo of three footed uniphant. It's not a very good photo, but our readers will enjoy it."

Narcissa smiled at him. His love of nature was influenced by both his wife and child.

"Say, did you know that Luna has taught the Angels some words?" he suddenly asked.

"No, I hadn't heard that."

"Oh, yes. She's been working with them since their birth and she's given them a vocabulary of roughly fifty words. It's not much, but she says that now that they understand spoken words, they'll quickly pick up others."

He leaned a little closer to her. "Hagrid tells me her work with the Angels is easily going to earn her a Mastery in Magical Creatures," he told her in a low conspiratorial tone. "But don't tell her that I said that. I don't want her slacking off too early."

Narcissa grinned. She, too, was inordinately pleased with her daughter-in-law and her progress. While Luna would never be politically savvy like Hermione was becoming, Luna was a wonderful witch and the very best thing that had ever happened to her son. Luna provided just enough inconsistency in Draco's life to keep him sharp.

She moved to say something when the shriek of an alarm broke the calm of the morning. Bertrand jumped to his feet and ran to the window.

"Oh, I say! There's a fight going on out on the lawn. Do you have a camera? I must get some photos for the paper!" he exclaimed excitedly. With that, he dashed from the room.

Narcissa stood, then blanched, seeing the firefight and the mass of people on the lawn. She started to turn to get her portable floo when the house shook violently.

BRAAAAAAAPPPPPPP!

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### **Padfoot Manor, Front Lawn...**

Harry blinked back tears and his stomach threatened to unload his breakfast. He fought down the urge, though others around him were unable to do so. The sound of people retching nearly overrode the sound of spells being spent against his shield.

He renewed his shield and a few more stunners bounced off it, but for the most part, people were too busy being ill to continue with the firefight.

BRAAAAAAAPPPPPPP!

Instinctively, he rolled. He knew that sound very well. It was the sound of a combat apparation. The brigade practiced it extensively. The idea was to make as much noise as possible and have everyone apparate at the same time, startling the defenders. He laid down a pattern of three wide field stunners, and then he heard what sounded like pure music to his ears.

"Check fire! Check fire!" shouted Twister. "Able company, disperse and disarm!"

He was on the lawn of Padfoot manor! Hermione and Luna had succeeded!

Standing, he looked around to see most of Able, minus those he had dropped with his stunners, relieving people of their wands. He grimaced and started enervating his troops.

"Twister!" he shouted.

Behind him, the Brotherhood started pulling themselves together and helping those still feeling the aftereffects of whatever Luna and Hermione had pulled off to get them here.

Twister came running up to him and saluted. "Sir?"

"Treat all the people in white robes and the one man in gray as VIPs, Twister. Separate out all the French as enemy hostiles. Oh, and you better call



up Baker company, especially their medical team,” Harry said softly.

“I’ll get right on it,” Twister replied, then he trotted off again, speaking into a portable floo as he went.

Harry walked to Draco, who was crouched down over a prone Luna.

He bent over, touching Draco’s shoulder. “Is she alright?”

“I think so. I think it was just the effect of that spell she cast and not because she was hit with anything,” he replied.

Luna opened her eyes. “Really, Dray, I’m fine. This is just an unanticipated side effect of our transport. Quite fascinating, really. I never would have imagined that Cheerios take so long to digest.”

Draco looked up at Harry, who straightened and shook his head in sympathy.

Hermione walked over to them unsteadily. The last time she looked like that had been at their wedding party, when she had had a little too much to drink.

Harry gripped her by the shoulders, then pulled her to him.

*“Are you alright?”* he sent.

*“No, but I will be. I don’t think I want to do that again.”*

*“Just what did you do?”*

*“Remember you wanted us to use your rune stones to create a portkey that would break the ward, then transport us out?”*

*“I remember.”*

*“Well, the problem with that would have been running around in the middle of that firefight handing out portkeys. That wasn’t an acceptable solution. Luna and I came up with a way of forcing a mass apparation, but I think it has a few drawbacks.”*

Harry snorted with amusement. “I’ll say. The house elves are going to really love you for the need to clean up our lawn.”

Hermione looked around at the mess that was their lawn and worriedly gnawed on her lip. “Is it bad, isn’t it?” she asked, her nose wrinkling at the unpleasant smell.

Harry chuckled. Spotting the Chief Justice making his way over to them, his amusement disappeared. Umtumba didn’t look happy.

“What is the meaning of this, Harry Potter?”

Harry released Hermione and turned fully towards the Chief Justice. He bowed slightly. “I apologize, Chief Justice. But from the onset of the council, we suspected treachery from the French. Our interrogation of their man revealed to us that neither the Muggle nor the Magical Ministries are truly in control of the country.

“It was felt that we needed some means of preventing their treachery or, barring that, saving the council. I would have forewarned you, sir, but we really didn’t know if anything would happen.”

Umtumba nodded thoughtfully for a moment. “And the council members?”

“Are free to leave anytime they wish, sir. You are not prisoners, you are guests. When the firefight broke out, we could have left everyone behind, but we didn’t want the council members getting hurt.”

“Do you have a place where we can meet, Harry Potter?”

Hermione and Harry exchanged a glance between them. “I suppose you could use the old Wizengamot building,” Harry mused.

Umtumba smiled broadly. “Very well, then. I will tell the members that we will have an emergency session first thing tomorrow morning. In the meantime, if you will excuse me, I must see to the needs of the council.”

Harry nodded and the old man turned away from him, joining the other council members. Harry could see a group of sullen looking men sitting off to one side, hands on their heads. He noted absently that it seemed that Twister had chosen the messiest spot on the lawn to seat the French.

“WAIT WAIT! ACCIO CAMERA! ACCIO CAMERA! ACCIO CAMERA!”

Harry whirled, then paused when he saw Bertrand Lovegood bolt from the manor house. He paused and looked around, crestfallen.

“Oh, bugger it all! How am I supposed to tell this story without pictures?” he moaned. Then there was a solid thinking sound and his eyes rolled up in his head. When he fell to the ground, his daughter shook her head.

“Oh, Daddy, when will you remember that when you summon things you need to catch them?” Luna said softly.

Two more cameras appeared and hit the unconscious publisher.

Luna sighed. "At least he's not breaking anything since he got that metal plate installed in his head. Come on, Dray, let's get Daddy into bed and find out who these cameras belong to."

Harry tried hard not to grin as he turned away. Spotting Amelia approaching, he couldn't help but notice that she looked decidedly peaky. It seemed to be the color of choice this morning.

"Harry, can we set up some of the Justices at the manor? I think we can send the rest to use the extra housing we built for the hospital," she asked.

"That would be a good idea. Now that the new wing has been cleared for people, we have twenty extra bedrooms we can use," he replied. He looked around to see that many of the Justices were being escorted off the lawn. From the manor, dozens of elves stood waiting for the lawn to empty before cleaning up the mess.

He turned back to Amelia. "Find the Chief Justice and invite him to join us in the manor. I'll let Dobby know we should set up space for him and some others. I'll also have someone contact Beauxbatons and let them know that everyone that was alive in the Chamber of Justice got out and are here."

Amelia nodded and walked off in hurry. Harry turned again, intent on heading to the manor when a small pop announced the arrival of a house elf. Dobby rushed up to Harry and spoked to him urgently for a few minutes.

Harry's anger flared.

"Hermione!" he called.

Sensing his anger via the bond, she joined him quickly. "What's wrong?" she asked.

Harry gripped her hand and he nodded to Dobby, who vanished with a pop.

"We're needed right now at the hospital," he said. With that, he apparated them both.

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## Haven Hospital...

The hospital was in a mild state of controlled chaos. None of the personnel had expected incoming wounded, but things were going well. The burns, cuts and broken bones all indicated spell damage, but the staff were becoming experts when it came to healing the injuries caused in battle. It wasn't something they were happy about, but they were professional enough to push their emotions aside long enough to do their jobs.

"Who's left?" Melinda McKinny asked tiredly as she looked around. The emergency room was rapidly thinning of both patients and aurors.

The head medi-witch smiled in sympathy. "A woman suffering a fractured tibia, and a man with a rather nasty second degree burn," she told the weary healer.

"Alright, Sharon, let's take a look at the burn victim," Melinda said.

Leading the healer to the man stretched out on a gurney, Sharon then went in search of a burn cart. When she returned, the healer had completed her scans.

"He has a few scrapes and bumps, but the burn seems to be the worst of his injuries," Melinda commented. "Why is he unconscious?"

Sharon grimaced. "He wouldn't stop yelling and screaming. We could find no other injuries to account for his pain, so we knocked him out."

Melinda frowned. "Was he combative?" She scanned his head once more for injuries.

"Tina and I got him on the gurney and he struggled with us a bit, wanting to get up and leave. But we couldn't understand what he was yelling. He was babbling in French and neither of us understands the language."

"Let's get the burn taken care of before we wake him up, then. Maybe if we take care of the pain he'll be a bit calmer this time around."

With a nod, Sharon checked the sterile field around the patient, then helped Melinda tend to the burn.

Several minutes later, the burn healed, Sharon pushed the burn cart away as Melinda checked the patient one more time for any other injuries. Seeing none, she woke the man, but was prepared to knock him out again at the first sign of combativeness.

"Sir?" she called quietly as the man's eyes fluttered and opened. "Sir, you're in Haven Hospital. Your injury has been treated. Are you feeling any better?"

The man blinked several times, then nodded.

"He seems calmer," Sharon noted as she approached and held out a chart to the healer.

"It might have just been shock," Melinda told her. Taking the chart, she made a few notes and closed it. "We can't keep calling him Patient Nine. We'll have to get his name, but my French isn't any better than yours." She turned to the man and smiled reassuringly as his eyes darted between her and the medi-witch.

Sharon pinned a small piece of parchment with the number nine written on it to the man's pant leg. "The aurors said they'd handle it."

"Aurors? What do they have to do with this?" Melinda asked.

"The rumor is that some of our patients fired on the council."

With a scowl, Melinda passed the patient's chart to Sharon and scanned the nearly empty room for an auror.

While the medi-witch checked the file and the healer searched for an auror, the man on the gurney saw his chance.

Pulling his pant leg up, he drew his spare wand. Sitting up, he reached out, grabbed the hair of the healer and yanked her back against him. Jabbing the tip of his wand against her neck, he ordered her to drop her wand.

Sharon stared wide-eyed at the man and took one step back. "Melinda?"

Seeing the medi-witch palm her own wand and give it a small, circular wave, Melinda shook her head slightly. "Don't, Sharon," she said quietly as her wand dropped to the floor.

"Very wise," the man growled in heavily accented English as the medi-witch also dropped her wand.

"So you do understand English," Melinda muttered.

"But of course. It is useful, when dealing with one's enemies, to understand their language," he said as he got off the gurney and wrapped his free arm around her waist.

"I healed you. I am not your enemy," she told him calmly.

"You are British," he spat, as if that explained it all.

"What do you want?" Sharon asked, her voice low.

"Out," the man said simply.

"The hospital is covered in anti-apparation wards," Melinda began.

"A portkey will work just as well," he told her.

"Only an incoming portkey will work," she told him. His wand dug into her neck and she grimaced. "Calm down, sir. I'd really rather not be burned by an accident discharge from your wand."

"Any injury you suffer will be my choice, woman, not some accident," he snarled. "I am not a child, unable to control my power."

"Right," she muttered as he began to move her toward the emergency room exit.

"There are aurors stationed outside the doors," Sharon informed him. "You won't..."

The doors to the patient ward swung open and three aurors appeared, wands drawn.

"Freeze! Let the healer go!" one growled as another grabbed Sharon and hustled her from the room.

The man tightened his hold around Melinda's waist and he stepped back far enough to place his back against a wall. "I leave, she lives. If you try to stop me, she'll die!"

Melinda closed her eyes and took several deep breaths. Sharon had been able to trigger the alarm ward before dropping her wand, but it certainly hadn't improved the situation.

"We have plenty of healers, so either way, you're not leaving," the auror told him. It was a bluff, of course, but the man didn't know that.

Neither did Melinda. Her eyes widened when the auror's words sunk in and she began to tremble.

"But death is easier than watching someone suffer," the man taunted. To Melinda, he whispered, "Remember, woman, your own people do this, not I!" Holding her firmly, he placed the tip of his wand against her cheek. "Aduro!" he hissed.

The pain started slowly, but quickly become unbearable as the spell used to kindle a small flame burned her cheek, charring skin. Melinda began to writhe in his grasp as agony lanced through her.

"Enough!" the auror shouted.

"You will back off, or watch the woman die!" the man shouted as he released her from the spell.

As the aurors backed away, the man stepped forward, following them.

"You will tell your men at the door to leave. Once I am beyond the wards, I will release the woman and leave."

They all knew it was a lie.

As the aurors backed out the emergency room doors, a small pop was heard behind the Frenchman.

Before the man could spin around, a loud, cracking sound bounced off the walls, and his grip on Melinda fell away.

She dove to the right and hit the ground hard, hoping to get clear of any crossfire. Her actions were unnecessary, however.

Turning, she saw the Frenchman on the ground, his lifeless eyes staring at the ceiling. Behind him stood an enraged house elf, one hand held out, palm up, the other clenched at her side.

"You will not be hurting Dilly's family!" the little elf roared.

Into the silence that gripped the room, Dilly spotted Melinda. With a small cry, she flew to her friend and threw herself into her arms.

"My gods, Dilly. You just saved my life," Melinda whispered as she held the small elf tightly.

"Bad man wanted to kill Dilly's family. Bad man had to pay," Dilly told her as she pulled back. Seeing the black, charred skin on Melinda's cheek, her large, green eyes welled up with tears. "Dilly did not come fast enough!" she cried.

"It can be healed," a quiet voice said.

Human and elf both looked up at the tired, concerned face of Sylvia August. Behind her stood several healers and medi-witches.

"Well, let's have a look at you," Sylvia said as she helped her friend and fellow healer to her feet.

While the head healer worked on Melinda, Dilly wrapped her arms around her friend's leg and watched the aurors remove the dead man from the emergency room.

Several minutes later Constable Barney Wither, O'Dalley's assistant, entered the emergency room. After being briefed by the aurors, he approached the healers.

Sylvia placed a bandage over the mostly healed burn and admonished Melinda to leave it alone. "It needs to stay on for a day or two. I want to keep the area clean and allow the salve to work."

"Healer McKinny?"

"Yes, Constable? How can I help you?" Melinda asked, frowning as the sticking charms around the bandage pulled at her skin slightly.

"I'm Constable Wither. The aurors filled me on what happened, ma'am. I'm glad you weren't hurt more severely."

"Thank you, Constable. So am I," she said.

"Not to be rude," Sylvia said, frowning at the man, "but why are you here?"

"I'm afraid there's no easy way to say this," Barney told them. "Under the law, I have to take Healer McKinny's elf into custody."

"What?" Melinda asked, her eyes narrowing.

Dilly whimpered and tightened her grip around Melinda's leg.

"Why?" Sylvia asked. "The elf saved her life."

"That may be, ma'am, but the law states that any magical creature that causes harm to a witch or wizard is to be taken into custody and the case reviewed." Seeing the look of outrage on the faces of the healers, he nearly grimaced. Sometimes he really hated his job.

"Reviewed how?" Melinda asked.

Several popping sounds were heard as house elves appeared in the room. Some were dressed in military fatigues, while others were dressed in tea towels or uniforms baring family crests.

As the Constable began to explain the process, one elf glanced around the room, looked at Dilly, and then popped away. Another took Dilly's hand and squeezed it in support. She then glanced up at the enraged healer the elf was clinging to, nodded once and disappeared.

"If it's proven that the elf did willingly and knowingly kill the man, I'm afraid the penalty is quite harsh," Barney concluded several minutes later.

"Don't mince words with me, Constable. What do you mean by 'quite harsh'?" Melinda demanded.

"The penalty is death, ma'am," he told her quietly.

More small popping sounds were heard in the room as more house elves arrived.

"Oh, hell no!" Melinda exclaimed, stepping back from him. "You'll not kill her for saving my life!"

From what I've been told, the aurors had the situation under control," Barney told her.

"Does this look controlled to you, Constable?" Melinda asked as she ripped the bandage off her cheek and showed him the still blackened flesh.

When he blanched, Sylvia shook her head. "We've healed the damage and the color should return to normal in the next day or so," she felt compelled to explain. "But the injury was serious enough, as was the man's threat to Healer McKinny's life."

"When that man threatened Melinda's life, the auror told him that Haven had plenty of healers, implying that one less wouldn't make a difference," Sharon said as she pushed her way through the crowd of hospital staff and gathering elves.

"I was wandless, in pain, and knew the man was going to kill me as soon as he no longer needed me to shield him from the aurors," Melinda told him. "Dilly must have picked up on my fear and reacted. She saved my life, Constable Wither, and you want to kill her for it?"

"What I want isn't really relevant, ma'am. The law says..."

"What is going on here?" a cold voice asked.

As one, those in the room turned toward the emergency room doors and those who'd just entered.

Gently pushing his way through the crowd of elves and people, Harry Potter approached the constable. Behind him walked Hermione and Dobby.

As the crowd began to speak, Harry shook his head at the noise. "One at a time, please!"

Into the silence, another small popping sound was heard as Winky arrived with Arthur Weasley.

"Melinda!" he exclaimed as he rushed to her side. "Winky told me what happened. Are you alright?"

"Physically, I'm fine," she told him as he wrapped his arms around her.

"Lord Potter," Sharon said quietly, "I was with Healer McKinny when she was taken hostage."

Harry nodded. "You start. I'll talk to the aurors when you're finished."

As Harry listened to the details from the medi-witch and then the lead auror, he began to scowl. Arthur listened carefully, his arms tightening around Melinda as he realized just how much danger she'd been in.

Once he had the facts, Harry turned to Barney and shook his head. "Many of the laws of the Department for the Regulation and Control of Magical Creatures no longer apply. By order of the King, all sentient, magical creatures are to be treated with the same respect and due process as any witch or wizard."

Turning to Melinda, he smiled at her, then down at the clearly terrified elf who clung to her leg. "I'm releasing Dilly into your custody, Healer McKinny. The Minster of Magic will probably require a hearing on the matter. The facts, as I've heard them, clearly show a case of justifiable lethal force, but the Minister will need to make the final decision."

"Thank you, Lord Potter," Melinda said, her voice trembling with relief.

Harry nodded, then looked around the room and frowned. "Someone want to tell me why there are so many elves here?"

"We's here for Dilly, Master Harry," Dobby told him. "If Dilly is in troubles for savings her witch, then we's also in troubles."

"What do you mean, Dobby?" Harry asked, confused.

"It's hurt my bad old master whens he tried to hurts you, Master Harry. Other elves do same things, tryings to stops the bad mens from hurting the goods."

Harry nodded, finally understanding. "I don't think there's anything to worry about, for any of you. Why don't we leave and let the healers get on with their duties?"

As many of the house elves popped away, Constable Wither smiled at Harry. "I'm very glad you were here, my lord. I didn't want to take the elf in. She was only saving the healer's life, and it seemed wrong to punish her for it. But the law..." He shrugged.

"I know, Barney. With all that's happened recently, the Ministry hasn't had the chance to get all the information out to the proper people," Harry told him, shaking his hand.

When Hermione wrapped her arm around his waist, he turned to her and smiled.

"I'm glad Dobby came and got us," she told him seriously.

"So am I." His eyes danced as he brushed a finger down her cheek.

"What?" she asked, her eyes narrowing in suspicion.

Leaning down, he brushed his lips over her ear and whispered, "S.P.E.W. rides again."

When she groaned, he laughed and pulled her into a tight hug, then turned to face Healer McKinny.

"If you have any questions, I'm sure Arthur can answer them. If not, don't hesitate to call me or Hermione. We'll do what we can to help."

"Thank you," Melinda said. "I'm not sure what would have happened if you hadn't come along."

"Thank Dobby. He's the one who came and got us," Harry told her, looking down at the elf by his side.

Melinda kneeled down and held out her hand. "Thank you, Dobby."

Dobby shook her hand shyly. When he let go, Dilly squealed and threw herself into his small arms.

"You do be a good elf, Dobby!" she cried.

Dobby patted her back, but looked at Harry for help.

"It's time for us to go, Dobby," Harry told him, coming to his rescue. "Arthur, let us know if you need anything."

"I will, Harry. Thanks."

Taking Dobby's hand, Harry, Hermione and the elf disappeared.

Arthur touched Melinda's uninjured cheek and shook his head. "Gods, Melinda," he began.

"I'm fine, Arthur," she assured him.

"You two can cuddle later. Let's get that bandage replaced, Melinda. Then I'm releasing you for the day," Sylvia said.

As Melinda argued with her boss, Arthur knelt down and looked at Dilly.

The young elf watched him carefully, unsure of his reaction. When he held open his arms, she clapped her hands and threw herself into his embrace.

"I'll never be able to thank you enough for what you did, Dilly. I don't know what I would have done if I'd lost her," Arthur said quietly as he hugged the elf tightly for a moment before releasing her.

"Dilly will not be letting anyone hurt Melinda," she said. "Melinda do be family, and family do be protecting each other."

"I couldn't have said it better," he replied.

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### **Padfoot Manor...**

Harry slipped quietly into the bedroom so he wouldn't disturb Hermione, who was already in bed. A quick check of his watch explained why he felt so exhausted. It was nearly three in the morning. He sat on his side of the bed and kicked off his shoes, then he sighed heavily and closed his eyes for a moment.

"Tired?" Hermione asked as she opened her eyes.

"You have no idea. And it's only going to get worse, I'm afraid," he replied as he began to undress.

"How so?"

"The Brigade is going on a full training schedule in a week. You know what that means. And then there is the matter with Dilly, and the Council of Avalon. Oh, and the twins did something in their lab which nearly consumed the entire floor before they stopped it. Something about a dimensional rift. Caleb wants me to talk to them. Need I continue? I get exhausted just thinking about it."

"Can I help?" she replied, sending him some rather naughty images.

He smiled softly. "Would it upset you much if I just held you tonight and we slept?"

"Of course not," she replied, her tone softening.

Harry crawled under the blankets and wrapped an arm around her. She moved and pushed his head so that it was cushioned against her breast. She cradled him against her, smiling to herself as his breathing deepened. A few minutes later, she followed him into sleep.

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### **Hogwarts Castle (Feb 27th)...**

"Lucius Malfoy is here to see you, my lord," said a Death Eater.

Voldemort looked up from the tome he had been reading. He, along with Brother Chung and Severus Snape, was busy exploring methods of breaking through Potter's ward so he could send his servants abroad.

"Send him in."

Lucius walked proudly up to Voldemort's throne and he bowed low before him. "My lord, I have news from our spies in Haven. However, only one has reported in. There may be a problem there."

Voldemort closed his book and looked over the cover for a moment, admiring the finely crafted volume that had used human skin as parchment. It really was a masterpiece.

"Why would you suspect a problem, Lucius?"

"As a precaution, we told both spies that they must report at the same time. Two owls, two reports, my lord. But only one report has been received, concerning enemy battle plans. Joyner reported only."

Voldemort leaned forward. "And what did Joyner have to say about the battle plans?"

"The British Ministry of Magic in Exile is worried. They have been unable to gather more than forty five hundred troops for their planned assault. According to Joyner, they will be attacking from Hogsmeade and are frantically trying to find people that can make portkeys for that location. We have no date on this supposed attack and if she's been captured like I suspect, we'll never find out a date from her."

Voldemort waved a hand, dismissing the concern about the spies. "If they are caught, they will do their duty and die as they should. So, they will not have more wizards than we will?"

"So it seems, my lord," replied Lucius.

"How fares our recruitment efforts?"

"Results have been mixed, my lord. After we received the Iron Wands and the Blood Jihad, recruitment dropped for quite a while, but it's been picking up lately. We've received a number of recruits from Eastern Europe and the Middle East. We'll outnumber them when they attack."

"You don't sound happy, Lucius. What is it you are trying so hard not to say?"

Lucius sighed and hoped he wasn't going to get cursed for this. "My lord, I'm not concerned that we won't have enough Death Eaters, I'm concerned that we won't be able to feed them. We're having trouble collecting enough food for ourselves and the muggles."

Voldemort frowned. Since he'd taking over the country, it had become obvious to him that Lucius actually controlled the muggles. It was time to start putting an end to that.

"Cut the rations to the general population unless they are working for us," Voldemort snapped. "I grow tired of your coddling the muggles, Lucius. Let them die off. There would be food for all if you weren't so concerned about feeding them, as well."

Voldemort gestured and a Death Eater stepped from the ranks and pointed his wand at Lucius. "*Crucio!*" he shouted.

Lucius dropped to the floor, writhing in agony.

Voldemort stood from his throne and walked around the man on the floor for a moment. He signaled and Lucius was released from the curse.

"I own Britain, and I own you Lucius Malfoy, you obey me. Your reliance and fondness for the muggles is going to cost you dearly. Now cut their rations and let them starve," the Dark Lord hissed angrily.

Lucius struggled slowly to his knees, then to his feet. "A-A-As you command, my lord," he stammered.

Voldemort sat back down on his throne and smiled slightly. "Excellent. Now, what other news have you for me?"

"T-T-There is a disturbing report over French Wizarding Wireless that Harry Potter and his people have killed the French Minister of Magic and have attacked the Council of Avalon. German Wireless reports their Minister is safe, as do the Dutch and Swedish wireless services, but they are not releasing any additional information."

"So, the French have failed in their efforts. I should have expected that," Voldemort mused. "See if you can find out what has happened. Potter and his friends might have lost a lot of support."

Lucius bowed, acknowledging the command. "That's all I have to report for now, my lord," he said. His body was still trembling from residual pain.

"Then you are dismissed, Lucius," Voldemort replied, picking up his book.

Lucius backed away and then turned. He was nearly at the door when a voice made him stop.

"Oh, Lucius? One last thing." Voldemort called.

He turned. "Yes, my lord?"

"A Necromancer, Lucius. It seems the last one wasn't suitable."

Lucius flinched and nodded nervously before exiting the Great Hall. As he left the castle, he could hear the laughter of multiple poltergeists and he gave thanks that he didn't have that problem in London.

## Ministry of Magic, Haven...

Amelia downed the offered potion and steam rose from her head like a thundercloud. Since yesterday morning and their precipitous arrival in Haven, she had been on the go non-stop. Susan had tried to help her, but Amelia had sent her back to Padfoot Manor hours ago with strict instructions to rest. She didn't want her niece endangering the baby because she was exhausted.

In the past twenty four hours she had seen to the housing of nearly one hundred and sixty unexpected heads of state, faced a possible government crisis concerning house elves and a royal decree, and had been updated on the status of the war.

The door opened and an exhausted Arthur Weasley walked in and plopped down on a chair. "Someone tell me why I thought working for the Ministry would be a fun career," he mumbled.

Amelia snorted in amusement, then looked at him. "Because you didn't want to go into the same work as your father. Would you have been happy as a tailor?"

Arthur shuddered and shook his head. He loved his father, but had no desire to follow in his footsteps. "I do have one piece of good news, Amelia," he offered.

"Oh?"

"With the staffs of so many Ministers still trying to leave France and come here, the Chief Justice has postponed the emergency meeting until this afternoon. He did ask, however, that Harry and his people attend the meeting."

Amelia nodded. "Good. Then, if there are no further emergencies, I'm going home to get a few hours sleep."

"Good idea. I think I'll do the same."

"Oh, Arthur, tell Melinda that we will have a hearing when this mess is cleared up, but that she shouldn't be overly concerned about the matter."

"Right," Arthur replied. If he knew his Melinda, and he did, she'd be worrying the wallpaper off the walls by now and Dilly would be helping her.

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## Padfoot Manor...

Harry groaned, then he opened his eyes. He was alone in the bed, and from the angle of the sunlight streaming in the window, it was later than he was used to waking up.

He could see that one of the elves had set up breakfast at the table not far away. Now if only he could make it that far, he thought. It seemed like every bone in his body was aching.

Standing, he walked over to the breakfast table and poured himself a large cup of coffee before sitting down. On the table was a note from Hermione informing him that the council meeting was moved back and that she'd meet him there.

A small pop alerted him that an elf had appeared.

"Dobby?"

"Master Harry is to wear his best today for the council meeting," Dobby muttered to himself, then went to the wardrobe, removing his cleaned uniform. The elf paused and turned to look at Harry. "Master Harry, what wills happen to Dilly? She is good elf."

Harry sighed and motioned for Dobby to come sit with him at the table. Reluctantly, the small elf sat on a chair after summoning a few cushions to sit on.

"Dobby, under the old laws Dilly would have died. You know that and I know that. But the King ordered us to change those laws. The problem is there are so many of them and we couldn't change them all at once, so we've been doing them in pieces. Dilly has fallen into a gray area, but I give you my word that I will do everything to protect her."

Dobby looked a little reassured.

"It's difficult to change Dobby. You of all people should know that. You want to be free and you are. But how many elves want to be free? And you know that freedom can hurt them. Someday we will figure out a way to free an elf without the lack of a bond driving them insane. But for now we need to go slow.

"Dilly's case is going to set an example. Because of her case, elves and other creatures will find themselves better off. She killed, and that is never a good thing, but she killed in defense of her family."

"So Dilly wills be alright?" asked Dobby.

Harry smiled at his friend. "Yes, I think she will. But just to be on the safe side, I'm going to offer my services to Healer McKinney as Dilly's advocate."



Dobby beamed at him. Feeling much better, he scrambled around the room laying out Harry's clothing and cleaning up.

Harry watched for a moment, then sighed to himself. Dilly's case was going to cause problems. Of that, he had no doubt.

Dobby popped out of the room while Harry was finishing breakfast. He opted for a quick shower before dressing.

He getting dressed when Dobby reappeared.

"Master Harry, there be a group of French peoples at the apparation point. They wants to come into Haven. They have that lady thats Professor Hairyhead likes," Dobby said.

Harry frowned and checked his watch. The council meeting wasn't due to start for another twenty minutes.

"Alright, Dobby, go to the apparation point and inform the constable in charge that I will be there shortly to escort our guests to the council. Then go to Hermione and tell her I will be there in a bit."

Dobby nodded and vanished with a pop.

He finished dressing and summoned his staff before apparating to the Haven primary apparation point.

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## **The Wizengamot Building, Haven...**

Chief Justice Umtumba looked around the large chamber and frowned. He wasn't happy, considering how they had arrived at this place, and less happy with what had to happen now.

The doors opened and the Justices filed in, many of them nervous and still tired from yesterday. Haven had gone out of its way to make the dignitaries welcome, but they were men and women used to traveling with entourages. It was only today that the first of their groups started filtering into Haven. Without their staff, most of the Justices felt just a little bit naked.

Umtumba knew the room wasn't normally this big; he could sense the lingering magic used to expand the space inside. Amelia had told him that the room was built for the original Wizengamot, which had barely one hundred members.

Seeing the justices had all been seated, he was about to begin the session when the doors opened again and Harry Potter walked in leading a group of people, including Beauxbatons Headmistress, Madam Maxime. Several Justices stood in alarm and an angry murmur rippled through the assembly.

Umtumba banged his gavel several times, even though the session hadn't begun. "Lord Potter, I must ask you to explain yourself and your companions!" he called.

"Chief Justice, council members," Harry said, addressing the room, "these four people, Madam Maxime of Beauxbatons, Serge Delacour, Henri Reinard and Julien Beauchamp represent the opposition to the current French Ministry. They arrived here in Haven only moments ago and have willingly offered me their wands and their oaths as proof of their good intentions." He raised his fist, showing them the four wands he held.

"And their purpose here, my lord? Remember that only a Minister has the right to participate in these proceedings."

Harry dropped his fist. "They ask only to be allowed to witness these proceedings and they beg that you do not condemn their country for the actions of a few."

Harry paused and looked around for a moment. "You are all here today because of the actions of a few people. Did these four cause the problem?" he asked pointing at the French. "No, they did not! Madam Maxime and these others represent a chance for change for the French nation. They represent a chance for the light to shine once again. I could have denied them entrance to these proceedings. But as we are here to see justice done, so are they."

There was a moment of silence while the Justices stared down at Harry and the others. Hermione and Amelia looked at him with pride. He didn't know it, but he was adding another page to the legend of Harry Potter.

"What say the council?" asked Umtumba after a moment.

It started small, but one by one, Justice's lit their wands in acknowledgment, allowing the French to remain. A minute later, every wand was lit, including that of the Chief Justice.

Harry bowed his head in appreciation and turned to the French. "I will see your wands returned to you before you leave. In the meantime, you can sit over there," he said pointing to the visitors gallery.

"Thank you, Harry Potter," Madam Maxime said, then she turned and led her group to the gallery while Harry sat down heavily on a chair next to Hermione.

"*You never fail to surprise me,*" Hermione sent him.

"*Oh? Howso?*"

"*The last thing I would have expected at this point would be for you to defend the French, especially in front of the Council.*"

*"It was the fair thing to do. You know that."*

"Harry?" her mental tone seemed softer somehow.

"Yes?"

*"I love you."*

*"Huh? I love you too, but what brought that on?"*

Hermione shook her head and remained silent, though her fingers slowly caressing his. His attitude surprised her, but she realized that he didn't have it in him to hate for the sake of hating. He could have been angry with all the French and everyone would have agreed with him.

She smiled and squeezed his hand, leaving him wondering.

Harry was about to ask Hermione what she was thinking, but the Chief Justice began to speak.

"My colleagues, I realize that we are not in a Chamber that has been sanctified, but we face an unusual set of circumstances. I ask for a vote. Shall we break and reform elsewhere? Or remain to conclude our business? If remaining is your vote, light your wand."

Umtumba glanced around and grinned at all the lit wands. It seems he wasn't the only one that wanted answers and didn't want to wait for them. He turned back to the main arena. Amelia sat at a table, waiting patiently. Across from her was an unmanned table that would have been used by the French Ministry.

Umtumba turned to look at Amelia.

"Madam Minister, I know that many here have questions. Considering the circumstances, would you assume the position in the witness box, while I act as inquisitor?"

"Of course, Chief Justice," Amelia replied, then she stood and moved to the witness box.

"Please explain to the assembly, exactly what occurred?" he asked as she sat down.

"The interrogation of our French prisoner revealed that the neither the French Muggle Ministry, nor the French Ministry of Magic, is fully in control of their country. Instead, a third party is operating behind the scenes.

"Knowing that another group was really running the country, but not knowing their intentions except to say they appeared hostile, our research people were tasked with creating a spell that would allow us to move as many people to safety as possible. It was felt that there was a strong probability of treachery at the council and we wanted to ensure the safety of our party, along with as many others as possible.

"To be honest, I had expected them to come up with some kind of ward breaking portkey, as that was what was originally discussed. But it would seem they had other ideas," she told the assembly wryly.

Once the chuckles died away, she cleared her throat and continued.

"When we arrived at Beauxbatons for the council, it seemed as though our suspicions were warranted. Our rooms were full of listening charms and other spying spells. Then our rooms were filled with soul poisoners; cursed vases designed to make us fight among ourselves. We still have some of them to submit as evidence, should this court wish to see them. Finally, one of our house elves, a trusted member of our elite elf forces, was killed by an unknown elf.

"When the fighting broke out just before we were to expose this government within a government, we were forced, for the sake of everyone present, to activate the transport spell to Haven."

"Madam Minister," called the Justice representing Mexico. "That transport spell was neither a portkey, nor apparation. Can you tell us more about it?"

"The spell was crafted by Lady Potter and Mrs. Black. I am not privy to all of the details behind the spell, but I am told it was a form of forced apparation. It was a most unpleasant sensation, if you ask me, and I doubt I would want to undergo it again. However, if you want more details on the spell, please feel free to ask Lady Potter or Mrs. Black," replied Amelia.

"What about casualties? How many were injured or killed?" asked another Justice.

Amelia frowned for a moment, then looked at Arthur. "Arthur? Do you have figures on that?"

Arthur Weasley stood and looked decidedly uncomfortable. "Of the Justices, six were injured in the rush to leave the building, none seriously. Sixteen people in the visitors gallery were injured. All but three of them have been released by the healers at this point.

"Since the transport spell didn't transport the dead, we had to review pensieve memories, but we think eight were killed, including the French Minister and his aide. Six combatants were killed also. Finally, we have eight prisoners who were captured on our arrival, one of whom was killed attempting to escape. A healer was injured in that escape attempt."

When Amelia nodded, he sat down. The attack on Melinda still angered him greatly.

"Are there any further questions concerning this matter?" asked Umtumba.

He looked around the chamber, noting the silence. Nodding to himself, he turned back to Amelia. "I believe it is time for us to see the evidence that triggered the attack and our arrival at Haven."

Amelia gestured to Arthur. The pensieve they had at Beauxbatons had been destroyed when the building collapsed, but it wasn't the only copy of those memories.

Arthur walked to the center of the chamber and conjured a small table. On the table he placed a presentation pensieve. He glanced at Amelia, who nodded. He pressed several runes along the edges of the pensieve, then stood back.

An image appeared above the pensieve and grew to nearly life size proportions.

A mirror appeared in the image and the face of Trenton Largo appeared in it. Unlike other, more expensive pensieves, presentation pensieves always appeared from the point of view of the person who donated the memories.

"My name is Trenton Largo. I am currently employed by the British Ministry of Magic as an Intelligence officer in our Ministry of Defense. I hold the rank of captain. Today is February the eleventh and I will be participating in the interrogation of a captured enemy prisoner," the man said to the mirror.

Then the scene shifted as the mirror was put away. Trenton walked out of the room he had been in, and walked down a short corridor before entering another room. Inside the room was a man bound to a chair, and several other people, including one person dressed in healer green.

"It is now exactly ten in the morning. Has the prisoner been administered veritaserum yet?" asked the voice of Largo.

The scene swung to focus on the healer. "Yes, sir. He's in good health and the potion should be in effect now."

The scene moved jerkily for a moment, as if Largo was nodding, then it swung to focus on the man in the chair.

"What is your name?" asked Largo.

"Jean LaRoche."

"And what is it that you do, Monsieur LaRoche?"

"I help control the country."

Largo glanced up at one of the other people present. "That's an odd way of saying it," he commented, then he looked down at LaRoche again.

"Do you work for the government, Monsieur LaRoche?" he asked.

"Oui. All of them."

The scene jiggled a bit as Largo leaned back in his chair. "All of them? How many governments do you work for, Monsieur?"

"Three, but only one is the real one."

Largo looked around, noting the frowning faces.

"Tell me about the real government then, Monsieur, and your work with them," Largo prompted.

"It's been there since before Charlemagne, always in the background, always controlling the country without being seen. Sometimes we'd influence policy, sometimes we'd control the purse strings, sometimes both. Kings and Princes have bowed before our power. We've created dynasties and struck down saints.

"It was my idea to capture your diplomats and we used the Magical and Muggle governments to do it."

"What was the purpose behind kidnapping the diplomats?"

"We were trying to show our support for Lord Voldemort in Britain. It was felt that since the diplomatic party contained two members of Harry Potter's group, we could portkey them to Voldemort and he would remember our support when he finally broke out of Britain."

A number of Justices shot glances at Harry Potter and his group, who sat stone faced.

They had heard this before and weren't about to let it start bothering them now. At the time, Ginny had nearly broken down when she had heard it. It was only with the help of Neville and Luna that they managed to calm her.

Ginny had faced many tough situations and had come through wonderfully, but her biggest fear was coming face to face with Voldemort once more. She was afraid that somehow he'd take control of her again and use her for his purposes. She had an interesting way of dealing with her fears though. She faced the problem and beat it. Only afterwards did she find herself a quiet place to be privately hysterical.

Facing one's fears was part of their training, and dealing with the aftermath was another. Each had their own ways of dealing with their fears and Ginny's was no less valid than Draco's or Tonks', who felt the need to scream and throw things. The group had rallied around Ginny when the news

about kidnapping and what their plans were to be revealed. Ginny had grown because of their support and so the rest of the Brotherhood.

"Monsieur, what of the Muggle Government? Or the Magical Ministry?" asked Largo.

"Marionnettes, Monsieur. Mere puppets," replied LaRoche.

"FREEZE PRESENTATION!" called Umtumba.

The Chief Justice sat, his face a thundercloud of anger. "Madam Minister, do you still have this individual in your custody?"

"Yes, Chief Justice, we do."

Umtumba looked at the other Justices. "My colleagues, we are faced with a signatory to the treaty of Avalon that has violated their sacred oaths. Do you wish to question this LaRoche first hand?"

The chamber lit up with lit wands and Umtumba nodded gravely. "The will of the council has spoken. We call Jean LaRoche to council!"

Amelia stepped down and Arthur hurried from the chamber.

"*This is unexpected,*" Hermione sent Harry.

"*Why? I would have thought they would have questioned him anyway, since we're here in Haven.*"

"*Didn't you hear the Chief Justice? He's gone from examining the actions of a single government, to questioning the right of that government to have signed the treaty in the first place. He is just a step away from declaring the French disenfranchised and perhaps oath breakers.*"

"*Oath Breakers? Hermione,*" Harry's tone whined a little in her head and she tried to hold in her laugh.

"*I'm sorry, Harry. I only read about it a few days ago. The signatories to the Council all took an oath before signing the treaty. If the council declares the oath to be broken, the council can enforce a Magical Government of their own on France for the next fifty years. After that, they will have their own government, but they will be subject to review every ten years for the next fifty years. It's called the 'one hundred year punishment'.*"

"*Ouch!*"

"*Ouch, indeed. It will be a slap at the French, but I suspect that once the French people learn of what has been happening, they'll be clamoring for the heads of these people in the hidden government. Look, here comes LaRoche now. I'm glad we didn't rough him up too much.*"

"*Stop that. You know it turns me on when you get bloodthirsty,*" he sent playfully.

Hermione snorted and tried to hold her laughter down. Her mother glared at her.

The lights in the chamber dimmed until only a lit chair in the center of the chamber was visible. Two Aurors dressed in brigade uniforms escorted LaRoche to the chair and pushed him into it. Only then did they remove the hood from his head.

Harry chuckled and Hermione smirked. She had been as angry at LaRoche as everyone else had been. Everyone went out of their way to keep Ginny away from him, forgetting that Hermione would stand up for her best friend also. Hermione had hexed the man so that his nights were filled with nightmares. The dark bags under his eyes showed he wasn't sleeping well.

"You can't hold me!" shouted LaRoche. "I demand to be released! I am a personal friend of the Minister of Magic! Bastard British! You can't hold me!"

Umtumba banged his gavel and LaRoche fell silent, looking around warily.

"Jean LaRoche, do you know where you are?" asked Umtumba. The lights in the chamber slowly came up revealing the chamber and all the robed Justices.

"Being tried by the bastard British," LaRoche muttered. "That's where I am."

"You are before the Council of Avalon, Jean LaRoche. You would do well to remember your manners," Umtumba intoned coldly.

LaRoche blanched and started to tremble. "M-m-my lord, I'm sorry. I did not know," he stammered.

"We have witnessed your confessions under veritaserum, Jean LaRoche, and also your confession about the third government, this shadow government, which really controls France."

LaRoche paled. "It's all lies! I was forced to say those things!"

Umtumba leaned forward. "Then you won't mind answering those same questions under veritaserum before this court?"

LaRoche shrank back from him, his shoulders slumped in defeat. "What is it you wish to know?" he whispered.

A murmur rose among the Justices.

"Is this other government truly separate? Who controls it, and who belongs to it?" someone called from the ranks of Justices.

"I cannot say. The only member that knows us all is the Leader, and even his identity is a mystery to us. We meet in secret. I do know that not all members are part of the government. Some represent business, banking, even the wine industry," LaRoche said brokenly. He was a dead man. If he was returned to France, the shadow government would see him killed. If not, the court of Avalon would order his death as an Oath Breaker.

"Do you truly control the Government of France?" asked the Justice from Mexico.

"We... influence, sometimes covertly, sometimes directly, sometimes by assassination. Generally, the Muggles and Magicals do what we want them to do," LaRoche replied.

"Chief Justice, there can be no doubt. The French Ministry has been subverted and is not in control," shouted the Justice from Poland.

Umtumba leaned forward. "Monsieur LaRoche, did the Minister of Magic agree to your controls?"

LaRoche sighed heavily. "Every Minister of Magic for the last four hundred years has known about and been party to the shadow government. Some have even been members themselves."

Umtumba looked around at the shocked expressions of the other Justices, then he happened to glance to the visitors gallery. He frowned for a moment.

"Monsieur Delacour, you look like you have something to say," Umtumba commented.

Serge Delacour stood, nodding his head. "Justices, a great crime has been committed against the people of France. But I beg of you, do not punish us further. Yes, legally you could call us Oath Breakers and, though it shames me deeply, I would have to agree with you.

"I know I have no right, no voice to speak to these proceedings, but I would ask that you consider not declaring us such. Disenfranchise the government yes, by all means. I promise my people will move into those positions and force every government employee under veritaserum to tell if they are a member of this shadow government or not.

"Give us your blessing and we will drag these people into the light of day and see that true justice is done, for our people and for everyone else."

Serge Delacour fell silent, watching the assembled Justices hopefully. He had no right to ask this of them, but he hoped just the same.

Across from him, in the section where the British sat, Harry's staff flared brightly. He looked at it in consternation. He wasn't causing it to light up. At least he didn't think he was.

Umtumba turned to Harry and chuckled softly to himself. "You have something you wish to add to these proceedings, Lord Potter?"

Harry stood, highly embarrassed. This was not something he had planned on. "It was not my intent to speak again before this body. But since you offer me the opportunity, Chief Justice, I will take it. We are here to see justice done. But justice against whom? The entire nation of France? Or against the few people who were in power and kidnapped our diplomats?"

"Mr. Delacour's proposal is extreme, but it's worth considering. It punishes those in the Ministry, while he promises to root out the shadow government and bring them to justice."

Harry paused and looked down at his feet for a moment. When he looked up again, his eyes blazed with power. "I know what it's like to be punished unfairly. I know exactly how I would feel if you declared a one hundred year punishment. I've felt the hatred and anger that festers and burns a hole in your heart for being treated unfairly.

"I know exactly how I'd feel after enduring one hundred years of punishment. France would be angry and uncooperative with everyone. They would feel they were unfairly treated, and they would be right. By declaring them Oath Breakers, you punish not only this generation, but the generations to come, those whose only crime was to be born French.

"You do not punish future generations for the crimes of their fathers. Mr. Delacour has offered you an honorable solution and I urge you to take it."

When Harry sat back down Hermione gripped his arm tightly. Her pride and approval flowed over their bond.

There was a moment of silence in the chamber, then the Justices lit their wands. The room glowed brightly and several members of the French delegation broke down, weeping.

Umtumba banged his gavel several times. "Very well. The current French Ministry is hereby disenfranchised. Ministry heads have seventy two hours to resign, or their oaths will kill them. We will give Monsieur Delacour and his people one year to show us that they are working to bring order and justice back to France. Monsieur Delacour, I will assign a Justice who you will keep informed of your activities so that he may report to the council. Will that be suitable?"

"Oui, Chief Justice. Merci! Merci!" Delacour sobbed.

Umtumba banged his gavel. "I declare these proceedings hereby closed. We will meet one year hence."

Harry sat in his chair emotionally exhausted.

"*I am so proud of you, Harry,*" Hermione sent him.

He looked at her, surprised.

Around him, those in the room began to file out. The Brotherhood and a few others remained behind.

"It takes a strong man to speak for his enemies and ask for mercy," Umtumba said, walking up to him. "Now I can see why you are a Maglios." He bowed deeply. "I must return to my country, but I will be watching. I understand why the Staff of Merlin is so interested in you."

Harry stood and returned the Chief Justice's bow. "Thank you, sir. Safe journey."

As Umtumba caught up with the other Justices, Madam Maxime and the three Frenchman approached. Amelia handed them back their wands and invited them to stay the night. Madam Maxime was most interested in visiting with Headmistress McGonagall and seeing the Haven School.

Finally, as the room emptied out, Harry wrapped an arm around Hermione. "Let's go home."

She smiled up at him. "Do you know what you've done today?"

He paused. "I spoke in front of the Council of Avalon?"

She giggled and shook her head ruefully, then she reached up and caressed his cheek. "Don't ever change, my heart."

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## Hogwarts Castle...

The fire in the dungeon workroom cast flickering shadows on the damp stone walls. The room was quiet, except for the occasional pop of wood from the hearth and the slight sounds of movement from the girl who slept in the room.

Several hours had passed since the Dark Man had retired, and the girl felt safe enough to sit up and gaze around the room. She liked the nights best. There was no one ordering her about, no screams to ignore or demands made upon her body.

She rocked herself slowly and hummed tunelessly, trying to block out the feeling of wrongness. When a log popped, she jumped, then glared at the fire.

"I wish you would stop doing that," she told the flames.

Turning away, she ignored the fire and began to rock gently once more. The shadows in the room were comforting most of the time. Sometimes she even danced with them, imagining herself at a fancy ball.

But tonight was different. She could sense it somehow. The slight creeping of her skin, the whisper of the flames in the hearth and the gathering of shadows told her that peace would not be hers just yet.

"I don't know why you're all looking to me, anyway," she muttered, looking down at her dirt caked hands.

"You had the means to destroy him before he killed me," a voice hissed.

The girl looked up and glared at the woman before her. "You were dead the moment you entered the pens," she told the shade. "It's not my fault you were stupid enough to get caught!"

Another form detached itself from the shadows, coalesced into another of Snape's victims and moved towards the girl. "You knew what he would do to us, yet you did nothing to stop him," she accused.

"Yes, I knew what would happen to you," the girl said. "But there was nothing I could do."

"You didn't even try," the first shade snapped. "We are damned because of your cowardice!"

The girl shrugged. "It wasn't cowardice, it was simply knowing there was no way I could stop it. Had you been smarter, you wouldn't have been caught in the first place."

"You had the means," the second woman spat. "You stole what you needed from the Dark Man months ago and didn't use it!"

"The apple lied!" the girl hissed furiously. "You're not real, anyway. You have no souls and you're not ghosts. Be gone, you ignorant cows!"

As the forms rejoined the shadows, the girl reached under her bedding and pulled out the dessicated thorn apple and glared at it.

"You promised! You said you would fix everything, but you lied!" she exclaimed.

*It's not my fault you waited too long to use me,* she heard the fruit say.

"Why didn't you warn me? Why didn't you tell me I had to use you before it was too late?" she moaned, seeing nothing wrong with dead fruit speaking.

*Is the Dark Man right, then? Are you so ignorant that you can't remember even the simplest things?* the fruit asked scornfully.

"I should just kill you now and forget about the whole thing," she muttered to the thorn apple.

*Your destiny is not to kill me, girl, but to kill the Dark Man.*

"That's what you were for! Now who is it that can't remember the simplest things, you wanker!" She shook the fruit in her hand violently.

*I can't really feel that, you know.*

"Maybe, but it makes me feel better," she told the thorn apple as she shook it a few more times.

*Finished now?* it asked her snidely.

"For the moment," she said petulantly.

*Time is running out, girl. You are the savior of the world. You must kill the Dark Man soon. Once he is gone, it will only be a matter of time before the Pale Creature follows him to the grave. You must focus, you must be strong and you must be ready to act.*

"But without you to help me, I don't know what to do," she whispered.

*Everything you need is inside you. I will help guide you, but it is you who must act now, not I. Listen closely to what I say and your destiny will be achieved!*

Sliding back down on her bedding, she rolled over and held the brown, dried out thorn apple to her ear. She nodded occasionally as she listened, even giggling once.

It was quite some time before she finally slipped the fruit back into its hiding place under her blankets and rolled back over to stare at the fire. The apple had made more promises, but she wasn't sure if she believed it. It had lied to her in the past and the bitter disappointment she'd felt had been crushing. She would see what the next few days brought, and act only if she felt the time was right.

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### **Haven, Melinda McKinny's cottage (March 1st)...**

Dilly answered the door and looked up in surprise at Harry Potter. She curtsied deeply. "I do be telling Melinda you do be here."

Harry chuckled and waited at the door while the little elf vanished with a pop.

Melinda came bustling into the little foyer, drying her hands on a towel. "Oh, Lord Potter! Come in, please. I was just making some tea. Would you like a cup?"

"Tea would be excellent," Harry replied with a smile.

He followed the healer into small kitchen and sat down when she waved him into a chair.

"I know this isn't exactly what you're used to..." Melinda began as she opened a cabinet and removed another cup.

"Healer McKinny, please call me Harry. The whole Lord bit always makes me feel uncomfortable. As to your cottage, it's very nice. Much better than what I grew up with."

Melinda blushed and passed him a cup of tea. Dilly popped in holding a tray of warm chocolate biscuits, which she passed to Melinda.

Melinda finally settled down and Harry took a sip of tea before speaking. "Healer McKinney..."

"Please call me Melinda. If I have to call you Harry, then you can call me Melinda," she said, interrupting him.

Harry flashed her a grin, which she returned.

"Tomorrow, you and Dilly will be summoned for a rather extraordinary hearing and I wanted to speak to both of you before hand."

Melinda nodded solemnly. "Dilly?"

Dilly appeared with a pop and Harry conjured her a chair to sit in. "Dilly, have a seat please."

"I know you were expecting Arthur to represent you at the hearing, but legally, because of his position, he is unable to do so. One of the reasons I'm here tonight is so that I can offer my services as advocate. Unless you feel that someone else would be better suited?"

Melinda shook her head. "Yes, er... no. I mean, I am disappointed that Arthur couldn't do it. But Dilly and I would be honored to have you act as our advocate."

Harry nodded, somewhat relieved. Then he leaned forward in the chair looking at the two intently.

"I want you both to understand that tomorrow's hearing is very serious, but I have taken some steps to ensure that no harm comes to Dilly. Two years ago there would be no hearing. Dilly would be executed and that would be that. But things have changed. The King has ordered the Ministry to modernize, and to treat the other sentient species as if they were humans."

"So, there is still a chance that they could order Dilly executed?" Melinda asked, her eyes narrowed in anger. When Dilly whimpered, Melinda wrapped an arm around her shoulders and waited.

Harry frowned. "Yes, there is that possibility. But I will tell you right now that it will not happen. I'm going to ask you to trust me on this. If necessary, Dilly will be portkeyed out of the hearing to a place of safety."

"Dilly doesn't want to be leaving her Melinda," the little elf said, her lower lip quivering.

Harry turned to face the elf. "It's only something I will do as a last resort, Dilly. If it comes to that, you would be away from her only for a few days. I'm going to do my best to make sure that doesn't happen, though."

"Dilly do be trusting Harry Potter. Dobby says you do be the greatest wizard alive," Dilly said softly.

Harry glanced over at Melinda and blushed slightly. "Well, Dobby always says that. But I promise I will do my best for you."

He stood and gave each a reassuring grin. "I must be off, but try not to worry too much tonight. I'll see you both in the morning."

Melinda and Dilly nodded at him, then Harry vanished from sight.

The elf looked at her friend for a moment. "Are you worried, Melinda?"

"I was, Dilly. But I think Lord Potter has something special in store for tomorrow."

"I think Dobby do be right about Harry Potter. He be a great wizard," replied Dilly.

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### Ministry of Magic, Haven (March 2nd)...

"We could have held this in my office. Did Harry say why he wanted us to hold this hearing in the committee hearing chambers?" Amelia asked warily.

"He didn't say. All he told me was that he would be acting as advocate for Melinda and Dilly. And that he had made some arrangements," replied Susan.

"Damn! He's got something up his sleeve. I almost wish I'd never introduced him to politics. At least with Coeur de Lion I knew what to expect," the Minister grumped.

Susan smiled to herself and said nothing. She didn't know what Harry had planned, but he had spent most of yesterday away from Haven 'making arrangements', as he called it.

"Oh, very well. Let's get this show going," Amelia said to herself, taking Amhar's old committee chair.

Susan sat off to one side, setting up the parchment and a dicta-quill to take transcripts of the proceedings.

The door opened and Melinda, Arthur and Dilly entered, looking nervous. A moment later, Hermione and her parents entered. They wanted to watch the proceedings.

Bertrand Lovegood entered the room, waving to Amelia and Hermione before sitting in the back of the room. Neville and Ginny entered and went over to sit with Arthur and Melinda.

Draco entered a moment later. Grinning, he sat next to Hermione.

"Where's Luna?" she asked him.

He chuckled and shook his head. "She's helping Harry. They should be here any minute."

Amelia glanced at the wall clock then leaned forward on her chair. "Healer McKinny, where is your advocate?"

Melinda sat up straight in her chair and opened her mouth, but the doors to the room swung open and Harry walked in.

"Sorry I'm late, but I had to round up a few guests."

Luna followed Harry and held the doors open. Into the room walked Ragnok and six house elves, including Dobby, Winky and the Pappy for Haven. Following them was a Centaur, a Veela, a Leprechaun and finally an Angel.

"Harry, what is the meaning of this?" demanded Amelia.

Harry walked over to stand by the table where Dilly and Melinda sat, while the other creatures took seats or positions in the back of the room.

"Madam Minister, this hearing will be the basis for new laws governing the rights and privileges of sentient creatures in our world. I have asked these *people* to attend our hearing today so that they may see and judge for themselves how we are to treat them from here on. These people represent only a fraction of the sentient species in our world. I was reluctant to invite a king Acromantula, for obvious reasons, and I was unable to find anyone who could honestly represent the dragon clans."



Amelia looked as though she would faint, while Dan and Draco chuckled. Luna sat in the back of the room speaking softly to the Angel and occasionally patting the rump of the centaur. The centaur didn't look happy with the situation, but he didn't see any way of making her stop. She was a Child of Gaia and he would deny her nothing.

Amelia cleared her throat and looked decidedly uncomfortable. Harry had placed her firmly in the fire and it was her turn to do something.

"Right. Let's begin. We are meeting here today to discuss the fate of Dilly, who is bound to Healer McKinny. This elf killed a human on the morning of February 26th. According to the old laws, the elf would have been turned over to the Department for the Regulation and Control of Magical Creatures, where she would have been executed."

Harry's expression darkened and he crossed his arms, staring at Amelia.

Amelia flinched slightly, but continued. "However, in light of the royal decree, those old laws have been thrown away. Unfortunately for Dilly and Healer McKinny, no new laws addressing this situation have been presented as yet, and with the Wizengamot presently unoccupied while its members campaign for their seats, no new laws will be forth coming for the foreseeable future."

Amelia paused, taking in her audience.

"There can be no doubt that Dilly killed the Frenchman..."

"She was protecting her family," Harry protested, interrupting Amelia. "He was using deadly force on Healer McKinny!"

Amelia nodded. "Yes, he was. And there were aurors present that could have done something to prevent the situation from escalating."

"No, they couldn't, Minister, and you should know better," Harry snapped. He was starting to get angry.

Amelia frowned. "Explain yourself, Lord Potter," she replied frostily.

Harry strode up to the platform where Amelia sat, then he turned back to look at Dilly and Melinda. "Yes, there were aurors present. But these aurors were trained members of my own unit. Soldiers trained to kill the enemy. They have no training in hostage situations and even less training in taking out a single person, leaving the hostage alive. I have reviewed the pensieve memories of that day and one of my own people told Healer McKinny and her captor that there were plenty of other healers in Haven, implying her life wasn't worth her captor's escape.

"From Healer McKinny's viewpoint, she had just been handed a death sentence by her own people! Her fear triggered Dilly's response. All Healer McKinny knew was that her life was in jeopardy. The bond between her and Dilly transmitted that fear and Dilly reacted accordingly."

Harry paused and walked over to Dilly, placing a hand on her shoulder and smiling at her. Then he turned to face Amelia. "We humans are really very arrogant. We think we're the best, when in truth we are no better than the Goblins, the Elves or the other races. Each race, each specie has it's own unique form of magic and it's own culture.

"For hundreds of years we have oppressed the elves until their bond became a death sentence if it were ever broken. Minister, you have the opportunity here to not only right a wrong that has gone on for far too long, but to set a precedent that will speak to future generations of all species.

"Yes, Dilly killed and I'm sure that she regrets being forced to take a life. But on the other hand, I know she will defend Healer McKinny again, if necessary. Not because of some bond, or because she is forced into doing so. But because she loves Healer McKinny, who is a member of her family. Each of us in this room is capable of loving. And that means we're more alike than we think."

Harry walked around the table and sat down next to Dilly and Melinda. Behind him, Dobby sniffled and handed Winky a large handkerchief.

Amelia frowned and sat back in her chair for a long moment, while everyone fidgeted nervously.

"I do not like the idea of an elf killing a human. But the situation was clearly confused, and deadly force had already been applied once, wounding Healer McKinny. There needs to be a line drawn that clearly indicates at what point the amount of force used is excessive. On the other hand, Dilly was clearly influenced by the fear she felt from Healer McKinny.

"We are at a crossroads. We are using elves in our efforts to take back our country from Lord Voldemort, and those elves have used deadly force in the course of their duty. If it is acceptable for our elf forces to use deadly force, then it clearly must be acceptable for Dilly to protect her bonded.

"It is not a simple matter of clearing Dilly of her actions. In this regard, as Lord Potter has pointed out. I must speak to the future. Therefore, I declare that Dilly's use of lethal force on February 28th was justified.

"In the event of future incidents, I further rule that each will require a hearing such as this. In the event of the hearing declaring the use of force being excessive for the situation, the individual in question will be tried as if they were human."

Melinda let out an explosive breath, and Dilly looked at her in confusion.

"We're alright, Dilly. No one will take you away from me," she said, hugging her friend. Dilly started weeping in her arms.

Harry sagged in his chair in relief.

"Thank Merlin! Now I don't have to kidnap her," he said a little too loudly.

"WHAT?" exclaimed Amelia, who stared at Harry in amazement. Everyone turned to look at him.

Harry looked around, noting everyone's curious stares. "Erm... Well, you see, I made arrangements with the Americans to give her asylum if things went wrong. They'd keep her safe until I could appeal to the King for a pardon. But I don't have to do that now."

Many in the room began to laugh, but Amelia's glare could melt ice. Someone needed to sit that man down and talk to him about what he could and could not do. *Going to the King for a pardon? Really!* she huffed to herself.

She looked down at Harry sternly. "Well, Lord Potter, since you don't have to do that, perhaps you would be kind enough to put together a list of all sentient species in Britain so that we can figure out who to treat as an equal?"

Harry winced at Amelia's tone and he glanced at Hermione, who nodded to him. "Yes, Minister, we'll be glad to."

Ragnok approached Harry. "I was honored to receive your invitation to this hearing, Lord Potter. And I can't say how pleased I am at the outcome. This bodes well for all our futures. Tell me, would you perhaps be available for a meeting next week?"

"I would be happy to meet with you, Ragnok. Owl me with the day and time and I'll be there."

Ragnok nodded, then he bowed and walked from the room.

"What that was about?" Amelia asked, as she joined Harry.

"I'm not really sure, Amelia. Once I know, you'll know," he replied.

He made ready to leave, content that Luna would see to their guests. Melinda and Dilly stopped him by the door. Melinda hugged him and whispered a heartfelt thank you, while Dilly hugged his leg into numbness.

"Harry Potter do be the greatest wizard like Dobby says."

He smiled down at her. "I don't know about that, Dilly, but you and Melinda are my friends and I try to help my friends when I can," he said as the elf let go of his leg.

When Dilly clapped her hands and made to launch herself at Harry's leg again, Melinda caught her and rolled her eyes at him.

Hermione laughed and Harry grinned at the Healer. "Let us know if you need anything else," he told the pair.

Turning, he escorted Hermione from the chamber.

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### Hogwarts Castle (March 5th)...

The girl sat close the fire, rocking slowly back and forth. She was in Snape's private quarters and watched him through dirty, tangled locks of black hair. The dungeon was cold and she found that if she entered his quarters quietly while he worked and remained near the fire, he usually let her stay.

On the rare occasions her eyes wandered from his person, it was to gaze longly at the potion ingredient cabinet.

Her gaze returned to the man seated at the large, cherry desk. He was working on the Dark Lord's ritual, taking a break from researching the ward around Britain. In the last few weeks his experiments to overcome the ritual's limitations had yielded favorable results and he had begun to push himself harder to find the answers he sought. The dark circles under his eyes and the gauntness of his face attested to the many late nights he'd spent perfecting his work.

As she watched, he leaned back on his chair and looked up. His eyes were wide and unfocused and his hands began to tremble. He carefully placed his notes down on the desktop and flattened his palms on either side of the parchment.

When he began to chuckle, the hair on the back of her neck stood up and she rocked herself harder.

"Pickled Murtlap," he said, finally looking at her. "It was right there all the time, pet. When broken down, the ritual is nothing more than a curse. With the larger infusion of unicorn blood I've been using, the soul of the victim remains tied to the body much longer. If the caster were to ingest a mixture of pickled Murtlap, he'd be resistant to the limitation of the ritual."

She stilled and whimpered. She wasn't ready for this. The apple had promised a solution, but had failed her!

Snape nodded, as though he understood her thoughts. "If I were loyal, I would report my discovery immediately. But if I do, and my theory proves to be correct, my usefulness will come to an end." He laughed, though the sound held no mirth. "But we both know the Dark Lord has little use for those who have served their purpose."

She stuffed her fist into her mouth to stifle the animal-like sounds of fear she couldn't stop.

"I'm sure you understand my predicament, my pet. I could withhold this information, bury it away. But the Dark Lord is a skilled Legilimens. He'd have the truth from me quick enough, and my death, when it came, would be long and tortuous."

He looked around the room, as if seeking an answer. Then his shoulders slumped and he shook his head. "There's no help for it. The Dark Lord must be informed of my discovery." He turned to her and smiled sadly. "Don't worry, pet. Even if my usefulness has come to an end, you've been well trained. I'm sure one of the others will snatch you up quickly, once I'm gone."

Her lips pulled back in a silent snarl and his lips twitched.

"Don't like the thought of leaving me? I'm touched," he sneered. "Out! I don't want you in here when I can't watch you."

She jumped to her feet and fled through the door and into the dungeon workroom, barely avoiding his boot when he tried to kick her.

"You're getting quicker! I'll have to cut back your food rations, won't I?" he taunted as he stalked towards the dungeon door, leaving the door to his quarters open.

She looked back towards his private quarters and the potions ingredient cabinet with longing, but knew it was beyond her now. Scurrying to the fire, she crouched down near the stacks of cauldrons she'd cleaned that morning and watched him.

As he relayed his message to the guard who opened the door, her eyes darted around the room frantically and she bit back a moan.

*The screams of the ritual's victims will continue and the soulless will sink to the depths, she thought, sinking into the madness. The giant squid will wave his tentacles, conducting the orchestra of the dead before feasting on their flesh!*

Burying her hands in her snarled hair, she began to pull with quick, violent jerks. The echoing screams of the women who'd died in the room reverberated through her mind. Their dead eyes stared at her accusingly as they reached out for her with cold, dead hands, seeking to strip the life from her.

"Stop that!"

Hands grabbed at her and she screamed, jerking away. The slap caught her by surprised, but stilled her as nothing else could have.

"What has gotten into you, girl?" Snape snarled.

When she only looked at him with wide, staring eyes, he shook his head.

"Calm yourself or I'll put you in the chains next! You can be replaced. A slut, after all, is easily trained. You took less than a week to come to heel," he reminded her.

Her eyes flashed with hatred and he laughed at her. Then, grabbing her by the hair, he yanked her to her feet.

"The Murtlap needs to be prepared. Get me the small silver cauldron while I gather my notes and the ingredients. Move!"

He punctuated his order by shoving her away so violently, she stumbled and fell. As he strode off to his quarters, she growled and turned away.

Her eyes narrowed when she spotted the stacks of cauldrons and she searched for what she needed.

When he returned, he joined her at the table where he normally prepared his ingredients and frowned at the cauldron she held.

"I said the silver cauldron, you idiot! Never tell me the small bit of knowledge you managed to retain from my classes has escaped you. Put that one back and retrieve the correct cauldron, or I'll give you to Mulciber!"

When she walked past him, he lay his notes on the table and reached for the jar of pickled Murtlap. He never noticed when she stopped.

Turning quickly, the girl stepped forward and swung the cauldron as hard as she could with both hands. The meaty sounding thunk of the cauldron meeting the back of Snape's skull was satisfying.

He fell to his knees with a grunt, then toppled over. She dropped down next him and turned him over onto his back. Straddling him, she reached for the cauldron and looked down on her tormentor with hate filled eyes.

Raising the cauldron with both hands, she brought it down with a strength born of madness. She heard the sound of bones shatter and laughed as blood spurted. Raising the cauldron, she repeated the action again and again.

She spoke then, her words punctuated by a squishing crunch each time the cauldron made contact with his head. "My name is not 'pet'. Nor is it 'slut', 'whore' or 'toy'. My name is Cho Chang and don't you forget it!"

With her breath sawing in her lungs, she brought the cauldron down one more time, then pushed it away to examine her work.

Snape's face had been pulverized. His eyeballs had exploded, and what had once been his very prominent nose was now shoved up into his misshapen skull. Through the blood she could see gray matter smeared on the cold stone floor.

Standing, she looked down at him and giggled. "Fifty points to Ravenclaw!" she called out merrily as she spun around on her toes.

Glancing around, she spied his notes on the table and tilted her head in thought. With a few quick strides, she picked them up and tossed them into the fire, then walked into his private quarters.

Reaching the ingredient cabinet, she grasped the handles and pulled the doors open. Laughing at his carelessness, she searched the bottles and jars until she found what she was looking for.

Taking a small vial from the middle shelf, she placed it into the pocket of her ragged robe. Finding two bottles of interest, she pulled them out and put them on the desk. She'd show him just how much she remembered!

She closed the cabinet doors, then paused for a moment. With a shrug, she jerked them open again and began to pull shelves out, laughing happily as jars fell and smashed on the hard floor. Shards of glass cut her bare feet as she danced around, but she was beyond pain.

When she was done, she looked around the room and smiled. She then gathered all the notes, bits of parchment and books sitting on the desk top and tossed them into the fire, where they caught fire and burned cheerfully. She looked at the overfull bookcases lining the office and shrugged. As satisfying as it might be, it would take too much time to toss them all into the fire.

Picking up the two bottles she'd set aside, she marched to the doorway and turned around. Unscrewing the lids, she poured the contents of one into the other and dropped the empty. When the bottle in her hand began to smoke, she replaced the lid and shook it. As the liquid began to roil, she heaved it at the fireplace and slammed the door closed.

The sound of glass shattering and the deep, whomping reverberation had her dancing. She placed her hand on the door and felt the heat of the fire she'd just created. She could feel the air from the dungeon tickle her feet as it was sucked under the door to feed the flames of the blaze.

Cocking her head to the side, she thought for a moment. It was true that stone wouldn't burn, but all of those dark, evil books would! And some of them were irreplaceable!

Turning away, she danced back to Snape and poked him with her foot.

"It's better this way. The screaming has stopped and the dance of the dead will take it's final bow. I've saved us, you know. Not you, of course. Your soul was damned before I was born. But them," she told him seriously as she waved her hand towards the door and the cages of victims outside in the pens. "Oh, yes. I've saved them. I've saved us all."

When the door of the dungeon banged open, she jumped and spun around.

Two Death Eaters stood outside as the Dark Lord entered.

"What is this? What has happened here?" Voldemort hissed, his eyes trained on what was left of Severus Snape.

"He was damned," Cho told him calmly. "He'd solved your ritual problem and was afraid that you wouldn't need him anymore and would kill him. I saved you the trouble. I didn't really want to do it this way, but the apple lied! It was supposed to be the solution, but it was actually the cauldron!"

When the Dark Lord pulled out his scepter, she laughed and held up a hand. "I wouldn't do that. I'm the only one who has the answer to your puzzle."

Voldemort's red eyes narrowed and his lips pulled back, exposing pointed teeth. "You? You're nothing. A play thing for my servants, to be used as they please. Severus would never have told you anything."

"He didn't usually, but everyone gets lonely from time to time," she taunted. "And let's face it. I may have given him the best blow jobs of his life, but head can only take a man so far. Oh, and did I forget to mention that he use to talk in his sleep? No? How remiss of me!"

Voldemort took a gliding step towards her. "Extracting the information from you will be easy enough, girl. Then you will know what pain is!"

Smiling, she reached into her pocket. Taking out the vial she'd placed there earlier, she held it up to the light. The deep red potion was laced with a fiery gold and it sparkled in the dim light.

"What is that?" he hissed.

"This? Why, this is the answer to everything. My name is Cho Chang and I am the savior of the wizarding world!" Uncorking the vial, she drank it quickly.

"Stop her!" Voldemort shouted.

The two Death Eaters rushed passed him, but it was too late.

She fell to her knees, laughing hoarsely. "Manticore venom," she ground out, staring at him. "Lethal in seconds. All of the Dark Man's notes and books are burning to a crisp, and his secret dies with me! One hundred points from Slytherin and Ravenclaw wins the house cup."

She coughed, spraying the floor with blood, then toppled over, dead. Her sightless eyes still gazed at the Dark Lord, mocking him even in death.

Voldemort's unholy screech sent his servants scurrying out the door.

Pouring his power into his staff, he leveled it at the girl's still form. "*Reducto*!" he shouted.

The body exploded, painting the wall behind it in gore. Not satisfied, he turned to Severus and repeated the curse.

As he reined in his power, one of the men who'd accompanied him cleared his throat.

"What?" The Dark Lord growled.

"Master, the little bitch mentioned something about his books and notes burning," the man reminded him.

Spinning around, Voldemort looked at the door to Snape's private quarters. "Check it!" he snapped.

Trying not to cringe, the man strode to the door, reached out and twisted the handle. The burning pain in his palm registered as the door swung open.

With a roaring whoosh, the man was engulfed in flames. Shrieking, blinded by the heat and the pain, he disappeared into the room.

The wave of heat from the open door drove Voldemort back. "Get that fire out," he shouted at the guards as the flames licked up the frame of the office door and up into the rafters. "Move, you idiots!"

More men rushed into the room to help with the blaze. If it took hold in the rafters, the ceiling could collapse.

Several minutes later, through the smoke still wafting through the doorway, the Dark Lord gazed at the utter destruction of Snape's private quarters.

Enraged by the enormity of his loss, Voldemort spun around, took aim at the stack of cauldrons by the fire in the dungeon and destroyed them. Their destruction reigned fiery bits of shrapnel down on some of his men.

Ignoring their cries of pain, he clenched his fists. "Get Mulciber in here! I want these rooms torn apart. Anything that survived the blaze is to be brought to me!"

"My lord," a servant stammered, staring at him in horror. "You've been injured."

Voldemort's eyes narrowed and he conjured a mirror. Looking at his reflection, he nearly blanched. His face was blistered by the heat of the blaze, as were his hands. The searing pain hit then and he bit back a groan.

"Get me a healer, now!"

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### Authors Notes:

Yes, yes, we get it! You all hate cliffies. Sheesh! This chapter might have been out a bit quicker if we hadn't had to heal the lash marks, the pin pricks from the dolls you made of us (glares at Rippergirl) and dodge all those howlers! Yes, I know. You all think it's our fault for leaving the chapter in a cliffy in the first place, but you should all be used to that by now!

Anyway, on with the dreaded AN's.

Oh, goodness. Did we kill Snape? How naughty of us. And unlike our disclaimers, the greasy bat will not be coming back for a command performance! And after everything we put her through, we felt it only right that Cho be allowed to kill him.

Our thanks to Princess Fictoria for the lovely plate of virtual cookies. I finally had to bake a chocolate cake and shove it under Bob's nose to get him to stop sniffing his monitor and pouting.

Let's see. Will Umtumba be a reoccurring character? Probably not. We like the man a lot, but he has many responsibilities. It took a fair amount of negotiating to get him to appear in our story, even briefly. And for those who asked - Yes, strangely enough, he DOES sound like James Earl Jones!

Fishburne left us with the enlightening comment of "Fnord". To this, we can only say, "Fishnuts!"

Ah, yes, Harry's shield. In the battle in the last chapter, Harry's shield flickered, then failed for a moment. First, it wasn't his most powerful shield and he can't cast through it. Second, he was trying to shield the Brotherhood from the attack coming at them from above. He was blocking the attacks of over twenty people. Had he known ahead of time how many were involved, he probably would have cast a stronger shield. In any case, it worked out in the end. Remember, our Harry is very strong, but even he has his limits and makes mistakes.

Dorothy: You'll be happy to know your flying monkeys arrived. Bob enjoyed them with a nice mushroom sauce and a bottle of chardonnay.

Who's going to be Harry's next opponent? We're not telling, mostly because we've given you all enough clues in previous chapters. ~Smirk~

No, the Bloody Baron is not Salazar Slytherin. Not in our story, at least. Who knows what JKR might come up with!

Ronnie: You never know about old Voldie. He might just use some evil eggs to replace his missing minions! Muahahahah! Umm, okay, so it was a typo. It's fixed now, however. Thanks for pointing it out. Boy do I have egg on my face! (Blush)

Okay, we've had several people ask how we came up with the idea for Fuzz. Remember, you all asked for this! So, Bob and I were watching a DVD while eating dinner one night and no, I don't remember which DVD off hand. We'd finished the movie and Bob was checking the extras on the disk when he came across an animated short in the menu. The short was about a dancing, singing sheep that eventually got shorn, but realized he was still quite good looking, even without his woolly coat. With a bit of twisting, some stretching, and quite a bit of cursing, Fuzz appeared on Bob's desk, whirring softly at us. She is, to us, a combination of a sheep, Taz (the cartoon from WB) and a Cheshire cat. The Crumpled Horn Snorkack we turned her into is JKR's invention.

Roy: We can assure you that there are lots of plots still left in our twisted little...I mean, our highly intelligent, socially acceptable minds! However, if you really want to psychoanalyze us, we don't mind. We would suggest, however, that you have your will updated and your medical insurance premiums paid in full. The last person who wanted to study us left our house hugging herself and drooling. You might last longer than her though if you bring us donuts!

No, there will be no sequel to Sunrise. Heck, what would we call it? Noon over Britain? Kinda ruins the whole SoB theme we had going. I mean,

NoB? Sounds obscene!

How far are we from finishing Sunrise? It ends when it ends. We have plots to finish, loose ends to tie up and cast members to pay. We'll get there, though.

Chris1: A spell checker helps with that, or so I've been told by two friends who have it.

Butch: The elves are an attached unit of the 24th .

Are we leaving the wings on Crookshanks? Nah, he was de-winged while no one was looking. It had to be done that way, as we were afraid the folks at PETA would hound us if they saw us do it.

Digeediva: Hermione went from being the Gryffindor know-it-all to the wife of the most influential and important man in the world and she still has some problems dealing with things she's never encountered before. Most of her problem with the whole multiple wives thing she keeps between herself and Harry. She has no problem with other men in different cultures taking multiple wives, in theory. She has a big problem with anyone thinking Harry would do the same thing, however. She knows, logically, that he wouldn't, but she's still a bit overwhelmed with the whole "Lady Potter" thing.

Narcissa has been teaching her many things, but mostly about Wizarding society in Britain. Remember that Narcissa will impart that information she thinks will be most useful to Hermione, and her husband taking a mistress wouldn't be all the unusual in her mind. After all, Lucius had his other women, as did most of the pure-blood men in her social circle.

Also, keep in mind that Hermione was born and raised a muggle. She has modern muggle thoughts about things like freedom and the right to choose (remember S.P.E.W.? She jumped into the fray of elvish rights without bothering to find out if the elves even wanted to be free). She's also a Catholic in this story, so is also dealing with a bit of religious teaching, as well.

It's going to take time for her to become a politicians wife. With the war, she's not really had time to learn as she should, and the lessons she's had from Narcissa haven't covered international politics. Give her time. She'll learn and grow, though she may stick her foot in her mouth a few times before she gets there.

Rayven: Umtumba didn't really react to the attack because he, like most of the other justices, was in shock. An attack had never taken place in the entire history of the Council. Remember Amelia's rather arrogant attitude when Harry suggested security for the delegation before they went to France? The members of the Council counted too much on history and not enough on the facts of the case and the dangers that were obvious to those not so awed by the Councils power. Plus, we didn't want him too. ~Snicker~

Meteoricshipyards: You didn't copy it, we just got our chapter posted before you did, that's all. Speaking of that, I hope you'll be updating *Luna's Hubby* soon (taps foot). For those who haven't read it, go search ff.net for it. You won't be disappointed!

Star\_Ranger4: Actually, the fact that we keep posting chapters is the reason we keep needing disclaimers. Now, unless you want us to not post any chapters, I see no way around the need for a disclaimer. The cliffhangers are just for our amusement. Although the reactions from the readers are starting to become a bit more violent than we'd counted on, so we may have to rethink that.

I think Kendiara hit the nail on the head when it comes to Amy. She said no sane person would stay in a job like that, no matter what they were being paid. Now, no where in the story did we ever say Amy was sane. She's stayed with the twins, put up with their pranks and has become a trusted member of their staff. Is she a masochist? Quite possibly. But by allowing herself to be "pranked", she's also helping the twins come up with some rather useful ideas. Most of the time. Sometimes the twins go a little too far, but what's a poor, put-upon, masochistic assistant to do? Throw up her lunch over Asia and start a new religious movement, apparently.

Well, that's it, folks. Our thanks to everyone who reviewed. Bob and I hope you enjoy the new chapter!

*Bobmin*  
*FanficAuthors.net*

# Sunrise Over Britain

## Chapter 29 - The coming dawn

### Standard Disclaimer:

Alyx walked into the theater and scowled. Up on the stage was the Hogwarts Express and Bob was trying to lift it using some pulleys, but without much success.

"What are you doing?" she screeched at him. She knew with his delicate condition he shouldn't be overdoing things and lifting a one hundred ton steam locomotive was definitely overdoing it.

Bob looked up from the rope he was tugging on. "Me? Oh... Well I'm... er... oh all right, I'm setting up for our next Snape disclaimer if you must know!"

She shook her head and lowered her voice. "Bob, dear," she said as if speaking to a small child. "We killed Snape in the last chapter. That means we can't use him again in a disclaimer."

Bob paled and muttered anxiously to himself. He turned away from the train and Alyx, looking around wildly. "But I had it all planned out. Dumbledore, Snape and Voldemort were to perform a can-can wearing thongs and I'd drop a locomotive on them after Snape told the audience that we don't own the Potterverse and that we make no claim to any part of the franchise. Then Harry would climb out from under Hermione's skirt and he'd make a vague sexual innuendo."

Alyx smacked Bob in the head. "You better come up with a new idea! Besides, I'm tired of killing people in our disclaimers. I want something happy, and nice and joyful, maybe with nice pastel colors..."

Bob sidled away from Alyx who was still muttering about pastel colors and dancing hippogriffs.

Alyx stopped when she noticed Bob trying to sneak away. She pounced on him. "Now listen to me! I swear I don't know why I keep you around anymore! If you weren't so good in bed..."

Bob turned to the audience. "I'm sorry, but due to technical difficulties, this disclaimer is about to be rated X. If you are under 18, please skip down to the story."

The curtain fell on the amorous authors.

Harry and Hermione exchanged a knowing grin when they heard the sounds coming from behind the curtain.

"They've never done that before," Harry murmured worriedly.

"I think it's cute, a bunch of old people getting it on. Gives me hope that you'll still be capable when you get that old," Hermione said smugly.

"Hey!" Harry protested.

"Aren't you supposed to be under my skirt?" she asked him archly.

"Oh yeah," he replied, sliding off his seat.

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### Sunrise Over Britain

#### Chapter 29

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#### Padfoot Manor (March 5th)...

"I can't see my feet and it's all your fault, Terry Boot!" Susan shouted.

Terry winced and tried to help her walk to a chair.

"I'm pregnant, not an invalid, dammit!" she snapped at him.

Terry backed away from her, holding up his hands. His injuries were mostly healed, but, like Harry, he still resorted to using a cane. Unlike Harry, who suffered from painful muscle cramping, his injury was mostly nerve damage, causing his leg to go numb and unresponsive for short durations.

His steps faltered and he quickly grabbed his cane.

He hobbled to a chair, where he could wait out the pins and needles in his leg. The healers kept claiming his leg had healed just fine, but the fact was there had been no marked improvement in the last two months. He didn't want to tell Susan, but even his healers were starting to talk about there being some residual loss of function, as if preparing him for bad news.

Susan watched him hobble to a chair and frowned. She knew her pregnancy had made her short tempered, but Terry really didn't deserve the bad treatment. Especially since his injury came about while defending her.



"I'm sorry, I shouldn't have yelled at you," she whispered.

He looked up at her with concern. "It's alright, love, and you probably should yell at me. After all, I'm the one that got you like that."

"It took both of us," she growled. "And stop patronizing me when I'm trying to be reasonable!"

"Alright! I won't!" he snapped back.

"FINE!" she yelled.

"FINE!" he replied back.

Susan launched herself from her chair, crashing into Terry and for a moment his chair rocked backwards. He wrapped his arms around her and she wept against him. She hated feeling this ungainly, this ugly and refused to believe him when he told her she was still beautiful in his eyes.

Once she managed to get control of her emotions, she looked up at him. "I'm sorry. I just can't help myself these days. I feel so big and ugly," she whispered.

He kissed her forehead. "I know things seem bad now, Susan, but soon, we'll have a daughter and she'll be as beautiful as you are."

Susan looked at him as if she was unsure of his comments. "Do you really mean that?"

He caressed her cheek and nodded.

"Would you make love to me?" she whispered.

"What did the healer say? Can we still do that?"

"We have to stop in the last three weeks, but even then there were still some things we could do. We still have nearly four weeks."

His hand slid into her robe and gently cupped one of her breasts. "I'll make love to you anytime and anyway you wish," he whispered huskily against her neck.

She shivered and whimpered slightly against him. She might feel ugly and awkward, but her husband didn't think so.

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### **The Lawn of Padfoot Manor, later that day...**

Harry walked up the long driveway towards the manor. He had spent most of the day at the Operations Center working on paperwork and had decided to walk home to work out the kinks caused from sitting for so long.

Approaching the Manor, he spotted several figures out on the lawn kneeling in prayer and decided to wait. Alim and his party had arrived from Beauxbatons and had opted to stay at Harry's invitation for a few extra days. Despite his insistence, Alim had brought his tent and slept in it, rather than the house. While most of his family stayed with him, one of his sons, Pasha, and his two wives accepted the invitation to stay in the manor. Apparently, Pasha's wives found western baths sinfully decadent and quite enjoyable.

Alim stood and one of his sons scooped up his prayer rug, returning it to the tent. A moment later several chairs were brought out and placed around a charcoal brazier, which was then lit.

Alim waved Harry over to join them. "Welcome, my friend! I hope your day has been a fruitful one?" he asked with a broad grin.

Harry shook his head and grimaced back. "I don't know about that, but his Majesty's government seems to think that a military unit fights with paper! I've spent most of the day filing reports and filling out requests."

Alim laughed heartedly. One of his younger sons placed several kabobs on the brazier, which put out a surprising amount of welcome heat on the chilly March day.

"I noticed you watching us pray. Tell me, my friend, do you think about God much?" asked Alim.

"No, actually, I don't, Excellency. My relatives never took me to church, and well... British Wizarding society has an eclectic mix of beliefs. Eocho, whom you've met, believes in the old Celtic Gods and I have seen them in action. But are they God or just powerful spirits? I don't know."

Harry sighed. "I guess I've seen too much man made suffering to believe in a God that looks down on us and takes care of us. Hermione was raised as a catholic, and I know she's had trouble dealing with the idea of being a witch and a catholic."

Alim nodded and passed Harry a cup of strong coffee.

"I was like you, in my youth. But God is. That is what I have learned. He is. Some of our people think that we should bring war to those that do not believe in God. And some among your own people think the same," Alim said, then he shrugged. "I am an old man and the juices of passion no longer race through my veins like they did in my youth. Now days, I prefer to use those juices on my wives, rather than chasing dreams with a sword. I have traveled the world, watching and learning. Buddhist, Christian, Jew, Hindu or Animist. It doesn't matter. What matters is one simple truth. God is."

Harry looked at him strangely.

Alim leaned back and smiled at him. "Confusing, yes? Let me try to make it simpler then. God is. He watches and sees what we do with what we have been given. God judges, but does not directly interfere. He nudges and prods on occasion, but generally, he lets the river of life flow where it may.

"You look and say, but what about my people? Look at the oppression and cruelty they live under! Why can't God do something about that? Why would an almighty God, who loves us, allow such a terrible thing to happen?"

The sheik paused, watching the young man carefully. Harry's eyes were wide and he nodded slightly. What Alim was saying was pivotal to his entire argument against God in the first place.

Alim chuckled, noting Harry's expression, then he poked him in the chest. "Has it not occurred to you that you are God's response to what your people are enduring? Is it not possible that God has placed you on the path of being Savior to your people? Or to us all? For if Lord Voldemort escapes Britain, we are all in danger."

The sheik took one of the kabobs off the fire and tore into a piece of meat. At his nod, one of his younger sons offered one to Harry.

"We wizards are a blessed lot, and we tend to be more devout than the muggles because we can see the possibility of forces greater than ourselves. Our magic allows us to accept the idea of a greater being who watches over us, with powers we do not understand.

"No matter what name you give him, God is. He watches, he judges and sometimes he steps in and does something through his people. Look at you, my friend. Admittedly, you are not a very imposing person, medium height, medium build, not very handsome, although your wife may disagree with me. But you have more power than I have ever seen in a wizard. You have a sense of presence about you that commands respect. Who is to say that you haven't been touched by God and tasked to do his bidding?"

Alim paused and waved a hand skyward, where a darkening sky was just beginning to shine with stars.

"His works are infinite and infinitely mysterious. That is why I tell you, God is. If you can learn that, then truly you will be a wise man," he said softly, then bit off more of his kabob.

"I have not thought about it that way, Excellency," Harry murmured. He turned the idea over in his mind, trying to find some flaw, some argument, but nothing came. It was a leap of faith, but it was only a small one. He was uncomfortable with the idea that he might be doing God's work. He didn't think he was worthy.

"I'm not sure I would be a good instrument for God's work," he said finally.

Alim nodded solemnly. "Who among us is, my friend? Would you trust someone else to lead the effort to save your country? Only God knows the full plan and it's not our place to question it."

Harry fell silent, nibbling on his kabob and staring into the coals. The older man had given him a lot to think about.

The brazier threw off a low red glow as the sun sunk below the horizon. Several of Alim's sons began to sing, softly.

Alim glanced over at Harry, then nodded knowingly. "So, tell me, my friend, how goes the preparations? Can Egypt do more to help?"

Harry glanced around, then he cast a privacy ward. Alim's sons, seeing the ward go up, excused themselves and went back into the tent. He could feel Hermione every so often testing their bond, wondering where he was. She kept quiet however. She could sense he was nearby and safe so she wasn't worried.

"The preparations are advancing and accelerating, Excellency. I am uncertain what else your great country can do, but we have several important issues we are still struggling with. Supplies will be a problem. We hope for a short campaign. If we run into prolonged fighting, we will be hard pressed to supply our forces in the field. That is just one of the issues we face."

Harry stared at the brazier for a moment. "In a few weeks we will have a meeting of the field commanders. I think I will push for a representative of each contributing nation to be present. Perhaps together we will be able to solve all of the problems."

"A meeting would go far to ease the worries of our allies. And who knows? You might find yourself with additional aid you had not expected," Alim offered.

Harry glanced at the sheik and nodded. He wondered if Alim was trying to tell him something. Finally he stood, dropped the privacy ward and smiled at his friend. "Excellency, you are welcome to stay with us as long as you wish. I know Hermione and I both greatly enjoy your company."

Alim laughed. "Go to your lovely wife, Lord Potter. I thank you for your invitation. These past days have been enjoyable, but truly, I miss the desert. The burning sands beckon and I think that on the morrow I shall return home. I will speak with my cousin, the Minister, and he will find a suitable representative for your meeting. Perhaps, after the war, you will come visit with me. I will take you and your wife to the ruins of the Great Observatory at Karnac. Even today, it is a sight to behold!"

Harry bowed. "We would enjoy that, Excellency. Thank you."

As the young man walked away, Alim smiled. "Go with God, Harry Potter. You may not believe in him, but I think he believes in you," he said softly.

As he walked towards the manor, he could hear Alim and his extended family singing softly around their brazier.

He caught up with Hermione in their bedroom. She was dressed for bed already, but was sitting in a chair by the fire, reading.

He smiled and kissed her cheek before walking over to his wardrobe and pulling out some clothing.

"I could tell that our friend had given you something important to think about. It had better not be about multiple wives," she teased.

He laughed. "No, I have my hands full with one wife. We talked about God, if you can believe it."

She closed her book and looked at him. "Oh? What did he have to say?"

"It's not so much what he said, as what he didn't say. He believes very strongly in his faith and in God," Harry said thoughtfully.

"You make it sound like they're two different things."

"Aren't they? One thing describes how he believes and how he practices that belief. The other is what he believes in."

Hermione frowned, confused. "I don't..."

"Let me see if I can explain a bit better."

She nodded and he pulled a chair closer to her and sat down. "You're catholic and you believe in God, right?"

She nodded.

"Is Alim wrong, then? He calls his God by a different name. Or the Dursleys. When they went to church, they went to an Anglican church. Their God is nearly the same as yours. But they worshiped differently. Merlin! I don't know what religion my parents followed, but they celebrated Christmas, so I think it would have been one of the Christian ones. Alim says God is. Just that - God is. I think he was trying to tell me that God exists and no matter what religion you use, it's still the same God."

Hermione nodded. "Yes, I've heard that argument before. But what brought this up? I mean we've touched on religion before, but we've never really talked about it. We are going to have to address this issue before we start having children."

"I know," he replied softly. "I'm not sure what brought it up. I think, perhaps, it's because I was wondering what it was like to believe in something so strongly."

She blinked at him in surprise. "It bothers you that you don't have something to believe in?"

"I have lots to believe in," he protested. "I believe in your love and in my friends."

"But you're wondering if there's more?"

Harry sighed and nodded slowly. "I can't but wonder if this is all there is. Oh, I know about the ghosts and other proofs that life exists beyond death, but does it really? Are all our proofs real, or just comforting explanations designed to make us feel better? Alim believes, and that gives him peace. I can't help wondering about it."

She reached over and took his hand in hers. "So, what do you want to do about it?"

He shrugged uncertainly. "I'm not sure. I know we've had this hovering around us for while and we've ignored it."

Hermione sat silently for a moment. She had a good idea what brought this up. It was something that was gnawing at her, too. The operational tempo in Haven was speeding up. Everyone could feel that they were nearing the end, even those not familiar with what was happening in the war. Harry was worried, and having faith in something outside of his control might help ease that worry.

"How about this Sunday you come with Mum, Dad and me when we go to St. Marks in Killarney? In the meantime, I'll answer any questions you might have."

He smiled. "I think I'll try it. But for now, I'm going for a long soak in the bath."

She gave him a sultry look. "Keep the water warm and maybe in an hour I'll come and join you."

He flushed and grinned. "I-I-I'd like that."

When he finally closed the bathroom door, she laughed softly to herself. No matter how intimate they had become, she could still make him stammer like an inexperienced schoolboy.

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## Hogwarts Castle (March 6th)...

With the morning briefing over, Harry left his study and walked to the basement of the manor. He opened the door to the restricted portal and entered. After locking the door, he activated the portal control pedestal and dialed in his location.

Turning, he levitated several boxes through the portal before stepping through himself.

"Lights!" he hissed in parseltongue.

The torches around the chamber flared, giving the room an eerie appearance. The only other source of light came from the power crystal sitting on a table not far from the portal. He checked the crystal and determined that it still had adequate power. He wouldn't have to recharge it during this visit.

It wasn't long before the Baron appeared. Even if he couldn't see them, there was almost always a ghost or two nearby, in case someone from Haven arrived.

"My lord Baron," Harry said with a bow, then he conjured a chair for himself. "I come with news."

"As do I, my lord," replied the Baron. Behind him, several other ghost shimmered and became visible. They were like everyone else in several way, including the wish to hear news or gossip.

"Our time is quickly approaching," Harry said, speaking to them all. "Your efforts have helped us tremendously and will not be forgotten. Even now we and our allies gather our forces and prepare to attack the Dark Lord directly.

"For this reason I come here today, bringing supplies to our Poltergeists and because I need to get the passage information for this chamber."

He glanced over towards the boxes of supplies and he grinned, seeing the five poltergeists, all but drooling over their contents.

Peeves peeled off from the others and zoomed over to Harry. He handed Harry a parchment which contained a map. A map that looked like it had been drawn by a dyslexic five year old with a blunt crayon. Harry looked down at the map and frowned. It wasn't exactly useful to him in this condition.

The Baron cleared his ghostly throat and looked ready to break into laughter. "Having Peeves draw the map was perhaps not the best idea, my lord."

Harry grimaced. "No. I had hoped for something better than this. Although the stick figures are drawn rather well..."

"My lord, if you would trust me enough to lower your occlumency shields for a brief moment or two, I can impart the information you need directly into your mind."

Harry frowned. Dropping his shields this close to Voldemort was an incredible risk, but the map he had been given was unusable. Reluctantly, he nodded at the Baron and dropped his shields.

The Baron moved closer to Harry and seemed to slide into him. Harry shivered as his body temperature dropped several degrees and he suddenly seemed to be two people in the same body. His mind reeled as a torrent of information flooded into him, information describing the status of the castle and all of it's hidden passages. He could clearly see in his mind the six passages leading from the chamber, including two that were of great interest to him. In an instant he also understood the limitations and why some passages were not fully explored.

The Baron slid out of Harry and he looked at him with renewed respect. "You have a highly organized mind, my lord, and powerful emotions. I have not felt such power in all my days," the ghost said quietly. He seemed to be having difficulty holding his form as he shimmered and blurred.

Harry sank into his chair, shuddering slightly from the Baron's exit. It was a singularly unusual sensation, one which he hoped not to repeat in the near future.

He shook himself and looked up at the Baron, who seemed to be in about as bad a shape as he was. "What other news have you for me?" he gasped out.

The Baron motioned and the Gray Lady hovered closer. "We have learned that Professor Snape was killed just after he made a breakthrough in the ritual they've been performing," she said in a soft contralto.

Harry looked up and scowled. "So, Voldemort knows how to extend it now?" he asked. This was news of the worst kind.

"Nay, my lord. Professor Snape had been given a slave as a reward. You might remember the girl. A Miss Chang, from Ravenclaw? She killed Professor Snape just after he made his breakthrough, then she committed suicide in front of Voldemort. She will be honored as one of Ravenclaws heroes."

Harry gaped at her. "Cho?" he whispered. "Cho was left behind?"

"Her parents removed her from Hogwarts, my lord, to protect her. She was not here to be evacuated. You did not leave her behind," she told him, her voice soothing.

Harry closed his eyes, trying to ignore the pain. He never loved Cho like he loved Hermione, but her death was painful.

"Did she come back, like Penelope?" he asked after a few minutes silence. He was dreading her answer.

"No, my lord. She was quite insane at the time. But she went to her destiny content and was at peace in the end," the Gray Lady replied.

Harry bowed his head and sighed with relief. He wasn't sure he could have handled Cho as a ghost.

"You went out with her for a while, didn't you?" she asked gently.

He looked up. "Yes, I did. She would have gone with us to Haven, but she never came back from the Yule break." He shook himself, trying to break his mood. "Thank you, my lady," he said softly. Turning then, he motioned for Peeves to come closer.

"Peeves, I brought you different toys this time."

Peeves snapped him a salute, then passed wind loudly. "Pottyboy!" he shouted and his brothers zoomed over to him.

Harry suppressed a smile. "Peeves, please. I need you to listen to me or I won't bring you more toys to play with."

Four of the poltergeists immediately transfigured into corn cobs. "We're all ears!" Peeves proclaimed proudly.

Harry groaned and wished he didn't have the equivalent of the spectral Weasley twins to work with. "Fine, just listen. From here on out, attack the black robes. Make them afraid, make them nervous. Just do not do any more damage to the castle," he said patiently.

Peeves stopped whirling around and peered at Harry. "Good wizards coming soon? School come back?"

Harry whirled and glared at one poltergeist who was trying to look under his robes.

"I hope so, Peeves," he replied, eying the poltergeists warily.

Peeves beamed a huge smile at him and Harry backed away nervously.

One of the Poltergeists had conjured a lit miners cap and another was pulling down his pants and bending over. Harry didn't think he needed to be there any longer. As he quickly walked to the portal, he never noticed the other ghosts fleeing the chamber, as well.

Apparently, even ghosts had their limits.

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### **Padfoot Manor...**

Harry shut the control pedestal down, then slowly trudged out of the room. The information the Baron had given him was important, but he was also depressed by the news about Cho.

"Harry?" came the alarmed thought. *"What's wrong, love?"*

"Another death," he replied with a heavy sigh. Hermione was at the other end of the building and still able to detect he was upset.

The bond between them widened and he could feel her anxiety bleeding over. *"Who?"*

*"The Gray Lady told me that Cho Chang killed Snape, just after he discovered a work around for that ritual of theirs, then committed suicide right in front of Voldemort after taunting him. Apparently, Cho was given to Snape as a pleasure slave. She was a reward for him. When will it end, Hermione? How many more must die?"*

There was a moment of silence across the bond while Hermione digested the news. Cho hadn't been competition, as far as she was concerned. Harry and Cho never really had a relationship, but she could understand why he was upset. Cho's death was personal. It was close enough to hurt and it represented all the other deaths that they knew about, but pretended not to feel.

She widened their bond to the maximum that she could. He could feel her slip past his shields and surround him with her presence. She was the only person he allowed completely past his shields. Even Eocho couldn't penetrate them all. Her presence had a calming effect on him. Up until that moment, he hadn't realized just how close had had come to losing control.

*"Come to me, my love. I'm in the library,"* she sent. Her tone was filled with love and understanding and her mind beckoned to him like a flame to a moth.

His breath hitched a few times, then he squared his shoulders and went upstairs. Less than three minutes later, he was in Hermione's arms. He didn't feel the need to cry, but he needed to be held by someone who understood and accepted him.

After a few minutes he pulled away from her far enough to look into her eyes and smiled weakly.

"Without you, I'd be lost," he whispered. He then leaned in and kissed her lightly.

"Nearly every time you go there you come back with bad news," she complained after she kissed him.

He shrugged his shoulders. "I can't see that place generating much in the way of good news. I mean, it is Voldemort Central, you know. While I'm here, I need some help building a map." He pulled out the map Peeves had drawn and handed it to her.

She looked at it and nibbled on her lower lip. "Well, the stick figures are really good, but I thought you could draw better than this?"

Harry growled in her direction. "I didn't draw that. Peeves did!"

She chuckled softly. "Oh, well it's not very useful, is it?"

"No, it isn't. But if we can figure out a way of doing this," he said, then he extended his staff. The emerald flared and a transparent three dimensional

map of Hogwarts appeared floating in front of her.

She walked around the map for a bit, examining it. "This is really good, Harry, but why do we need to recreate this?"

"Because it's taking a lot to produce this," he replied.

She glanced at him and noted the beads of sweat popping up on his forehead. She waved to him and he stopped the presentation.

"Perhaps we can use or alter a pensieve. That way, you only have to do it once and we could replay it when needed," she mused.

"That would work, but we'll need two of them. Someone is going to have to turn that first map into a drawn map."

She looked at him and grinned. "You know, you employ several artists and the Johansen twins are both quite capable of drawing. I've seen some of the designs being made for the portals, and I know that Helga and Olga both have worked on blueprints for those red headed lunatics."

Harry looked intrigued. "I need to speak with the twins anyway. I'll talk to the girls when I'm over there. If they can't do it, I'll swing by the portal factory and see if I employ an artist who can draw a map," he mused.

Hermione nodded and smiled smugly to herself. She had distracted Harry out of his funk over Cho. She was confident in their relationship enough to know he was upset because he knew her, she was a friend in his mind and that made her death all the worse.

"Oh, you received a delivery today. It's from Ragnok, I think," she informed him, pulling a small, sealed box out of her pocket.

He looked at the box with interest. It was made of plain wood, but had an ornate 'G' embossed on the lid. He pressed the 'G' with his thumb and the box flattened, then expanded to nearly twice its size. The 'G' developed a pair of lips and began to speak.

*"Greetings! Ragnok, Director of Gringotts and Leader of the Goblin Nation, wishes to meet with you. If possible, please come to Gringotts, Stonewall Lane Branch, this Friday, March 9th. Please bring your lovely wife along, as well as anyone else whom you might think useful. We will be discussing a closer cooperation between the Human and Goblin communities."*

Harry glanced at Hermione, who stared at the now inert wooden square in Harry's hand. The lips on the 'G' had vanished.

"What the devil was that?" exclaimed Harry.

"Kind of like a wooden howler?" Hermione offered. She looked more interested in the way the message was delivered than the actual message. "Not all howlers scream, love. They repeat their message at the volume the message was recorded at."

"Oh, I still remember the one Molly sent Ron in second year. I never wanted to receive one after that."

"One of the advantages of having muggles for parents," Hermione replied slyly.

"It would be, but you know better."

Hermione looked up at him and narrowed her eyes. "What are you on about?"

"Your parents weren't Muggles, Hermione. Heck, they weren't even squibs. Are you a pure blood? I don't know, but your parents aren't muggles. I think I may have even less of a pedigree than you do," Harry told her, grinning. He began to back toward the door. "Now you can pretend to be one of those obnoxious pure bloods. I'm sure Draco would be willing to give you lessons in being snooty."

As she drew her wand, he laughed and danced out of the way of the stinging hex she sent his way.

"I'll get you for that, Potter," she called when he ducked out of the room. Once he was gone, she laughed to herself, then stuck her nose in the air. "Hem hem," she said with a giggle. "Umbridge would be so proud."

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## Haven Operations Center...

"Caleb, General Stanton is here to see you," Terry Boot said from the doorway.

Caleb put the parchment he was reading down and looked up. "Send him in, Terry, and join us. You've been watching the operational picture more than I have, at this point."

Terry nodded and disappeared. He returned a few moments later, leading Charles Stanton into the office.

Caleb stood and extended his hand to the commander of the American and Canadian forces.

"Chuck, good to see you," Caleb said with a smile, shaking the man's hand.

"Caleb," Stanton replied. "I was on the way back home from Brussels and I thought I'd stop in and see how things are progressing." He sat down when he was waved to a chair.

Caleb nodded. Stanton was fishing for information and he understood that and why. Like Caleb, Stanton had political masters that he needed to appease.

"We have the rough outlines of an operational plan down, but there are some details we're still working on. We're fairly certain that one of our deceptions has been picked up by the enemy."

Stanton nodded thoughtfully. "When do you think you'll have a plan you can present?"

Caleb sighed. "I'm not sure, Chuck. We have the plans for the castle, but the primary insertion point isn't big enough to accommodate all of our forces. Harry's looking into finding us an area large enough to take a second group."

"He's planning on splitting our forces?" Stanton said with a frown. Splitting your forces was never a good idea, if you could avoid it.

"That was my initial reaction as well, Chuck, but I'm going to ask you to reserve judgment for now. He's talked to me about the over all plan, and I have to admit to being surprised at how good the idea actually is. I don't want to go into details now, though. His plan is a rough draft and may not be used if conditions aren't favorable. What about on your end?"

Stanton leaned back. "We'll be ready to arrive here given a three day notice. As overall commander of both the American and Canadian forces, I can safely say we'll be putting fifty five hundred soldiers onto the field, including the Animagi Division and the Northwest Shaman Regiment from Canada."

The pride in Stanton's voice was hard to miss. He had worked hard to get where he was and he was justifiably pleased with his troops. Both groups were training hard.

Caleb glanced at Terry. "Given General Stanton's troop numbers, plus our two brigades and five hundred extra troops under our control from the smaller nations, we'll be able to field a total of seventy five hundred. Then there are some five hundred elves. If our estimates of the enemy are correct, that's a force ratio of roughly one and a half to one."

"How many wizards do you think he can put into the field?" asked Stanton.

Terry checked his notes. "Originally, we figured he had between thirty five hundred and forty five hundred. The attack on the camps may have reduced that number by as much as one thousand, perhaps twelve hundred, but we know he was reinforced. We're currently estimating roughly between forty five hundred and five thousand, sir.

"As to non-humans supporting him, that number is fairly low. Britain never had much in the way of a giant population, and only a few vampire clans joined with him before the ward was raised. At least, that is our thinking on the matter," Terry frowned and looked to Caleb. "How long do you think we'll need to keep our troops here in Haven, sir?"

Caleb glanced over at Stanton. "Let's say three days to a week, maximum?" he said uncertainly.

Stanton nodded in reply. He was still considering Terry's numbers. "Anything longer and we should return the troops to their original bases, I would think," he offered finally.

Terry made a mark in his notes. "I think I better get in touch with the quartermaster and arrange for enough supplies to be on hand. The camp itself is nearly completed, and we're well along in our stockpiling of supplies for the assault."

"Good. Thanks, Terry." Caleb turned back to Stanton. "Chuck, I know our governments agreed that I was to be in overall command of this operation, but I want to know your thoughts and get your input on what we're doing. The better we can work together, the more of our boys we can bring home alive."

Stanton nodded and both men fell silent. It was never far from their minds that they would be soon leading men into battle and there would be casualties.

Caleb stood. "Would you like to see the camp? It's not a long walk and I know you need some information for your government."

"I could use a walk," Stanton agreed. "My staff is conferring with your people, so there's really no need for you and I to talk about how many rolls of toilet paper we need to store."

Caleb laughed and led him from his office.

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### **Padfoot Manor, Harry's Study (March 7th)...**

Harry stood by the window watching as elves work on the grounds, while the Brotherhood filed into the room. In the distance, he could see Feeder being chased by a group of squirrels.

The little elf ran, screaming, his arms waving frantically and spilling peanuts all over the lawn from the open bag clutched in his hand. Harry shook his head and wondered if the elf would ever learn.

He turned away from the window to face his friends. Most were already seated when Hermione walked in holding what appeared to be a pensieve sitting on a layer of his rune stones.

"Is that it?" he asked her.

She nodded and he grinned. "Excellent," he exclaimed.

Hermione put the strange looking pensieve on his desk. "Treat it like you would a regular pensieve. Take the memory of the model you can project and place it in the bowl," she said softly.

Harry pulled his shrunken staff from his holster. Withdrawing the memory, he placed it in the bowl, then looked at Hermione.

She reached over and pressed three rune stones, then tapped the bowl with her wand. Immediately the model of Hogwarts appeared, floating above the pensieve. "Touch the areas of the model with the tip of your wand to make them highlight," she told him.

Harry nodded and turned to face everyone. "What you are looking at is a map of the interior of Hogwarts, and in particular, the passages leading from our chamber to the rest of the castle. These passages have been scouted by the castle ghosts as being viable for a man to walk through."

He reached through the model and touched two jagged lines leading from the chamber. The lines brightened.

"You'll note that these two passages seem to be cut off, that is, they don't seem to go anywhere. The Bloody Baron assures me they do. Because they extend beyond the grounds of the castle, the ghosts are unable to finish mapping them. And therein lies the problem," he told those gathered in the room.

"There is not enough room to move all of the troops into the castle through the chamber, even if we risked enlarging it. There are limits to the space enlarging charms and we all know, the larger the space, the more power it takes to continue enlarging the area.

"What we need to do is return to the castle and see where these two passages come out. Obviously they do not exit anywhere in the castle. Both appear to exit in the Forbidden Forest, but we need to be certain of that. The last thing we need to do is find out on the day we plan to attack that the passages have been collapsed and are unusable."

Remus frowned. "Has Caleb been informed that you want to return to the castle and leave the chamber?"

Harry nodded. "Yes. I spoke to him earlier today about it. He agrees we need to check it out. He's not happy with the idea, but agrees to the necessity of it."

"But why, Harry? Why do we need to know where these passages exit?" asked Emma. She was clearly frightened by the idea.

"With the chamber being unable to support all of our troops, we have to adjust our plans, Mum. If these passages come out in the forest, we might be able to sneak a team in early to set up a pair of industrial, one way portals. That way, we can bring in people from two or more separate areas," Harry told her.

Emma stared at the model and nodded uneasily. Dan placed a comforting hand on her shoulder.

"This is going to be a scouting trip only. And considering how close to the castle we'll be, magic should only be used as a last resort," Harry said.

Ginny rubbed her arms nervously. "Why can't we use elves to scout this out?" she asked.

"We need to complete the map, Gin, and a pensieve won't work for elves. Besides, I'm pretty sure Harry has another reason, as well," Neville said.

Harry chuckled. "I do, actually. I'm hoping that Luna might be able to convince the local species to help us, or at least leave us alone."

Everyone turned to look at Luna, who smiled gently. Fuzz opened her eyes and meeped questioningly at everyone. She reached up and stroked her familiar. "That shouldn't be a problem, Harry. Unless we run into some late blooming Bugmurts. They tend to be rather uncooperative, especially during molting season," she replied softly. She leaned against Draco, practically purring. "Are we going now? I had hoped to make love to Draco this afternoon."

Harry flushed and cough.

Hermione, out of habit, opened her mouth to refute the claim of Bugmurts. When Fuzz blinked at her, she nearly growled in frustration. Instead, she leaned back in her chair and huffed to herself. The Snorkack was a living monument to her mistake in not believing Luna. And while she had nothing against Fuzz, she did wish Fuzz would stop rubbing her nose in it.

Draco closed his eyes and shook his head, while Ginny, Dan and Tonks laughed.

"Er, no. I think I'll let you have a few hours before we leave, Luna," Harry stammered.

"That's generous of you, Harry, but I don't think Draco can last that long. Maybe I can help him," Luna replied.

Draco buried his head in his hands and groaned. Luna patted him on the back and whispered something in his ear, which only increased his blush.

"I'm filing this under too much information," Neville commented.

"Agreed," Harry replied, shaking his head. "Tonight," he continued seriously, "we'll go back to the castle. Only four of us will follow the passages; Draco, Luna, Neville and myself. Hermione will be able to pick up the information from my mind and feed it into our display pensieve. I'd like the rest of you to talk to the ghosts. Get a feel in regard to how the people live and work around the castle. I'd like to get an idea about what happens there. Do they patrol the castle or the grounds? Are there posted guards? And if so, where? That sort of thing."

Harry turned to Emma and Dan, eying them speculatively. "I know we said we'd not send either of you two into harms way, but the chamber is secure, so I'm giving you a choice. You can come along and help, or remain behind."



Dan and Emma exchanged a look. "I think we'd like to take a more active role in the war, Harry," Dan said. "We both know we're not trained to fight, but there are still things we can do. Emma and I both feel a little left out when you all go off on a Brotherhood mission."

Harry nodded. "I suspected as much, Dad. That's why I'm making the offer. Now, to placate my wife, I'm going to say this. Other than defending yourselves, you will not be fighting anywhere. You two are not the only ones who stand to be left behind. Terry, Susan? I'm sorry, but I'd prefer you both remain in the manor tonight."

Terry gave Harry a grateful look. "I think that's probably a good idea," he said sadly.

Susan turned to look at him suspiciously. "Terry? If you want to go, I don't mind staying behind."

Terry sighed and looked down at his feet for a moment, his hands idly playing with his cane. "It's not that. My days of fighting Dark Wizards are done," he said with a bitter laugh. "Some dark wizard catching career, eh? My first real encounter turned out to be my last."

"Terry?" Susan exclaimed in alarm.

"My healers told me today that my leg won't get any better, Suse. I'll always have periods of numbness. Even Harry's emergency strengthening spell has no effect," he told her quietly.

"Oops," murmured Harry, wincing. He had not wanted anyone knowing about that spell. He had told Terry about it only because their problems were similar.

"What strengthening spell?" asked Hermione, her eyes narrowing.

"I think we're just about finished here. We'll all meet down in the portal room at ten tonight," Harry said, trying to ignore Hermione's question.

"Harry," Hermione said warningly.

He flinched, then shrugged. "It's a spell Eocho taught me. I've not tried it myself, but it's supposed to strengthen a damaged limb for a short amount of time. According to Eocho, you could have a leg broken in multiple places and the spell will enable you to duel as if the leg were uninjured. The downside is that you can cause more damage to the limb if you're not careful. That's why when I told Terry about it, I called it an emergency spell, it's not something you want to use everyday."

Hermione gave him a look that clearly said the conversation wasn't over with yet, then she turned back to Terry. "I know you feel bad right now, Terry, but you are helping us tremendously. Please don't feel like you're not contributing."

"She's right, Terry," Harry added. "Your work with Caleb is invaluable. And until you brought it up, no one among us thought about the problems of feeding our troops while we waited. That could have been more than embarrassing."

Susan reached out and grabbed Terry's hand, gripping it tightly in her own. "I don't know about the war, but I know I couldn't do this alone, Terry. Maybe it's selfish of me, but I like knowing my husband is going to be there for me," she said quietly.

Terry smiled at her and lifted her hand to his lips.

Harry smiled. "Alright then, we meet in the portal room tonight at ten. Dress in dark clothing."

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## Hogwarts Castle...

Peeves rummaged through the box, his mood turning slightly less happy.

"Well?" asked Vex.

"Potions," Peeves spat in disgust, holding up a bottle.

"What potions?" asked Hacks.

Peeves peered at the bottle in his hand, checking the label. The picture on the label looked interesting.

*Weasley Wizarding Wheezes*

*Flaming Flatulence.*

*Just 3 Drops in your friends food will make their farts explode!*

"Exploding poop, me think," Peeves said dubiously.

"How?"

"Says just add three in food," Peeves replied.

"Is there three?" asked Vex, looking intrigued.

Peeves turned and rooted around in the box, finding two more potion bottles containing the same label.

"I have three!" he proclaimed loudly.

The five poltergeists grinned and faded from sight. They were off to the Death Eater Kitchen.

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## **Hogwarts Outbuilding #2, Cafeteria...**

Hex lifted the lid on the pot of stew. The cooks were off chasing Miiffs, who had been caught peeing in the large coffee urn.

Peeves uncorked the first bottle and poured it in. Hex started laughing and Peeves shot him an angry glare. "Not yet! I need to pour three!" he told his brother.

Hex nodded and snickered quietly. "Yeah, yeah, yeah... More!"

Peeves nodded and smashed the empty bottle, dropping the shards of glass into the stew, as well. Within three minutes, the stew contained a lethal dose of the Flaming Flatulence potion. Dinner was about to heat up.

The poltergeists then faded from view, just as the cooks returned to the kitchen grumbling about the poltergeists and the need to clean the coffee pot.

"Get that stew out to dining room," growled the head cook, unimaginatively named Cooky. The man had an ugly temper and a reputed fondness for knives that kept the other cooks wary of him.

Two helpers rushed forward and grabbed the large pot, taking it out to the dining room. They returned a moment later with an empty stew pot.

"Get that bread out of the oven before it burns, you morons," shouted Cooky. "I'm going to check outside."

Cooky left the kitchen, causing everyone to breath a sigh of relief.

In the dining room the stew was being ladled into bowls and handed out to anyone wanting it. Cooky might have a foul temper, but he was an excellent cook and many of the Death Eaters enjoyed his stew.

The cook stood to one side, his arms crossed, watching in satisfaction as dinner was served.

Dustin Johan was a dull, small minded man. He was exactly what the Dark Lord looked for in a Death Eater; a follower, not a leader, and in no way an independent thinker. He had just come off a grueling twelve hour training shift and was looking forward to a meal and several hours of uninterrupted sleep.

He spooned some of the stew up and chewed, all the while wondering about the unusual taste. Cooky must be trying something new. It wasn't bad, just a little more spicy than Cooky normally served. He paused when his stomach rumbled ominously. He looked around in relief. No one seemed to have noticed. Then it rumbled again, only louder and more violently.

His arse puckered and a small amount of gas escaped. Gas was a normal occurrence at meals and usually ignored. This time, however, the gas ignited. In pain, Dustin tried to stand. The effort forced a large bubble of gas through his intestines. When it made contact with the air, it ignited and his upward momentum continued with such force, his feet left the floor. He screamed in pain and fear, then smashed into the ceiling.

There was a moment of shocked silence in the cafeteria and all eyes turned towards Dustin, still pinned to the ceiling by the exhaust from his own personal rocket engine. Then, like most rocket mishaps, he exploded, violently.

Cooky stared dumbfounded as, one by one, Death Eaters expelled foul smelling gas and launched themselves into the ceiling in a shower of smoke and flame. The unlucky ones were those trapped by the ceiling. For a lucky few, sitting under the skylights, they were treated to the experience of a lifetime as they lifted into low Earth orbit.

The event in the dining room continued for three more minutes before the building, unable to contain the mix of volatile gases, exploded in a fiery ball. Fifty Death Eaters and the entire kitchen staff were killed in the blast.

From the Astronomy tower, five poltergeists watched and applauded. *The red headed weasel twins would be so proud!* Peeves thought.

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## **The Chamber of Secrets, Hogwarts Castle...**

Harry stepped through the portal and looked at Hermione, who was holding his hand tightly. She didn't like the portal travel, but it was faster than a portkey and not nearly as much of a problem for him.

She looked around curiously. It was her first trip back to the school since their frantic escape, nearly a year ago. She shivered and he placed an arm around her.

"He can't sense us down here. It will only be when we're in the tunnels that we'll need to be especially careful," he told her quietly.

She nodded and looked at the others clustering around them. The chamber was large and poorly lit, and the sound of dripping water echoed through it. All in all, the room was downright spooky. Each person was intimately aware that they were only a few hundred feet from the most dangerous person on the planet.

**LIGHTS!**" Harry hissed in parseltongue.

The torches around the room flared to life, throwing back the darkness. Tonks shivered and glared at Harry. "I hate it when you speak in that language," she said.

He laughed. "I'm sorry, Tonks, but the room responds to parsel magic only. This is Slytherin's chamber, or was. It now belongs to the Outcasts."

The rest of his friends grinned at the reference to what they'd once called themselves.

"Harry, what is that?" Hermione said, pointing to the table with the power crystal glowing on it.

He looked where she pointed. "That's the crystal I charged with magic. It's providing an anchor for the ghosts."

Hermione looked at the crystal, then looked at Remus, who shrugged his shoulders.

"You should be used to this by now, Hermione," he said, his eyes dancing.

She nodded and shot Harry a hurt look.

"What did I do?" he protested.

"You... you.... oh!" Hermione sputtered. Turning, she walked away from him, muttering about husbands violating the laws of magic.

"I thought it was a wife's job to keep her husband off guard?" Dan asked Emma.

"Yes, dear, that's what it says in the handbook," she replied.

"One of you forgot to tell those two, then. They seem to have have their roles reversed," he told her, grinning.

"Wait a second? There's a handbook?" asked Harry.

"Didn't you get yours?" Draco drawled with a perfectly straight face.

Harry looked at him, his eyes narrowing in suspicion. "Ha ha. It might have worked, but Draco can't tell a joke to save his life," he said, shaking his head.

Draco pretended to look offended, while the others laughed.

"Alright," Harry said as the laughter died away, "let's get this show going, I'd like to get home and crawl into bed at a reasonable hour."

The two groups split apart, and Draco, Luna and Neville followed Harry out of the entrance to the chamber. Reaching the side passage in the exterior cavern, the group paused.

"No more magic from this point," he said as he opened a bag and pulled out several torches.

The passage Harry led them through twisted and turned. At several points it they had to carefully crawl over rubble to continue moving forward. They could use their medallions to portkey back to Haven if they ran into any trouble, but they were out from under the chamber's *Fidelius* charm now. Nearly any external magic they used would be picked up.

Back in the chamber, the rest of the Brotherhood were busy interviewing the ghosts. It was the first time Dan and Emma had been exposed to ghosts and they were amazed by the spirits.

"So you went to school with Hermione?" Emma asked Penelope. She wasn't sure how to talk to these spirits.

Penelope smiled, as if remembering something fondly. "I was a few years ahead of them, but I remember Harry and Hermione pretty well. At the time, I was dating Percy Weasley."

"Do... do... do you miss being alive?" asked Emma.

Penelope nodded. "Yes, I do. But the Baron has taken it upon himself to teach me all he can about being a ghost. It's not a bad life, when it's all you have and I've learned to accept it. I wish things could have been different, but that wasn't my fate."

Dan watched Emma's conversation for a moment before he joined Ginny, who was talking to Sir Nicholas.

"Tell me about the towers, Sir Nicholas. Are they housing any Death Eaters?" asked Ginny.

Sir Nicholas straightened his head and grinned. "We chased them out of Gryffindor and Hufflepuff, but they're still using Slytherin and Ravenclaw."

"How many live in the castle?" asked Dan. When Ginny jumped in surprise, he grinned ruefully at her. "Sorry," he said softly.

Sir Nicholas eyed Dan warily.

"Sir Nicholas de Mimsy-Porpington, meet Dan Granger, Hermione's father," Ginny offered. "Mr. Granger, this is Sir Nicholas, or sometimes called Nearly Headless Nick."

"Nearly Headless?" Dan exclaimed.

"Yes," Sir Nicholas replied sadly. "I'm afraid the headless hunt is still refusing my membership."

Ginny giggled and shook her head. "Perhaps next year, Sir Nicholas."

Sir Nicholas smiled. "Yes, there is always next year."

Dan's eyes seemed fixed on Nick's neck. His head kept sliding to one side, held on by a few tendons and some skin. Finally, he shook his head and looked away.

"Er, so back to my question, Sir Nicholas. How many live..."

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## **The Forbidden Forest...**

Harry paused and looked up the passage nervously. Other than the torches and small utility knives, they had no real weapons, except for their magic and their hands. They had been trained in hand to hand fighting, but that sort of fighting was useless for what lay ahead. He made a mental note that he should talk to Caleb about training with some muggle weapons. He was certain a gun would be mighty handy right about now.

He turned to the others. "I think we need to turn back."

"Why?" asked Draco. "We're near the end. I can feel a stronger breeze and the passage ahead is lightening."

"Draco, it's night out. It shouldn't be lighter. What you're seeing is the white of Acromantula webs."

Draco gulped nervously and fingered the knife on his belt.

"Oh, don't be silly," Luna exclaimed. "They're only spiders." She pushed past them and hurried down the passage.

"Luna!" Draco called, bolting after her.

The three men rushed after Luna, who ran up the last fifty feet of the passage and stepped outside into a small clearing.

All around them the trees were filled with spider silk. Seconds later, the clicking, chittering sounds of the large, dog-sized spiders surrounded them. They were everywhere!

"I don't think this is a good idea," Neville muttered, holding his torch up high. The spiders were climbing down from the trees. The path to the cavern had been blocked and none of them wanted to lead the spiders back into the cavern.

"You think?" asked Draco sardonically. He stood close to Luna, one hand holding his small knife, the other brandishing his torch at the closing spiders.

"Oh, stop that and bring me your king!" Luna snapped at a spider that got too close.

The spider halted and flinched back from her. The other creatures froze and Harry turned in a circle, holding his torch high. Just as they'd thought, they were surrounded by hundreds of the arachnids.

Several spiders scurried away, clicking and chittering as they went.

Several tense minutes later, an enormous spider approached. Others scurried out of the way, making room for the larger creature to enter the circle.

"Gaia's child, I greet thee," said the large spider. "I am called Sleg, king of this place. Why have you come into our range? Do you bring these creatures as offerings?"

"Not bloody likely," Harry muttered as he stepped forward. "Where is Aragog?"

"Aragog has passed. His time was over and I, Sleg, Aragog's son, now rule here. I know you, friend of Hagrid. Even Hagrid is no longer welcome in our range."

"I don't want to fight you, Sleg. We are not here for that purpose, but we will defend ourselves," Harry said ominously.

Sleg took a step forward, then recoiled from Harry. "AllEEEE! You have the beast in your veins!"

Luna stepped forward and placed a hand on Harry's arm. She knew he was coming close to using magic. Fuzz whirred in warning, although only Fuzz knew who she was warning.

"This is my friend and brother. He killed your enemy during Aragog's reign. These others are also friends, and my mate. We do not wish to anger or disturb you, but we are seeking places from which we can attack the evil in the castle. Soon, a great many wizards will be here and there will be a battle. We are scouts, looking for places we can use in our attack."

"You will cleanse the shadow that covers the land?" asked Sleg.

Luna nodded. "We will. My brother," she said, touching Harry's shoulder, "will lead his armies against the dark ones and chase them from this land. We wish only to be allowed passage unhindered."

Sleeg backed up a few feet and crouched low while dozens of spiders chittered and clicked around him.

"What is he doing?" Neville asked.

"He's consulting with some of the elders," Luna replied.

Neville shook his head and marveled at Luna. The spiders seriously creeped him out. Why she wasn't close to gibbering in terror was beyond him. He certainly felt like doing so!

Finally, Sleeg rose up again and moved forward. "A debt is owed to the slayer of the beast. When the time comes, we will aid Gaia's friends and show them the way through the forest. We shall also alert the other denizens, who will come to help. There is a large clearing not far from here that you can use to assemble your army. It belongs to a clan of half horses. We will tell them of your coming."

Luna smiled prettily at the spider and patted it above the eyes. "We thank you, Sleeg. It is good to know that Aragog's children are honorable."

Sleeg pulled back out of the circle. Within seconds, all of the spiders were gone and everyone slowly relaxed.

"Merciful Merlin! I don't want to go through that again," Draco said with a shudder. Then he looked at Harry, his expression puzzled. "What did he mean by having the beast in your veins?"

Harry shrugged. "When I rescued Ginny and killed the basilisk, it bit me. Fawkes, the Headmaster's phoenix, saved me, but I'll always have a little basilisk venom and phoenix tears in my blood now." Turning away, he looked at the cave entrance. "Come on. We still have that other passage to check out."

"Wait, Harry," Luna said. Taking a few steps away from them, she knelt on the ground and scraped away an area of the underbrush until she found dirt.

Taking her knife, she drew a rune in the dirt, then cut her finger. She dripped several drops of blood onto the rune, then put her knife away. Standing, she turned back and walked into the passage, leaving the men mystified.

They hurried to follow her, never noticing the rune glowing softly behind them.

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## **Maidens, South Ayrshire, Scotland...**

The collective was diminishing. Every member could feel it and for the first time in memory, which spanned nearly two millennia, they felt fear. The Dark One had insisted that the collective hunt with the soulless ones. It was the first time they had hunted with another species and it added to their uneasiness.

The Leader gestured and the collective came to a stop on the small rise overlooking the town below. These little towns were more self sufficient than the big cities and had been less affected by the upheavals that wracked the country. As a result, their populations didn't fluctuate as much.

The Leader looked around. Surrounding him were the forty members of his hunting party, and the thirty soulless ones that followed in their wake, consuming what they left behind.

Down the hill and only a short distance away, the humans of Maidens sat around a communal fire in the town square, singing. It looked like the entire town had turned out for some sort of celebration. There must have been hundreds of them! The Leader shook slightly as it felt the uncontrollable urge to feast race through it.

In its hunger, the Leader overlooked the warning signs as it gestured to the collective. With a hissing cry, the dementors surged down the hill. A moment later, the vampires followed.

No one was exactly sure what caused the feeling, but by late afternoon the townspeople of Maiden were celebrating. Two score of men collected wood to build a massive box fire in the square, while the women prepared what food they had. The fisherman had long given up their gas powered engines and returned to their roots, rigging their boats with sails. The small fleet was met by a happy crowd when it returned to port with their catch.

Small cook fires dotted the square and the townsfolk mingled and shared what they had with their neighbors. Small children ran and played among the adults, unaware of the danger that lurked not far away.

The large box fire had been burning only a short while when the town was suddenly bathed in a startling bright light.

The dementors recoiled in shock and fear when, from the roofs of nearby buildings, Angels unfurled their wings and took to the air. The very sky seemed to erupt in light.

Children ran to their parents and the men rushed to gather in front of their families, protecting them. The muggles couldn't see the Angels or the Dementors, but they could see the Vampires that screamed in the intense bright light and burst into flame.

To add to their confusion, when an Angel consumed a dementor, there was an explosion of black dust and a ragged black cloak fluttered to the ground. Above the spot, for a brief instant, the souls consumed by the dementor became visible as pinpricks of rainbow colored light before

crossing over.

For one family in the square, their moment of terror came and passed in a flash, leaving them relieved, but confused. They were a wizarding family that had been living in Maidens for generations. They saw the Dementors, and the Vampires and knew exactly how close they had come to death. They also saw the Angels and marveled at their luck.

The Leader halted and turned, trying to escape back up the hill. But it was too late. An Angel swooped down and caught it in her grip. Her wings enclosed the evil creature, cocooning it in light and her magic lifted her high in the air. The song she sang was uplifting enough to make a Phoenix weep with envy. A moment later, her wings unfurled and the remains of the Leader exploded outwards in a cloud of black dust and the cloak fluttered to the ground.

In less than five minutes, the attack was over. The Angels had been responsible for releasing hundreds of trapped souls. They floated over the town of Maiden, celebrating in an aerial dance for nearly another hour.

Then, as one, they turned toward the north. They were needed. They could hear the call.

From the rooftops, nearly twenty smaller Angels took flight, following their parents.

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### **Gringotts, Stonewall Lane, Dublin (March 9th)...**

"Welcome, Lord Potter. Please, come in," Ragnok said, waving Harry and his companions into the large conference room.

Harry led Hermione, Remus and Draco into the large room. They all sat down on the chairs indicated, close to Ragnok and a group of goblins.

"May this meeting bring us all nothing but profit," Harry murmured in greeting, causing the goblins present to grin at him. It was a traditional goblin greeting, even if Harry said it in English, rather than Gobbledegook.

Ragnok bowed from his seat. "You honor us, my lord. Our business relationship has far exceeded our expectations. If we meet today for reasons other than profit, I hope you will forgive us."

Harry's brow furrowed. Hermione was watching their investments and hadn't told him how things were going lately. "So the portals are doing well, then?"

Ragnok grinned toothlessly at him. "Very well, my lord."

He glanced at Hermione, who seemed a little embarrassed.

"I thought you weren't interested in knowing, Harry. You never seem all that concerned about money," she told him.

He shrugged. "I'm not. Not at the moment, anyway. I trust you and Remus to make sure we have enough. To be honest, my primary interest in the portals is for use in the war. What happens with them on the side, or after the war, is a secondary concern."

Ragnok nodded and looked at his advisor, Gapsit, as if to say, "I told you so."

"My lord, if I may interrupt? The war is the primary reason why we asked you here today."

Harry turned back to Ragnok. "Oh?"

Ragnok nodded to Gapsit, who stood and walked over to large map. On the map, several cities were circled.

"In the past month we've noticed breeches in the security domes at several of our branch offices, including Glasgow, Birmingham and Cardiff. I don't know if you are aware, but each of these offices have their own access to our track system. In each case, several minor vaults were pilfered before we closed and sealed access to the track from those offices."

Harry frowned. "So Voldemort's forces are trying to break into the track?"

"Unfortunately, that appears to be the case, my lord," Ragnok said. He nodded to Gapsit, who sat back down. "What my colleague failed to mention was that reconnecting the track to those branches requires extensive magic, and the willing sacrifice of a goblin life."

"The track doesn't exist under any particular branch office. It is contained... elsewhere. Each office with access has a clever set of spells to make it look as though you are entering the track when, in fact, you are performing a dimensional transport to the real track."

Ragnok paused and scowled. He leaned back on his chair and looked at Harry for a minute before continuing. "The Goblin Nation is angry, my lord. We have returned to the remaining branches with track access and have reinforced our wards. But we are angry. At least three families will have to give up a member to return those branch offices to full operational status. We goblins feel that if Lord Voldemort and his forces are going to do this to us, then we can no longer remain neutral."

Harry sat up straight in his chair and blinked in surprise. He exchanged a glance with Draco and Remus, then conjured some parchment and a quill.

"I have to admit, I thought Voldemort would make a move against Gringotts eventually," Harry murmured. "We'd heard some rumors about the assaults on one of the branch offices."

"My lord, can you tell us about your plans? The Goblin Nation is willing to put our warriors into the field, but it would be best if we coordinate our efforts," Gapsit replied.

Harry leaned back in his chair and smiled. "We have plans I think you and your warriors would be well suited for. A few days ago, we finished scouting the area around Hogwarts. We have located several access points where we plan on setting up portals to bring in our assault forces.

"I do not expect your warriors to be involved in the assault on the castle, unless you wish to be. Where we could use your help, however, will be with one of the diversionary fights, in Diagon Alley."

"Harry, are you sure you should be talking about this?" asked Remus worriedly.

"I think it's an acceptable risk, Remus, both as commander of the Brotherhood Brigade and as Ambassador," Harry replied evenly. "We owe a debt of thanks to the Goblin Nation. They could have supported Voldemort, but they didn't."

"At least check with Amelia," Remus cautioned.

Harry sighed and dug into his pocket. "Very well," he grumbled. A moment later, he pulled out his portable floo and flipped the cap up. The flame lit, burning a bright green.

Ragnok watched the exchange with interest.

"Amelia Bones," he said sharply into the flame.

"Harry?" came a surprised, but tinny reply.

"Amelia, good, are you alone?"

"I'm here with Arthur Weasley, why?"

"Arthur's alright, Amelia. Set up a privacy ward and let me know when it's set."

Harry smiled apologetically to Ragnok while he waited.

"Alright, Harry, it's set. Now, what's going on?"

"Amelia, I'm sitting in Gringotts with Lord Ragnok and his chief advisor, Gapsit. They have informed me that they are considering dropping their neutrality."

"Are you serious?" screeched the tinny voice.

Harry laughed. "Completely, Amelia. Listen, in my official capacity as Ambassador, I would like to invite Ragnok to meet with you as soon as possible. I would also like to invite the commander of their force to our Allied forces staff meeting later this month."

"Yes, yes! Of course! I'd be happy to receive Ragnok anytime," she nearly shouted into the floo.

Harry grinned at Remus, then turned back to his floo. "Thanks. Amelia. I'll talk to you later today." He snapped his floo closed and looked at Remus.

"It pays to check with the boss, Harry," the older man said, smiling.

Harry chuckled and turned back to Ragnok. "Well, that's settled. We'll be having a meeting of the commanders later this month. We will be talking about our battle plans then. In the meantime, my lord, on behalf of my government, I'd like to extend our thanks to you and your people. If I have anything to say about it, when this is over, I will do my best to ensure equal relations between our two peoples."

Hermione reached under the table and rested a hand on his thigh. He could feel her pride and love surging through the bond. She'd never realized that his upbringing would make him so receptive to the idea of equality among the intelligent non-human species.

"We have heard about your defense of that house elf, my lord. We have no doubt that you will remain a Goblin friend for a long time to come. I will contact Minister Bones and arrange for our meeting. If you contact me with the date and time for the commanders meeting, I will make sure our commander attends," Ragnok replied.

Harry nodded and tried very hard not to smile. The Goblins were going to war!

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### **Haven School, (March 12th)...**

The unused classroom was warm and lit with a multitude of candles. In the center of the room was a low table surrounded by rugs and large, colorful pillows. The table was set for dinner, with a bottle of wine chilling in a silver bucket.

Millicent's eyes widened and she turned to Deneb, who had just closed and locked the door behind them. "What's going on?"

Deneb smiled softly. "Happy Birthday." He took her hand and led her to the table. "I've been planning this for days now. The school elves were a lot of help."

She stopped and glared at him. "How did you know it was my birthday?"

"You know I've been interested in you for awhile," he told her gently. "After our talk back in January, I made it a point to learn everything I could about you. That included when your birthday was. I wanted to surprise you."

Millicent scowled. "What did you do? Sneak into McGonagall's office and look up my file? I'm not sure I like the idea of you digging into my life, Thorntree."

"I didn't look at your file, Millie. I simply asked Chloe when your birthday was. I'm not sure where she got the information. It's entirely possible that *she* looked at your file to find out," he said, his eyes dancing.

When she continued to scowl at him, he sighed and raised her hand. Turning it over, he kissed her palm softly. When her expression softened, he smiled. "I wanted to do something special for you, to show you how much I care about you. We've been so busy the last few months that we haven't had a lot of time for ourselves."

She looked down at their joined hands and shook her head. "I'm not used to this sort of thing, Deneb," she muttered. "I'm not girly, or feminine, or whatever it's called."

He tugged her hand, pulling her closer. "Some guys like that sort of thing in their woman. I don't. I want a woman who's strong and intelligent. I want someone who can challenge me and keep me on my toes." He wrapped both arms around her, drawing her closer. "I won't lie to you or play games with you. You are what I want, Millicent."

She looked into his eyes, searching for the truth.

"Believe it," he said softly. Bending slightly, he brushed his lips gently across hers.

"I do believe you," she whispered. "I'm sorry I snapped at you, Deneb."

"I understand." Stepping away, he took her hand once more and drew her to the table. "Now, the house elves and I worked very hard on this. You don't want to ruin it by letting it get cold, do you?"

She smiled when he helped her to sit down on one of the large floor pillows. Once he was seated next to her, she reached out and took his hand.

"Thank you," she said simply.

He brushed her cheek lightly with the back of his hand. "You're welcome. Now, let's eat. The house elves prepared a feast, so you shouldn't feel the need to snack on any of the school's owls."

"For tonight, at least," she said with a devilish grin.

When he shuddered, her laughter rang out through the room. Hearing it, Deneb smiled. She didn't laugh often enough, in his opinion.

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### **Camp Outhouse, Haven (March 15th)...**

Harry hated the name, but once it had been explained to him, he understood it. Chuck Stanton, the commander of the American and Canadian forces, had given the place an informal name and it stuck like glue. It didn't help that part of the American team had sneaked into the camp one night and charmed a half moon on every door.

Harry walked behind Caleb, who was showing the camp off to Minister Bones and Minister Mallory of Ireland. Joining them were Sven Johansen, Mayor of Haven, Michael O'Dalley and Sylvia August.

"Each building, of which we have one hundred and fifty, is capable of housing fifty people," Caleb said proudly.

The buildings looked like small, single stall outhouses. The interior of each building was magically enlarged to room fifty people comfortably. They also contained bathrooms, showers and a small dining area.

"How many will the camp hold?" asked Mallory.

"Currently, the capacity of the camp is roughly seventy five hundred, but we are able to quickly throw up new buildings now that we have the charms down pat. Between our forces and the muggles, we'll be putting nearly one hundred thousand into the field." Caleb said softly.

Sylvia whistled under her breath and Mallory turned to her.

"Is there a problem, Healer August?"

"Yes... er... No. Well, maybe. With these numbers, I'm just concerned about our ability to handle wounded. Deputy Minister Newman is talking about quite a lot of people."

"That isn't as much of a problem as you might think, Sylvia," offered Harry. "The muggles will be using their own hospital facilities on the continent and at sea. I don't expect you'll be seeing a lot of muggle patients. As far as wizards go, we're putting less than ten thousand into battle. And the Americans are revamping the same camp they used for our rescue, for wounded."



“Still, it’s a lot of potential wounded, my lord,” August replied quietly.

“It is,” Caleb said, then his expression hardened. “But you’ll only be treating our people.”

Sylvia looked up at him in alarm. “What?” she exclaimed.

“Sylvia, we can’t take prisoners,” Harry said gently. “We won’t have the force to look after them, and they can’t leave Britain without me pulling down the ward. I don’t expect to be pulling that ward down for quite a number of months yet, if ever.”

Mallory looked at Harry in surprise. “You’ll be leaving the ward up?”

“Actually, we talked about that the other day,” Amelia said, jumping into the conversation. “We want to make sure that we pick up the bulk of the Death Eaters. Keeping the ward in place will make sure they won’t be able to run.”

Mallory nodded thoughtfully, but Sylvia looked appalled. “But what about everyone else?”

“The muggles?” asked Harry.

Sylvia nodded.

“There’s not much we can do for them, Sylvia. We’re going to be hard pressed to help any wizards we find,” Harry replied tensely.

“Sylvia, I know it isn’t much, but we have several buildings like these that we’ll be moving in after our fight. The Americans are allocating a two hundred man medical battalion to man them as field hospitals,” Caleb offered. “I don’t expect them to be up and running for a day or two, though.”

“I suppose I could contact the Irish hospitals,” Sylvia murmured softly.

“That’s already been done,” Harry said. “And we’re stock piling potions by the ton. You see the camp. What you don’t see are the storerooms with tons of supplies. Potions, bandages, weapons, spare wands, clothing, field kitchens, you name it, it’s there.”

Sven watched quietly for a moment longer, then he waved at the row after row of small buildings. “This many troops in Haven, we must keep secret, yes?”

Caleb nodded unhappily. “Yes. That’s why we brought you out here. so you could see the camp for yourself and understand why we need your help with this.”

Sven nodded unhappily. “Keeping secret for a few days we can do. A week? Longer? The longer we go, the harder it becomes.”

“He’s right, my lord,” O’Dalley said to Harry. “We can put up a ward preventing owls from leaving for a few days. We can even close off the apparation point and shut down floo access for a few days, but that is about the most we can get away with.”

Harry and Caleb exchanged a worried glance.

Harry turned to Sven and O’Dalley. “Can you give us three days?” he asked.

The two men looked at each other. Sven knew he would have to provide the excuses to the townspeople, but it would be O’Dalley who would have to do most of the work.

Finally, O’Dalley nodded cautiously. “We can do three days, but what excuse can we give for cutting off the town from the outside world?”

Sylvia shrugged. “Tell them we have an outbreak of Dragon Lung. That will scare outsiders away and keep the townspeople in their homes for the time you need.”

Everyone grinned. Dragon Lung was an infectious, deadly disease, unless it was treated on time. Even with treatment available, most people didn’t want to catch the illness, as the cough it caused was extremely painful.

“Sounds like a good plan,” Caleb murmured.

“We may not be able to give you much lead time, Michael. Can you set everything up ahead of time?” asked Harry.

“Yes, I can, but I’ll need your help, my lord. You still hold the keys to most of the wards around Haven. For optimal results, you should hold the warding keys for this, as well.”

“Anything you need, just ask,” Harry told him.

“Well, now that that’s settled, humor me, Deputy Minister Newman, and show me some of these tons of supplies you’re stockpiling,” Sylvia said.

“Of course, Healer August. If you would all follow me?” Caleb asked, leading them to one end of Camp Outhouse.

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### **Padfoot Manor, (March 17th)...**

Harry limped into the bedroom. Hermione looked up from their small breakfast table where she was working on some Arithmancy for Remus and frowned. She stood and walked over to his side, watching him move unsteadily.

“Did you eat dinner?” she asked.

“I had a sandwich at the commissary,” he replied tiredly. His leg was aching badly today.

Her frown deepened. “Harry, you’ve been on the go since we returned from France and you’re not eating properly. You need to slow down.”

He collapsed on a chair by the table and kneaded his leg absently. “It can’t be helped. I have to get the Brigade ready and I’m helping with the attack planning. And today we had that meeting of the allied commanders,” he told her as he leaned back and closed his eyes.

“Dobby,” Hermione called.

Dobby appeared with a small pop and looked at the two anxiously.

“Dobby, Harry needs a decent supper, then I think a long, hot soak.”

The elf nodded and vanished again.

Harry opened one eye and looked up at her. “Are you ordering me around?” he asked incredulously.

She folded her arms across her chest. “I’m allowed. I outrank you.”

He smiled slightly. “How do you figure that? I’m your Colonel and your Maglios.”

“Yeah, but I’m your wife. That outranks everything else.”

Harry opened both eyes and smiled to himself.

Dobby appeared with Winky and put food on the table.

“Master Harry Potter needs to eat more!” Winky exclaimed. “You is lucky that Mistress cares. You could waste away and be sick all day long without Mistress watching over you. I swear, you nearly as insane as your elf!”

Hermione grinned at Winky, and nearly laughed out loud when Dobby flinched.

Harry looked at the food being spread out before him and hungrily dug in. The sandwich at the Operations Center was not enough to keep him going.

Hermione sat across from him, watching him eat, satisfied that he was willing to listen to her. It wasn’t that he did it deliberately, it was just that he tended to get so busy that he forgot to take care of himself.

“I went by the Portals factory after the Brigade post this afternoon,” she said. He started to say something, but she waved him silent.

“Eat, I’ll talk for now. Anyway, the twins asked me to stop by. They were having a problem storing their Sun Bangers, but I think we’ve got it worked out now. It looks like we’ll be able to issue at least four to everyone we put in the field.”

Harry cocked an eyebrow at her and she smiled in return.

“*They ended up using more of the Portal plant capacity than they thought they would, didn’t they?*” he sent her.

She frowned. She thought that mental speech while eating was bad manners, but she wasn’t sure.

“Yes they did, but it’s for a good cause.”

“*I’m not arguing that, love. I don’t mind. It doesn’t seem to have hurt the production of Portals any, and we’re going to need those weapons if vampires show up in significant numbers.*”

Hermione looked worried. “Is that possible?”

He put his fork on his plate and swallowed. “We just don’t know. That was one of the things we did today at the meeting; a force analysis. Our estimates on the vampires Voldemort has available range from a few hundred to over a thousand, depending on who you ask,” he replied.

She sucked in her breath. A thousand vampires would be a significant force and difficult to beat, even with the weapons developed by the Twins.

After dinner, Harry walked into the bath and sank into the large tub, relaxing in the hot water. Dobby had added his scented bath salts, and the room smelled of sandalwood. He leaned back, resting his head on the edge of the tub and closed his eyes. A moment later, he heard the door open as Hermione entered.

He opened one eye and watched as she disrobed. Her beauty still took his breath away.

She slid into the water opposite him, then reached out and gently pulled his sore leg into her lap where she could massage it. “So, you attended nearly a full day’s worth of meetings, then tried to squeeze in your own training?”

He groaned slightly at her ministrations and nodded. “Can’t have the brigade commander unable to keep up with his own people, love,” he told her.

She nodded to herself, but she knew they were both dancing around the real issue.

Soon they would attack Hogwarts and if he could arrange it, he would be fighting Voldemort. It was the culmination of more than a year's efforts and it terrified them both, for different reasons.

"You've been training since summer after fifth year, Harry. I don't think anyone, especially your brigade, will think any less of you if you miss a training day now and then," she chided. "Just about everyone will tell you that you're in excellent shape if you don't believe me."

He lifted his head and peered at her. "Alright, Hermione, stopping beating around the bush. Just say it."

She pushed his leg off her lap and glared at him. "Fine. You're being stupid again."

He winced. "Well, that was to the point," he muttered.

She sighed. "Harry, in the past week you've barely let yourself have four hours sleep a night. I let you get away with it because you were preparing for that meeting of the commanders, but I'm not going to let you do that until we leave. You put me in charge of the brigade command post and that includes you! A command post without a working commander is just a building."

He raised his hands in surrender and she moved closer to him, nearly sitting in his lap.

"Alright, alright. I'm too tired to argue anyway," he conceded.

She slowly straddled him, reaching between their bodies with one hand. "Good," she replied impishly. "I intend to put you to bed after I wear you out."

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### **Weasley Cottage, (March 20th)...**

Arthur Weasley stood in front of his bedroom mirror and straightening his robe once more. He was nervous and there was no way he could hide it.

He'd called a family meeting several nights ago to inform them of his plans. He hadn't been seeking their approval, but had wanted to discuss any problems his children might have with what he was planning to do. Surprisingly, there had been none. Charlie had been the real worry for him, but his second oldest had calmly informed him that all he wanted was for Arthur to be happy.

Of course, the twins had then mobbed their older brother, pretending to weep over how mature he had become, and the tension had been broken. Dinner afterwards had been a lively affair, and Arthur had never been more proud of his children as he watched them tease and joke with each other. His family, while smaller now, was closer than ever.

"Are you ready, dad?"

Turning, Arthur smiled at Bill, who stood in the doorway. "As ready as I'll ever be," he replied, tugging at his robe again.

"You might want to comb your hair," his son told him, grinning.

"Oh, right!"

As his father rushed into the bathroom, Bill shook his head. "And put on some shoes," he called.

"Right, shoes. Mustn't forget them."

When Arthur returned to the bedroom and put on his shoes, Bill walked over to him and fixed his collar. "You know, you'd probably do this better if you'd just calm down a bit."

"Says the man who's never proposed to a woman before," Arthur muttered.

"I came close," Bill told him.

"What?" Arthur exclaimed. "When? Who?"

"Fleur Delacour, just before all hell broke loose in Britain. She's back in France now, and we write each other often. When the war is over, we're both hoping to pick up where we left off."

Arthur squeezed his son's shoulder in understanding. "No war last forever, Bill. The Delacour's are a fine family. Her father is now the Minister for France, trying to clean up the source of the corruption in both governments. He's a good, honest man."

"I've met him. Fleur has his personality, but her mother's looks."

"Part Veela?"

"And how," Bill replied with a wolfish grin.

Arthur laughed. "Good luck with that!"

A small pop sounded in the room and both men turned toward it. A small elf stepped forward and frowned.

"Mister Minster, all do be ready. Melinda do be home at any time," Dilly told him firmly.

Seeing his father's shoulders tense, Bill shook his head. "Relax, dad. Everything will work out."

"I hope you're right, son." Turning to the elf, Arthur smiled. "I'll meet you there, Dilly. And thank you for everything you've done."

The elf smiled. "You do be welcome, Mister Minister. Dilly will be seeing you soon. Don't be late!"

When the elf popped away, Arthur took a deep breath and let it out slowly. "I'm not sure when I'll be back," he warned his son.

"If you're not back tonight, we'll assume the best," Bill told him. "Now, you better get going before Dilly comes back and drags you over there."

Arthur grimaced. "She would, too. She's a bossy little thing. Thank Merlin she's on our side."

"Stop stalling. Go," Bill said, stepping back a few paces. "Good luck, dad."

"Thanks, Bill. I'll see you later." Patting his pockets to make sure he had everything, he then nodded to his son and disappeared.

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### **Melinda McKinny's cottage, moments later...**

Arthur apparated into the living room of the small cottage and looked around. "Dilly?" he called.

The elf appeared in the doorway to the kitchen and smiled. "Melinda do be home any time now, Mister Minister. All do be ready and Dilly will be waiting if you do be needing anything."

"Thanks, Dilly. I couldn't have done this without your help."

The elf's eyes widened suddenly and she clapped her hands. "Melinda do be coming! Hurry!"

Panic seized Arthur as he rushed to the kitchen. *It's just dinner*, he tried telling himself. It didn't work, of course, but he tried. When he heard the door to the cottage open, he snatched the glasses from the beautifully set table and quickly filled them with wine.

When he turned back to the kitchen door, Dilly smiled at him reassuringly, then popped away.

"I wonder if this would be easier if she stayed?" he muttered to himself.

"Dilly?" Melinda called from the living room. "I'm home."

Her voice grew louder as she approached the kitchen and Arthur took several deep breaths to calm his nerves.

"Today seemed to drag by. I hope Sylvia puts me back on nights soon," Melinda said as she entered the kitchen. "I don't think I can...Arthur!" She jumped slightly and placed a hand over heart. "Merlin, you startled me!"

"I'm sorry," he told her as he approached. "That wasn't my intent. Here, have a glass of wine." He shoved the glass at her and grimaced when some of the contents splashed over the rim.

"Um, thanks," she said, taking the glass and looking around the kitchen. "Were we going to have dinner tonight?" she asked, looking at the laden table. "I'm sorry, Arthur, I must have forgotten."

"We hadn't made plans, no. I wanted to surprise you." He gulped his wine nervously.

"It's a lovely surprise, thank you," she told him, smiling.

"Dilly helped," he informed her seriously.

"That was nice of her."

"Yes, it was. But she's a nice elf, isn't she?" he asked.

"I've always thought so." She tilted her head slightly and waited.

"Yes, a fine elf. And a good cook, too."

"Then perhaps we should sit down and eat? We wouldn't want all her hard work to go to waste, would we?"

"What? Or, right! Dinner!" he exclaimed. Reaching for her hand, he then dragged her to the table and pushed her into a chair. "She cooked all your favorites, too."

Putting her glass down on the table, she watched as he refilled his own glass and sat down next to her. When he began to fill their plates, she shook her head in bemusement.

Arthur, is something wrong?" she asked over the rather large mound of mashed potatoes he'd all but flung onto her plate.

"Wrong? No, there's nothing wrong. What makes you think there's something wrong?"

"I don't know. Maybe it's the fact that you just put a dinner roll in your wine glass and poured gravy in mine?"

Dilly, who was eavesdropping unabashedly from her quarters behind the pantry, yanked her ears in frustration and aimed a glare toward the kitchen. "Mister Minister man best be pulling himself together," she growled. "Dilly can't be doing everything for him!"

Arthur's eyes widened as he looked at the mess he'd made. "I'm sorry," he blurted. "I wasn't paying attention. I'll get some clean glasses."

When he stood up, grabbed the dirty glasses from the table and rushed to the cabinets, she shook her head. He hadn't been this nervous around her in months.

Putting a clean glass in front of her, he reached for the wine, but she beat him to it.

"I think it would be better if I filled my own glass, don't you?" she asked.

"I can pour a glass of wine," he said, slightly hurt.

"Normally, I would agree. But your hand is trembling a bit too much for my peace of mine. I'd like to drink my wine, not wear it," she teased.

He sat down and put his head in his hands. Things weren't going as well as he'd hoped.

Placing the bottle on the table, Melinda turned to him and put her hand on his shoulder. "Arthur, what's wrong? Something is obviously bothering you. I'd like to help, if you'd let me."

He shook his head and dropped his hands. Facing her, he took her hands in his and squeezed them gently. "I'm sorry, Melinda. I just wanted to share a romantic evening with you."

She smiled. "We've shared many, and you weren't nervous then. What's changed?"

"This," he said as he stood up and moved his chair out of the way. "I'd hoped to do this after dinner, but I just can't wait that long."

She watched, puzzled, as he patted himself down, obviously looking for something.

Finding what he was looking for, he pulled it out of his pocket and smiled, nervously. When he dropped down on one knee, her eyes widened.

Holding out a small, black box, he opened the lid to reveal a small, diamond ring. With a calm voice and serious eyes, he asked, "Melinda McKinny, will you marry me?"

She stared at him, shocked. "Arthur, are you sure?" she finally whispered.

"I've never been more sure of anything in my life," he told her simply.

"Oh, Arthur!" she exclaimed as her eye filled with tears.

"Does that mean yes?" he asked hopefully, not wanting to presume.

"Yes!"

He took the ring out of the box and managed to slip it onto her finger just before she launched herself at him, taking them both to the floor.

He wanted to thank her. He wanted to tell her how happy she'd made him. He wanted to breath!

Wrapping his arms around her, he groaned as she bit his lip and thought, *Maybe later...*

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### **Padfoot Manor (March 30th)...**

"Damn you, Terry Boot!"

The plate smashed up against the wall and showered Terry with fragments of crockery. "Huh? What did I do?" he asked, ducking and covering his head.

He had just returned from a day at the Operations Center, where the pace bordered on chaotic, and he wondered if he should have stayed there.

"I spoke with Melinda McKinny today," Susan said between gritted teeth. "She said they may have made a mistake in my due date calculation. I may have another two weeks of this! I swear, next time around, I'm hexing you so you swell up and carry like I do!"

Terry cringed and flinched. He wondered if the French Foreign Legion was still accepting wizards. Anything would be better than living with an insane, pregnant witch. He was just glad she had regained control of her magic. The day and a half that he had endured walking around with testicles the size of cantaloupes had been one of the most uncomfortable of his life.

"Susan, calm down and relax a moment. Tell me what the healer said."

He limped over to a chair and watched her carefully. If she went for another plate, he would use his Brotherhood medallion to portkey out of the way.

Susan sighed and a tear slid down her cheek. She sat on her chair, gripping the arms tightly. "I just want this over, Terry. I want this baby out of me! My back aches all the time, my feet hurt, my boobs hurt. I'm gross and ugly!"

Terry stood and walked over to her and knelt by her chair.

"No you aren't, Susan. Now, tell me what the healer said," he prompted again.

Susan looked at her best friend, sighed and reached out and caressed his cheek. "She said that things weren't quite as advanced as they thought and that maybe they were off by a couple weeks. Everything is fine with the baby, but she thinks I won't have her until the second week in April."

Terry leaned back on his knees and thought for a moment. "Is there anything I can do to make this time easier for you?" he asked seriously.

She smiled at him. "Why do you put up with me?"

He shrugged. "Because I love you. You're having our daughter and I can't imagine a life without you. I admit you make me a little nervous at times. But all in all, I'd rather be with you, even when you're irrational, than be without you."

She sniffled and ran her hand through his hair. "It's still your fault," she said fondly.

"Yeah, I know," he replied, grinning mischievously. "But, if I remember correctly, you were telling me how much you were enjoying what I was doing at the time."

When she blushed, he laughed, then kissed her on the cheek. "You'll get through this, and I'll be there holding your hand the whole way," he murmured. Standing, he helped her to her feet and placed his palm over her belly. "Have you seen what Harry did?"

She looked at him curiously. "No, what?"

"Well, tomorrow, a couple elves will be adding a new door to the room. To a nursery. He and Hermione had the room next to ours remodeled into a nursery for when we're staying here."

He grabbed her hand and pulled her along gently. "Come on, I want you to see it."

Bemused she let him lead her from their bedroom.

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## Hogwarts Castle (April 1st)...

"Mulciber, what have you done outside?" asked Voldemort in a deceptively calm voice.

"I'm sorry if it offends you, my lord, but we're moving more of your servants into the area. Hogsmeade is overflowing, so we had to add additional barracks space on the castle grounds."

The Dark Lord frowned and fingered his scepter dangerously. "And why have you done this?"

"My lord, surely you've read Lucius' reports concerning Potter and his attack against you? We're bringing in every wizard we can spare to aid in the attack."

That gave Voldemort pause. He'd not been given a time frame for the attack. "Lucius believes the attack will be soon? How does he know this?"

"From the French, my lord. Lucius learned that the muggles would not jump into the war until most of our forces had been destroyed. He's learned from other sources that the muggles are very nearly ready. They have amassed an invasion fleet and an army of over one hundred thousand men," Mulciber told him.

Voldemort blinked in shock. That was more than ten times the number of men he had! "So many," he murmured to himself.

"Yes, my lord, but they won't attack if we can defeat Potter. That is why I'm bringing in more wizards. When he attacks from Hogsmeade, we will meet him and crush him."

Voldemort nodded absently and stood. He walked over to a large rune he had inscribed on the wall of the Great Hall. His scepter traced a complex pattern in the air and he chanted softly, then tapped the rune, which rang like a great bell and glowed a sickly green.

He turned to Mulciber again. "Summon the Vampire clans. I have called the Dementors. We shall amass our allies and await Potter and his 'army'. Then I will crush him. Killing Potter in front of his friends will be a pleasure, and will cause his ward to fail, releasing me and my army onto the world!"

Mulciber fell to his knees, overwhelmed by the vision his master had described. He prostrated himself before him. "I will, my lord. We will bring you victory!"

Mulciber stood and hurried from the hall. Behind him, the gathered Death Eaters were chanting "Victory!" to a smiling Voldemort.

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## Haven Operations Center, Briefing Theater...

“Brigade, attention!” shouted Twister.

Harry entered the theater, followed by Hermione and Draco, and the three moved to the small stage. Remus entered a moment later carrying a large box. He opened the box and started pulling out a thick sheave of parchments, which he began to pass around.

Harry walked to the center of the stage and waved for everyone to relax.

“Good morning.”

A chorus of voices murmured back at him.

“I know the training tempo has been tough, of late, and it’s going to get even harder for the next few days,” Harry said, then he paused and nodded to Hermione.

She waved her wand and a date appeared in big bold letters, visible to everyone in the room.

“April tenth. That’s our target date. We will continue training for four more days, then stand down for two days, letting you go home to your families. On the seventh, you will return to Camp Outhouse.”

He tried to ignore the ripple of laughter that echoed in the room.

“Starting on the seventh, you will draw your supplies and we’ll hold several classes to make sure everyone knows how to use the items we’re getting from Q Branch.”

Harry nodded to Hermione, who flipped up a canvas flap on an easel, revealing a map of Hogwarts and the surrounding areas. Next, she activated the pensieve, displaying the three dimensional image.

Harry waved a hand and two areas on the large rotating image started to flash.

“The maps you have been given are identical to this. The flashing areas represent our points of entry. Now, if you will bear with me for a bit, I’ll give you an overview of what we’re calling Operation Downfall, then explain what our role is.”

Harry stood and walked over to one wall, where a large illuminated map of Britain hung.

“The ball drops at oh two hundred on April tenth, when two hundred elves begin a campaign of distracting the muggle military with some selective sabotage and acts of arson. At the same time, pathfinders will portal to the Chamber of Secrets and make their way to certain clearings we’ve scouted out in the forest, here and here.”

Harry gestured and two points in the forest began to glow.

“The pathfinders will erect portals in those clearings. At oh four hundred, the Brotherhood Brigade and the Raiders will portal to the Chamber of Secrets beneath Hogwarts.

A large room under the castle began to glow for everyone to see.

“At the same time, the 806th Animagi division, the 5th Sorcerer Infantry and 102nd Broomsticks will portal to the locations in the forest.

“Elements of the Canadian 2nd Northwest Shamans and a multinational group under Canadian command will lead two diversionary attacks starting at oh four thirty. The first attack will begin in Hogsmeade and will be assisted by another group of two hundred elves. Their purpose is to appear to be a lot bigger than they are. We want to draw the force concentrated around the castle, away from the castle and in the direction of Hogsmeade.

“The second diversionary attack will happen in London. The goblins do not name their units like we do, so all I can say is that three hundred goblins, under the command of Torngut, will attack Diagon Alley, pushing the remaining Wizarding forces away from that area before they interdict the alley.

“With the Alley secured, and the ruckus going on in Hogsmeade, we feel confident that Voldemort will commit his forces, sending them in the direction of Hogsmeade. Additionally, we believe that Voldemort himself will probably leave the castle, so he can be on hand to witness his victory.”

Harry paused and grinned wolfishly at the assembled soldiers.

“As his forces move out of Hogwarts, the Brotherhood Brigade and the Raiders will leave the Chamber of Secrets. We will have the Hogwarts ghosts guiding us to our assigned positions. In the meantime, the Canadian forces in Hogsmeade will briefly engage the enemy, then pull back and portkey to Haven. Once in Haven, they will portal to Hogwarts and act as our reserve.

“With the Canadians gone, Voldemort will most likely attempt to return to Hogwarts, only to find we’re now occupying it. Our job is to hold the castle, denying it to the enemy. Once we’re engaged, the Americans will flank the enemy on both sides and, hopefully, pin him up against the castle walls.”

Harry stopped and looked around, trying to gauge the mood of the brigade. “Questions?” he asked.

Twister grinned evilly and fingered the large knife he carried on his belt.

Allan Humbert, commander of Able company, stood. Harry nodded to the man.

“Sir, what do we expect the enemy force disposition to be?”

Harry stepped up to the edge of the stage and looked out over the sea of faces. There were nearly eight hundred people in the theater.

“For our own forces, we expect to be putting just less than eight thousand into battle. The enemy dispositions are more problematic. It is our estimate that he has five thousand wizards helping him. We are pretty certain about that number. Where our estimates break down, however, are in the number of non-human species that are helping him. We do not know the total number of dementors, vampires or other creatures with any certainty. Most of the giants are still on the continent, so they aren't a problem. On the other hand, Voldemort has a fondness for Trolls, so we may have to deal with them, as well.

He sighed and looked around. “I wish I could tell you how many of the enemy there are, but I can't. However, if the plan holds up long enough for us to occupy the castle, we'll be fighting from a secured and heavily fortified position, which always acts as a multiplier.”

He paced the stage for a moment. When he stopped and began to speak quietly, those in the room strained to hear him.

“You are our very best. You have been trained to be the best. I have every confidence that when we hit Hogwarts, we'll do it on our feet and bring home a victory for our people. They deserve it, and so do you...”

Harry blushed slightly and looked at them with pride. “Your unit commanders will detail your roles in the coming days. Q Branch is issuing booklets explaining the equipment they will be handing out. I strongly advise each of you to get those booklets and read them thoroughly.

“Finally, I will remind each of you that you took a magical oath to keep our secrets. Operation Downfall is classified. Telling anyone that isn't in this room about our plans will result in a very nasty, non-reversible curse.”

Harry grinned, then gathered up his papers. Remus and Draco would run the remaining part of the briefing, as commanders of Delta and Charlie companies.

“Brigade, attention!” shouted Twister.

Everyone stood as Harry walked from the room. He had another meeting to attend.

“Now, if everyone will turn to page two of the handout, you will find a detailed map of the castle, broken down by sector and areas of responsibility...” Remus began, as Hermione tapped another map with her wand.

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### **Author's Notes:**

“EEEEEEKKKK!!!!” Screamed Alyx, then she jumped on Bob, wrestling to the ground and taking away his donut.

“Alyx,” Bob whined. He stared at the comforting confection in her hands and quivered.

“No Bob! Down boy! You can't eat these. Remember what the Doctor said!” she replied.

Bob looked around for a moment, then he kicked a puppy. “Yeah, he said no food, all the good stuff gone and I have to survive on something that would starve a rabbit,” he muttered.

Alyx stared at the puppy in horror. “You kicked that puppy.”

Bob turned to the readers. “Send me pizza, or I'll kick the puppy again!”

Alyx jumped on Bob, tackling him to the ground. “Ignore him dear readers. Besides, we don't have a puppy.”

“Alyx?”

She winced.

“Yeah?”

“How long do you think it would take to microwave our cats?”

“Just get on with the Author's notes already!” she growled at him.

“Alright,” Bob grumbled.

o.T: Increase your meds.

Rebel Goddess: Dilly is not super powered. Her powers are typical of what a house elf has. Remember in canon Dobby threw Lucius Malfoy down a corridor with a gesture. Dilly having the ability to kill someone isn't that far a stretch of the imagination.

Muirmin Cocan: Firstly people like our disclaimers. If they bother you, don't read them. As to Draco's title, that would be for the Malfoy family. A title which he currently lay claim to.

Alyx and I would like to thank every person that sent us emails and reviews telling us about the name of the video short that gave us inspiration for



fuzz. Our ISP however is pissed about all the email from the millions of people that had to tell us about it. There's never a Jackalope around when you need one.

Meghan: Nutters is still around. He's just up a tree somewhere waiting to come down.

Lordblack: Authors prerogative. That's why.

Marine Potter Fan: Yeah, we can't believe it either. But we're coming down to the home stretch so hang in there.

Vidar: Shame on you for reading our story at work. As we've said before, we are not to be held responsible for failing grades, lost jobs/sleep/wars, missing body parts and failed marriages if you aren't paying attention while reading our fiction.

Princess Fictoria: Regrettably I am not allowed to eat the virtual cookies you sent. A recent stay in the hospital has changed all that for me. Sigh... Anyone got any low cal, low carb, low everything (except taste) Chocolate chip cookies?

Crose: I'm sorry, but I'm one of those people that truly dislikes Snape. In my mind, even in canon, Snape works for Snape.

Crys: Hmmmm I'm not sure whether the information will be useful or not. To be honest I needed a scene to torment our readers by starting off without showing what happened to Harry and company. The conversation between Bertrand and Narcissa fit the bill nicely I thought. While Narcissa may be developing some feelings for Bertrand, we have no plans of getting the two together. As it stands he'd never return those feelings.

*Bobmin*  
*FanficAuthors.net*

# Sunrise Over Britain

## Chapter 30 - Sunrise Over Britain (part 1)

### Standard Disclaimer:

"So it's time again?" asked Alyx.

"Yep... Time for another disclaimer," replied Bob.

"Well? What are your plans this time?" she asked.

"Well I thought I'd start with a whole Patton Motif, you know, I'd step up to the center of the stage, wearing a uniform and there'd be this huge American flag behind me. Then I thought, no, that wouldn't do since this is mostly a British run show. Next I considered using the fish slap dance from Monty Python, but that's too old hat."

Bob leaned back and thought about it. "Your suggestion to use the explosive castration hex on Voldemort has merit, but considering what we do to him in this chapter, we really should have thought of doing that to him earlier.

"I mean, think about it, we could have him come out, and explain that we don't own the Pottverse, and all this is the property of JKR. He could be dressed in one of those butt flossing thongs, you know, the ball sack kind? And then in the midst of his speech we would let loose a horde of starving lemmings after we hit him with the curse! Think of it! Blood, gore and castration all rolled into one disclaimer!"

Alyx smiled dreamily at the vision.

"And then I could squish what's left under a tank!" Bob proclaimed happily.

Alyx's eyes opened and she turned to look at Bob. "You just ruined it!"

"Did not!"

"Did too!"

"Did not!"

"Did too!"

"Did not!"

"Did too!"

"Did not!"

"Did too!"

Harry turned to Hermione. "Shall we get on with the chapter? I think the authors have regressed into childhood again."

"Yes please," Hermione said, pulling up his zipper and conjuring some popcorn.

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### Sunrise Over Britain

#### Chapter 30

#### Padfoot Manor (April 4th)...

Susan *waddled* into the dining room. There was no other word for it, really. Terry limped in behind her and helped her sit down.

Harry smiled at his friend when she sighed with relief and she grinned sheepishly at him.

"I can't even imagine what you're going through, Susan," Harry said softly.

"I can," Emma said with a grin, then she beamed at the young woman. "I know it's tough now, but it will be over soon enough. I remember when I carried Hermione. It seemed to take forever! Then, when she was born, it seemed like only yesterday the doctor was telling me I was pregnant."

Dan laughed. "Yeah, but when Hermione was born, all the power to the hospital failed. We didn't realize it at the time, but it was probably her first burst of accidental magic."

Hermione looked up from her dinner and eyed her parents suspiciously. "Am I going to have to sit through another episode of 'Let's embarrass our daughter'?"

"Hermione, don't be like that," Remus said seriously. "They aren't trying to embarrass you just because they recall past events with fondness. Now, if

they trot out the photos of you naked on the bed, then they're trying to embarrass you."

Tonks laugh and Hermione's face colored. She turned to face her parents full on. "You promised you'd never show those pictures to anyone!"

Dan smiled at his daughter. "I don't know what you're talking about. I never showed any photos to Remus."

Dan's eyes flicked towards Emma.

Hermione turned to her mother. "Mum!"

Emma shrugged. "I'm sorry, dear. Remus and I just got to reminiscing one day and I remembered the photos. Next thing I knew, I was showing them to him."

Hermione buried her face in her hands. "My own mother turns against me," she murmured.

She paused for a moment, trying to define the emotions she was feeling from Harry. He was grinning, but the emotions coming from him via their bond were a lot more complex than simple amusement. She felt that too, of course, but there was also a bit of wistful longing.

It suddenly struck her that he had no one who could tease him about his childhood. No parents to trot out photos of him playing naked in the sink or making a mess of his first birthday cake.

She reached over and caressed the back of his hand lightly. He looked at her puzzled, then he understood. He smiled slightly and gripped her hand tightly. Together, they would build a lifetime of happy memories. Both were sure of that, despite the coming uncertainty of battle.

Harry rapped his knuckles on the table to get everyone's attention. As he did, Eocho drifted in through a wall and came to rest behind Susan. The pair had been spending a lot of time together, although Susan hadn't told anyone what they'd been talking about.

"In the coming days, the Brigade will be living in camp. I'm going to make allowance for us to return to the manor each night, but in exchange for that privilege, we'll be getting up earlier than the rest of the camp so we can return before wake up call.

"I want us eating and training with the brigade. Hermione, you'll be with me from here on. Now, on to unpleasant business. Has each of you filed your will?"

He looked around at the frowning faces and knew he'd damped the mood. "I'm sorry, but it's necessary. If you haven't, please let Remus know and he'll arrange for our solicitor to help you."

Ginny shivered and looked down. "I hate this," she hissed angrily. "We're all dancing around it, trying to pretend that nothing is happening and then bang, it's in your face."

"Do you want to talk about it, Ginny?" Harry asked.

"Would it help at all?"

Harry leaned back in his chair, his expression pensive. "I think it might. You all know I'm not really good when it comes to talking about my feelings. But I can tell you, things would have been much different if I hadn't had Hermione, her parents, Remus and Tonks with me last summer." He shuddered and his gaze became unfocused. "Sometimes... sometimes I have nightmares about what could have happened. Talking helped me."

Emma reached across the table and patted Harry's hand. "I'm just glad we were able to help. In a way, that summer saved all of us."

He smiled at Emma. "It did indeed," he replied, before he turned back to Ginny. "I'm not looking forward to this fight. I'm looking forward to what comes after it."

"What comes after it? All I can see is this huge fight," she said.

"You can't think that way," Harry told her seriously. "If you do, you'll do something stupid and it could end up being your last fight. Think about what you'll have when this is over. Consider it a test, of sorts. Pass the test and you win, failure is not acceptable."

"What do you see, Harry?" she asked intently.

"I see a lot of hard work, but I also see life with my family. No Voldemort or Death Eaters. I see Susan having her baby and, one by one, each of us starting a family. I see taking time off and just living life. I want to see the world."

As he spoke, Hermione's eyes glistened with unshed tears and she leaned against him.

"Voldemort has always been an obstacle in my life," Harry said, continuing. "It wasn't until the summer before last that I even started to think of the possibility of surviving him. I wasn't sure I even wanted to survive him."

Ginny looked around. "I don't know," she said doubtfully. "This frightens me. Sometimes I don't think I was meant to be a Gryffindor."

"We're all frightened, Ginny, even Harry," Remus said.

Harry nodded in agreement.

"The key is stepping up and doing what we must, despite our fear. You've trained long and hard to become a field medic. I can't see you letting that

go to waste. I think, when all is said and done, you'll look back on this time and be proud of yourself," Remus finished.

"I know I'm scared senseless," Neville said.

Ginny looked at him in astonishment. "But, I thought..."

"Just because I don't say it, doesn't mean I'm not scared, Ginny," Neville said quietly. "Having you in my life helps me focus and face the fear."

She looked around, noting how everyone was agreeing with Neville.

"Mastering one's fear is the greatest battle," Eocho said proudly. "You have seen battle before and have come through. This time is no different. Remember your training and rely on one another." He smiled down at Ginny. "There is no shame in admitting your fear, and no shame in seeking comfort in the arms of your husband, my daughter."

There was a moment of uncomfortable silence around the table.

Luna suddenly smiled. "When this is over, Fuzz is going to show me where we can find a colony of ancient Snorkacks. She says we'll be able to talk to the Grand Dame of the clan," she told them all brightly.

Hermione sagged in her chair and eyed the Snorkack on her shoulder. "That sounds like fun, Luna."

Harry turned to stare at Hermione.

*"What? It's not like I can deny it! She has one of the beasts on her shoulder, for Merlin's sake!"* she sent him.

Her eyes narrowed when she felt his amusement bubbling across the bond.

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## Hogwarts Castle...

"My lord, Lucius Malfoy has just arrived with a large force of Wizards and muggles." Mulciber said softly. Voldemort was naturally paranoid. It wouldn't take much to make him think that Malfoy was out to take his spot. It was something he'd need to consider for the future, he mused to himself.

"Muggles?" Voldemort said, narrowing his eyes. "Send him in."

Lucius walked into the room proudly and Mulciber smirked. There was a great deal about Lucius that irritated people, and his haughty attitude was one of them. The funniest thing was, he didn't even know he was doing it! Mulciber was certain that the day would come when Malfoy's attitude caused their master to kill him.

"Lucius! What is this about you bringing Muggles into my domain?" Voldemort asked. The one of his voice informed Malfoy of the peril he was in.

Lucius paused and glanced at Mulciber, who smirked at him. Focusing on Voldemort, he bowed low. "My lord, I brought a small force of controlled muggles and their weapons. It was my thought that they may be able to distract Potter and his rabble. Potter goes out of his way to protect muggles. Imagine his surprise when he is attacked by them."

Voldemort leaned back on his chair and stroked Nagini for a moment, his eyes distant. "Yes, it would be a shock to Potter. And with his attitude, he wouldn't want to fight them."

Lucius bowed. "I am pleased you approve, my lord."

Voldemort nodded for a moment. "Yes. However, Mulciber is in charge of the defense of my domain. How is it that you failed to notify him of your movements?"

"My lord, Mulciber is a fine wizard, but he has little experience with muggles, or the effects their weapons have on other wizards. Besides, he needed me to bring in the wizards under my command to bolster his defenses. I merely brought some additional help," he replied with a quick smirk at Mulciber.

Mulciber was steaming and trying not to grind his teeth.

Voldemort waved his hand, dismissing the topic as unimportant. "What have you done about London, Lucius? Is my city protected?"

"Your city is well protected. I left a small group of one hundred wizards protecting our interests around Diagon Alley, and a larger muggle force protecting the rest of the city. I'm also pleased to report that the expansions to the Alley have been started. It's so much easier to build when you have a large workforce like we do. The fact that we don't have to hide from the muggles any longer certainly helps."

Voldemort cackled with laughter. "Especially when we don't bother feeding them!"

Lucius smiled grimly and moved closer when Voldemort waved him to approach. "Come, Lucius, come and see the plans we have in place for Potter. He will scream for days before we finally snuff the life from his pathetic body."

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## Office of the British Minister for Magic (1500 hours, April 9th)...

"I just wanted to wish you and your people the best, Amelia," Brogan Mallory said, his head floating in her fireplace.

"Thank you, Minister. We never could have come this far without your help and the help of your great nation. Merlin willing, we'll be able to look back on this and consider it one of the finest moments in our history," Amelia replied from her desk.

"I hope so too, Amelia, Merlin's luck to you and our brave soldiers. I'll see you tomorrow," Mallory said, then he vanished from the fireplace.

Amelia nodded mostly to herself, then she looked up when the door to her office opened and Arthur stuck his head in.

"Amelia, do you need me anymore for the next few hours?" he asked.

"No, I don't think so. Will you be with Melinda?"

"Probably. For now, though I'm heading over to Harry's place. They'll be leaving soon and I want to be there for that."

Amelia nodded. "I'll be heading over there myself, later. Tell Susan I'll join them for dinner."

Arthur nodded and waved, then closed the door behind him.

Amelia sighed and looked down at her desk. She had two parchments in front of her, each a press release. The first one announced the invasion of Britain by allied wizarding forces. The second one, the one she prayed she'd never see used, announced an unsuccessful attack.

She scratched a word out on one of the announcements and wrote something new. Tossing down her quill, she tossed both pieces of parchment into her briefcase and closed it. The briefcase had been a Christmas gift from Susan, who had gotten it for her in New York.

The door to her office opened again and one of her aides bustled in, carrying a stack of papers. "Messages wishing us luck for tomorrow, ma'am" said the young man.

"Put them on the coffee table, David. I'll look them over tomorrow. Has there been any word from Department M Dublin?"

"Yes, ma'am. It's on top of the stack."

She held out a hand. "I'll see that one now."

David pulled the sheet off the top and handed it to her. Amelia quickly read the note and blinked back tears. She handed the note back to her aide.

"See that a copy of that is sent to the camp right away. Lord Potter will want to see that."

"I'll take care of it," David replied softly.

When he left the office, Amelia stood and walked to the window. The waiting was gnawing at her belly like a monster.

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### **Haven Operations Center, Office of the Deputy Minister of Defense (1500 hours, April 9th)...**

"Terry, go home. We'll be back at this sooner than we want to be," Caleb said tiredly.

Terry frowned and stared at the exhausted man. "I'll go home after you do... Sir."

Caleb sighed and nodded slowly. "Maybe I should. I'm beat."

"I'm sure your wife will be happy to see you, even if you're just sleeping," Terry offered.

Caleb peered up at him from his desk. "Are you going to go home also?"

Terry nodded. "I will, I just need to finish cutting these orders and I'll be out of here. I'm expected back at the manor in a little bit. Besides, I don't like leaving Susan alone too much. You know she's due any day now."

"Better you than me," Caleb muttered, remembering when his two girls were born. Neither of them had been easy births and his wife had been rather upset with him at the time.

"What time will you be back here?" asked Caleb.

"I'll probably be manning the war room starting around oh two hundred. There are a lot of details to cover. I don't expect you'll show up until at least oh three hundred," Terry replied, then he made some notations on a clipboard.

Caleb smiled. When Harry offered him the services of Terry, he had reluctantly accepted. Terry had slowly become very competent in the minutia that fueled a war. If he needed to know how many tons of beans they had on hand, Terry knew, and most times didn't even need to look it up. He had relieved Caleb of many of the nitty gritty details that made Miles Pickerton ill.

"Very well, Terry. I'll see you in the war room after I meet with the field commanders," Caleb said. Standing, he stretched tiredly, then trudged out of the office.

Terry shook his head. "Finally!" he muttered to himself. "I thought I'd have to stun him and float him home. Now I can get out of here, too."

He killed the lights and left the room.

### **Padfoot Manor (1600 hours, April 9th)...**

Harry checked his watch and waited anxiously for everyone to appear. He wore his Brotherhood cloak with the hood down. Under it, he wore the regular battledress uniform, modified to Brigade specifications.

On the right arm, under the Union Flag patch, was the newly designed Brotherhood Brigade patch. The design, crossed wands and a Celtic cross over the Royal coat of arms, was a gift from the King. It was also an indication that the 24th Regiment of the SAS was a royally sanctioned unit.

Another new addition to the uniform, and one which he felt would give everyone an added edge, was a sidearm. After much debate, Harry had talked Caleb into allowing them to equip the Brotherhood Brigade and the Raiders with Sig-Sauer P228s. Harry pointed out that the Americans and Canadians all carried muggle sidearms as an added back up, and that the Death Eaters would be greatly surprised to discover wizards armed with guns. When he added that the number of shields able to stop a bullet were few and not generally well known, Caleb had relented.

Harry, Hermione and Tonks had little trouble adapting to the new weapon during the few days of training they had received. Tonks already had some training with them, and both Harry and Hermione knew generally what to expect with the guns. The others, however, were a different story. It took quite a bit of work for them to grow accustomed to the noise and recoil from the weapon. Some, like Luna, showed an active distaste for them. It was one of the few times Harry had become angry enough to exercise his rights as Maglios and order her to carry the weapon. He couldn't force her to use it, but she would carry it.

Shaking off the memories, he watched as Hermione walked toward him. She carried an extra sack containing maps, portable floo devices and a backup command post building. One of her staff had the actual CP they would use, but she carried a spare in case it was needed.

"All set?" she asked.

"Just waiting on everyone else," he replied quietly.

Dan and Emma stepped out of the sitting room, looking worried. One by one, members of the Brotherhood and their families arrived in the main foyer of the manor. Narcissa and Arthur moved to stand with Dan and Emma. Bertrand was trying to hand Luna a miniature camera so she could take photos for him. Andromeda stood, holding Narcissa's hand, while Ted Tonks stood behind them.

Hermione walked over to her mother and hugged her. The three huddled together for a few moments, while Harry silently watched the others arrive. He happily noted everyone had brought their full gear, including the hated sidearm.

Eocho drifted through a wall, coming to rest not far from Harry.

"When we arrive at camp, you will find a small potion vial next to your bed. Use it. Everyone is taking one to give them at least eight hours of good sleep before we leave. I've taken the liberty of putting us all in one of the unused barrack buildings, so if you want to push your beds together, or expand one to fit two, I'm not going to complain about it. Just remember, I want everyone to get at least eight hours sleep," Harry said, staring at Luna. Of those in the Brotherhood, she was the one most likely to something she shouldn't, like stay awake.

"*Luna isn't the one you should be worrying about, my heart,*" Hermione sent him with a smile on her face.

Harry halted for a moment and Ginny laughed. "Anyone want to bet that Hermione just sent him a dirty thought?"

"No bet," Draco said dryly. "She likes teasing him."

Neville snickered at the two of them and Harry blushed, revealing the truth of Ginny's comment.

"Can we get back to business here?" Harry asked plaintively.

"I suppose, but I'd really like to hear what Hermione has in mind," Luna told him as she stroked Fuzz. "It could be something new, knowing Hermione."

Harry sighed, shook his head for a moment, then looked up towards the ceiling. "Give me strength. I'm surrounded by perverts," he mumbled.

When the laughter quieted, he looked at them. "I just wanted to say that I'm proud to have you all with me. The past two years have been difficult and we've all had to grow in ways we didn't expect. I'm glad we did it together," Harry said somberly.

The mood among them became grave and Eocho drifted forward. "Each of you has trained hard and well. Each of you is a warrior, a true member of the Brotherhood. I have been honored to be your guide and mentor. Now comes your moment to shine. It is time to proclaim your affiliation. Display your medallions with pride and let all people know who you are: Celtic Knights, upholders of justice!"

Harry looked at Eocho for a moment, then he removed his medallion from under his clothes, pulling it out so it hung visible to all.

Eocho moved until he floated a few steps up the stairs and he turned to face them. He made a gesture with both hands.

"Math Mathonwy, Teutates, Cailleach Beara and Danu! I call on thee, Gods of old! Bless our Brotherhood on this eve of war," he cried, lifting his arms.

Eocho's hands began to glow and an intense field of golden light bathed the Brotherhood.

Harry sucked in a breath. He felt energized and more powerful. It was almost as if some greater presence had looked at him and was pleased with what it found.

Profoundly moved, Harry bowed to Eocho. "You honor us, Múinteoir. May we be worthy of your blessing."

Behind him, Harry's friends also bowed, following his example.

"It is I who has been blessed, Maglios. For I believe I have been witness to the greatest incarnation of the Brotherhood the world has ever seen. Now go. Your army awaits. Those of us who cannot join you will wait for news," he replied, moving to stand near Susan and Terry.

Harry nodded, then he pulled out of his pocket a golden cord he was going to use as a portkey. Before he could enchant it, however, he was enveloped in a hug. "Be safe, my son," Emma whispered through her tears. "Come home safe and bring my daughter back to me."

Harry wrapped his arms around her and nodded against her shoulder. "I will, Mum."

Dan stepped up to the pair and Harry released Emma, stepping away. Dan stuck out his hand. "Come back to us, Harry. Godspeed."

Numb, Harry could only nod. Hermione looped an arm through his, squeezing him gently. He looked around and decided to hold off on the portkey for a few more minutes. Arthur was speaking with Ginny. Draco and Luna were hugging a tearful Narcissa and Tonks embraced her mother.

Harry waited a few minutes, then he held up the cord. "Portus," he murmured. The cord glowed blue for a moment.

"Ready?" he asked loud enough to be heard by everyone. Hermione took his hand before grasping onto the cord. Each couple followed her example. A moment later, they were gone.

There was a moment of silence in the foyer, then Dan let out a heavy sigh. "Nothing left to do but wait now."

"If anyone wants, I can offer a light sleeping potion. It will make it easier to sleep tonight," Narcissa offered.

Emma looked at Dan, who stared back at her for a moment before shrugging. "I think we'll take you up on that offer, Cissy. I don't know if we'll actually use it, but it would be nice to have it available if we need it."

Narcissa nodded. "I'll get doses for everyone and meet you all in the dining room."

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### **Haven Hospital, Office of the Director (1600 hours, April 9th)...**

"Healer O'Donnell is here to speak with you, Sylvia," said Maggie, her secretary.

"Good, send her in, Maggie. Oh, and bring us some tea, would you?"

The door to the office opened and Catherine O'Donnell stepped in. "Sylvia, you're looking well," said the middle aged woman.

Sylvia stood and motioned for the other healer to take a seat. "I'm glad to see you, Catherine. How are things at St. Luke's?"

Catherine waved a hand airily. "You know what teaching hospitals are like; too many eager students, not enough trained healers and too many patients. When Margot called from St. Patrick's, I couldn't turn down the opportunity."

Sylvia nodded, then waited as Maggie brought them both a cup of tea. "You know what your people will be doing, don't you?"

"Yes. My first through third year students will be working under your medi-witches. My fourth years will be under your healers as assistants, as well as working in your triage center. Do you have any idea how many patients we'll be seeing?"

Sylvia frowned. "No, and that's what worries me. We have room here for thirty critical cases, and we'll have three operating theaters running. All of the Irish hospitals have been warned that we may be sending people their way. We can also portkey any critical patients to a facility in the United States, but that means we'll have to stabilize them here before sending them on.

"We have a total of nearly six hundred beds, thanks to our industrious elves. Add to that forty fully qualified healers, and twenty five nearly qualified trainees, plus your people," Sylvia said, then she paused and raised an eyebrow at Catherine.

"We are bringing fifteen fully qualified healers, including six professors. Twenty nine fourth years and fifty seven from the other years."

Sylvia nodded. Those were the numbers she had been expecting. The Irish were still scrambling to find healers, but many of the hospitals were withholding their own personnel in anticipation of Haven sending them critical cases.

Catherine checked her watch. "In fact, my people should be arriving right about now."

"Eager to jump in, are they?" Sylvia asked, grinning.

Catherine laughed. "Come on, Sylvia. Don't you remember when we were students and meeting our first patients?"



Yes, I do," replied Sylvia. "And I remember when you were training under me and you accidentally switched that man's feet with his hands when trying to fix a simple splinching."

Catherine winced at her. "I'm never going to live that down, am I?"

Sylvia laughed and stood. "Come on, let me show you around. It's no St. Mungo's, but we're pretty proud of Haven Hospital."

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### **Haven (2000 hours, April 9th)...**

An uneasy silence settled over the small community. Few believed the story issued by the town government concerning the Dragon Lung outbreak. It was hard to miss the large number of people arriving and immediately being whisked away to an unknown location.

The Operations Center was under a *Fidelius* charm and few knew of its existence. Camp Outhouse was also under a *Fidelius* charm, but it didn't take a genius to realize that a large number of people were arriving, only to vanish just as quickly.

The fact that the impending military action was supposed to be a secret resulted in everyone in the town knowing about it. The spouses of the soldiers were the first to suspect as both of the principle British units increased their training. That meant something was coming. Then the merchants in town started getting orders for large quantities of supplies, more than was usually used by either of the units. Finally, there was the story about an outbreak of Dragon Lung, but no one knew of anyone being sick.

There were other signs, as well. An increased nervousness among the healers and trainees, the hospital only admitting cases requiring full time health care and the maternity ward being converted in to a regular ward had the people in town buzzing. After all, had it truly been a case of Dragon Lung, the school would have been closed for the duration of the outbreak. It was a simple oversight made by the town government, but the people weren't stupid.

In the end, very few were fooled by the ruse. As a result, the mood in town could best be called nervously optimistic.

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### **Haven Operations Center, (0230 hours, April 10th)...**

Draco looked over at Caleb and nodded. "That's the last of them."

Caleb ran a hand through his thinning hair and smiled grimly. "Time for you to get to the camp, Draco. See if you can get another hour of sleep."

"Yes, sir, I know. What about you?"

Caleb checked his watch. "I would go to the camp myself, but things are going to get hectic real quick around here. I suppose I'll wander down to the war room and make sure there's plenty of coffee ready."

Draco smiled and started to turn, but Caleb stopped him. "Tell Harry I said good luck and good hunting. Merlin protect you all,"

The blond shook Caleb's hand. "We'll see you later," he said with a grin.

As Draco walked out of the Operations Center, the Haven elf saboteurs were out in force.

In London, the docks exploded violently, waking the city.

The Hertfordshire Oil Storage Terminal, less than twenty five miles from the city, went up in a fountain of flames, breaking windows for miles in every direction.

Nervous Londoners peered from their windows and prayed that whatever was happening wouldn't reach them.

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### **Castle Hogwarts, (0215 hours, April 10th)...**

The monitoring system was fairly simple - a large map with a pendulum suspended over it. When a witch or wizard used magic, the pendulum stopped, pointing to the location the spell or spells were being cast, and an alarm would sound.

It wasn't as sophisticated as some of the tools developed by the twins of Q Branch, but it was surprisingly sophisticated for something originally developed by the Ministry to monitor underage magic.

Unfortunately, the detector was doing something all too familiar to those who now used it. The pendulum swung wildly, barely pausing as it detected magic being used all over Britain. The system was being overloaded, and they had no way of refining the data they were receiving.

Several men stood nearby, clustered around another who had his head stuck in a fireplace. After a moment, he pulled his head out and was looking decidedly unhappy.

"Well? What did he say?" demanded one man.

"I told him about the detector going crazy and he's ordered all Death Eaters to be put on alert." He then sighed and slumped his shoulders. "He also said he doesn't care that we're researchers. We're to find our robes and masks and join the other Death Eaters."

“B-b-but my research is critical! Lord Voldemort is going to be angry if it's delayed!” protested another man.

The first man straightened up and looked at the group angrily. “I don't care!” he snarled. “My research is just as important, but Lord Mulciber doesn't care. We all knew this moment would come when we joined Lord Voldemort and his holy crusade. Now find your cloaks and masks.”

Grumbling, the men left the room, the last one out slamming the door in a fit of anger. They weren't common Death Eaters! They were valuable!

Behind them, a series of local detectors began to ping, demanding attention in the now empty room.

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### **Camp Outhouse, Able Company, Brotherhood Brigade, (0230 hours, April 10th)...**

Harry lifted his head and looked towards the door. “Yes?” he called.

“It's Oh two thirty, sir. This is your requested wake up call.” called a voice.

“Thank you.”

“Very good, sir.”

He carefully rolled away from Hermione, slipping out from under the covers.

“*What time is it?*” came a sleepy thought.

“*It's still early. You can get another thirty minutes of sleep if you want,*” he replied.

“*No, I'll get up with you.*”

“Alright,” he told her quietly. Standing, he stretched, then walked over to the chair he'd placed his uniform on the night before.

Hermione propped her head up on her elbow, watching him as he wrapped a heat pack tightly around his leg. He dressed in silence for the most part, but she could tell from their bond that his mind was running over the plan again and again. He was looking for flaws and running 'what if' scenarios, trying to find ways of giving them all an extra edge.

He stopped suddenly and looked at her. He was nearly dressed and she still hadn't moved. “Are you planning on sleeping in?” he asked with a bit of grin.

“You know I'm not. I'm just watching you.”

“Oh?”

She nodded and gave him a look that sent shivers down his spine. “You turned out to be a very handsome man, Harry Potter. Considering the shy, lost, little boy I met on the train, you turned out really well. It makes me glad I caught you before someone else did.”

He arched an eyebrow. “You didn't turn out too bad yourself, Mrs. Potter. Quite different from that girl looking for a toad on that same train,” he said with a grin.

She felt his mood shift and darken over the bond. “Hermione, if anything should happen to me...”

“No!” she snapped as she angrily wiped away the tears that threatened to run down her cheeks. “We're not going to do this, Harry. You and I are coming home when this is over. Remember what you told Ginny? The same goes doubly for you. I want to be able to crawl into bed and hold my husband tonight.”

He sighed and shook his head. There was so much he wanted to say.

“*I know, my heart. But we'll either come out of this together, or not at all. I cannot and refuse to consider a life without you.*” she sent him.

He nodded. “Then let's go to work, love,” he murmured, fastening his belt.

He checked the equipment on the belt - potion box, sidearm, four sun bangers and two muggle made anti-personnel grenades – and then glanced over at Hermione, who was finally up and dressing.

“I'll wait for you outside,” he said.

She nodded and he slipped from the room, into a much larger barrack area. Around him were the men and women who worked Hermione's command post. They were a special unit, officially attached to Able company, and nearly as big as Able itself.

Spotting Twister, Harry walked over to him. “Fine morning, isn't it?” he asked.

Twister grinned fiercely.

“Report. What's the situation?”

The Brigade hasn't turned out yet, sir. I figured I'd let them have another hour before waking them. According to Ops Center, the weather in our zone is only fair, with light rain and overcast, but they expect it to clear late today."

Harry nodded and thought for a moment. "Wake the company commanders at oh three fifteen if they aren't already awake and have them meet me in the Brigade Headquarters building for a final meeting at oh three thirty."

Twister nodded. "Yes, sir," he said, saluting before he turned away.

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### **Haven Operations Center, War Room (0300 hours, April 10th)...**

Caleb walked into the war room and was surprised by the level of activity he saw around him. The room had been expanded and there were multiple large tables, each one containing a map of where they expected a fight to take place. Against one wall were stacks of other enlarged maps in case they needed to switch off.

A white board hung from another wall, listing each unit, it's known status, number of wounded and killed. Another board, clearly marked 'Haven Hospital', listed the number of wounded and dead, this time broken down by species; human, goblin and elf.

In a corner a bank of muggle radios occasionally broke through the quiet murmur of voices. Group Captain Anderson stood nearby, monitoring the Navy frequencies. The muggle air forces would be available to support the troops, but the troops in the field couldn't directly call for air support. That was Anderson's job.

Terry walked over and handed Caleb a steaming mug of coffee.

"It looks like you got some sleep," Terry said.

"Yeah. Carlyne slipped me a light sleeping potion," he admitted with a sheepish look on his face. He glanced over at the woman who was still setting up the flags on the table. "So, what's the situation?" he asked, not knowing he was echoing Harry's question.

"The elves are busy wreaking havoc and they seem to be enjoying themselves. However, it seems like there's no response to their magic. No capture teams have been sent out at all that we can tell. Our pathfinders were delayed in getting to the insertion point, but we've heard from them and they're setting up the portals as we speak.

"Haven Hospital reports being fully staffed and ready to receive wounded. Fort Ord in the States also reports being ready. Group Captain Anderson informs me that we have twenty four attack squadrons of muggle aircraft ready to assist where needed.

"All units are currently inactive, although I expect that to change within the next thirty minutes," Terry concluded.

Caleb nodded and looked around again. The upper observation deck was still empty. He cleared his throat. "Can I have everyone's attention please?" he called in a loud voice.

The room fell silent and everyone turned to look at him. "Today may be the most important day of our lives. We all know people who will be fighting, people we love and care for. I know each and every one of you are worried about them. But the best thing you can do for them now is to concentrate on doing your job to the best of your ability. If they were here now they would thank you, but since they can't, I will. For myself and for our people, know that your hard work and dedication is appreciated and that you have our thanks. Now, let's focus on our work. It's almost show time."

Several of the women manning the map smiled at him before returning to their duties.

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### **Camp Outhouse, Able Company, 2nd Battalion, 806th Animagi Division, (0330 hours, April 10th)...**

Amos Madison was just a private, a newbie who had only recently graduated from the West Coast Academy of Magics and enlisted in the army. He never thought that he'd be going into combat so soon after basic training, but here he was, along with the rest of the division, and he was scared shitless.

Sergeant James walked the barracks, watching the company check their gear and do a little last minute packing. Off to one corner of the barracks, Corporal Walters was leading some of the men in prayer. In another corner, Jacobs was leading another prayer group, only this time in Hebrew. James didn't say anything. Everyone had their own beliefs and if they found comfort in them he wasn't going to complain. As long as they did their job, that is all he cared about.

The 806th had gone to war before, many times. They were officially listed as part of the Pentagon's black ops group, unless called upon by the Department of Magic. Under Pentagon command, they were used for illegal and covert operations. They had seen combat in places like El Salvador, Kuwait, Cuba, Canada and South Central Los Angeles.

This operation was different. This time they were under control of their Department of Magic and they were going in publicly. It was almost enough to make James smile with pride. If you listened to his men, he never smiled. There was a standing bet of one thousand galleons to the first man to get him to do so. It was rumored that he'd rather die first.

James paused by Madison's bunk. "Alright there, Madison?"

Amos nearly jumped out of his skin and whirled around. "Y-y-yes, sergeant," he stammered.

James moved a little closer. Madison had the makings of a decent soldier, once he learned what he was all about, that was. "Look around you, Madison. Everyone is nervous and a little scared. What you feel isn't unnatural or anything to be ashamed of. Just remember your training and you should do fine."

Madison swallowed nervously, his Adams apple bobbing up and down, and he nodded.

James clapped him on the shoulder. "Good. Now button up your pack. We're moving out."

He turned to the rest of them. "Able company! Listen up kiddies. We're moving out. You have three minutes," he shouted, while swinging his own pack onto his shoulder.

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### **British Forces Headquarters Building, Camp Outhouse (0300 hours, April 10th)...**

The door opened and people piled in. Most immediately walked over to the table with a large pot of coffee and helped themselves. Harry entered from another door and looked around with satisfaction. These were the commanders of the British Forces.

Felicia Walsh had taken over from Chuck Stanton when he was rotated back to the States and put in charge of the American forces. She was in charge of the Raiders, but technically under Harry in terms of command. She was only slightly younger than Twister, and only marginally nicer. Behind her back they called her Colonel Grandma because of her soft spoken manner, but she was a tough fighter with many years of Auror experience under her belt.

Harry stepped to the front of the room and waited a moment for it quiet down.

"I'm going to be very brief here. We all have duties we need to be taking care of, but Minister Bones has sent a letter over that I feel I should read to everyone. A copy of this letter will be made available to each of you, in case you want to read it to your people."

Harry lifted the letter while Hermione handed out copies to everyone.

*"To the Allied Forces,*

*"On this, the eve of battle, our thoughts and prayers go with you, one and all. Our people have suffered terribly and we know that your skill and bravery will free our nation. We are proud of each and every one of you.*

*"We know that by God's grace, we shall prevail and our people will be freed. Our hopes and prayers go with you all.*

*"Godspeed, good luck and God bless you all."*

"It's signed by King Charles III," Harry finished softly.

Hermione stood in the back of the room and shook her head. She had thought that passing the note along was a waste of time, but the effect on everyone was obvious. She admitted to herself, rather ruefully, that in this area, Harry was a master and she'd never come close to his abilities. He seemed to know instinctively what people needed in order for him to lead them. Each of the commanders sat a little taller and looked a little more determined after hearing the contents of the letter.

*Harry, she thought. He's a real leader, whether he sees it in himself or not.*

Harry dismissed the company commanders and looked over at Hermione curiously. He had felt her introspective thoughts via their bond.

"Are you alright?" he asked.

*"Yes, I'm fine. You handled them very well."*

He shrugged. *"I'm just making this up as I go along, love. No one handed me a book on how to lead people into battle."*

*"I know, but you're doing a good job of it. I'm amazed,"* she sent back playfully.

"Hey!" he said, sounding offended. With a shake of his head, he smiled at her. "Come on. The company will be assembling soon."

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### **Haven Operations Center, Assembly area (0350 hours, April 10th)...**

Major Howard waited along with the rest of his regiment. The 2nd Northwest Shamans weren't the only Canadian unit, but they were the only full unit deployed. Under his command were three hundred Canadians and another two hundred of mixed nationality. The remaining three hundred members of his unit would be using the portals to go to Gringotts in support of the Goblin assault on Diagon Alley.

Amelia and Ragnok had met and managed to hammer out an agreement between the British Ministry and the Goblin Nation. In return for the normalization of relations and the British Ministry recognizing the goblins as a sovereign nation, they would use their forces to assault the wizards remaining in Diagon Alley. Once that assault was complete, the goblins would interdict the Alley.

Interdiction was basically a set of lethal goblin wards that were nearly impossible to break. Interdicting the Alley would have the added advantage of protecting the main office of Gringotts.

The British didn't walk away from those negotiations empty handed, though. Amelia received a promise that the goblins would accept an ambassador and Gringotts would accept joint responsibility for security in and around Diagon Alley. The Alley, in effect, was to become a border crossing point between the British and Goblin nations.

All this high level diplomacy made no difference to Major Howard. He was told by his government to come here and fight, and that was exactly what he intended to do. He wasn't happy with the fact that his unit had been broken in half, but he had faith in his executive officer, Captain Wilmer, to see that they supported the goblins to the best of their abilities.

Unlike the other units, his group were assembling at the Haven Operations Center.

The Northwest Shamans were the only unit that would be using portkeys to go to their destination today.

“Sergeant Major!”

“Sir!”

“Get the lads assembled. Five minutes to jump,” Howard said tensely.

Sergeant Major Nichols turned and started shouting at the assembled unit. “At right lads, last equipment check. We jump in five!” he yelled.

Around Howard, dozens of men and women double checked their gear, then knelt down to pick up a long silver cord that had been enchanted as a portkey.

Up on one wall, a large clock flashed and a bell rang. The clock face turned red as it went into it's last three minutes.

“SHAMANS! LIFT!” shouted Sergeant Major Nichols.

Howard gripped his section of the cord tightly and glanced over at the group of strangely clad elves. They would follow Howard's Shamans, jumping to their location two minutes after the Shamans arrived.

Another bell rang and Howard looked up at the clock. Ten seconds.

Five seconds.

Three seconds.

The room shook with a loud whooshing sound. A second later, the room was empty except for the waiting elves. The clock reset and all the elves watched anxiously and a bit nervously. Their turn was coming.

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### **Haven Operations Center, War Room (0355 hours, April 10th)...**

Caleb sat down and waited. Above, the lights came on and the observation deck lit up. He watched Amelia and Arthur file in, along with representatives of the other allied nations. He wasn't surprised to see Miles Pickerton sitting behind Amelia. Miles waved and shot Caleb a thumbs up.

Caleb nodded and offered a smile to his former mentor and friend. Then he turned his attention back to what was happening in the room.

The face of a clock on the wall changed colors from white to red and a bell rang through the room.

“The 2nd Shamans are successfully away,” announced one of the women manning a floo.

Another woman placed a marker on the white board next to the unit, indicating that they had portkeyed to their destination.

A radio barked something in the corner of the room and Anderson spoke into a microphone for a moment before turning to speak to one of the women. She placed several markers onto the large map representing groups of aircraft.

“Nimitz and Kitty Hawk are launching ground support flights,” Anderson reported.

Terry walked over to Caleb. “Camp Outhouse reports all units standing by portals waiting for permission to proceed.”

Caleb nodded, then glanced up at the board showing unit locations and conditions. “Have we heard anything from the elf scouts concerning movement away from the castle?”

“No, sir,” replied Terry.

Caleb frowned. He had hoped they would be able to draw out the Death Eaters first. “Very well. Send to all commands. Hold position until the Shamans have engaged,” he said.

Terry nodded and turned to speak to one of the women manning a floo. The mood in the room was tense and people tended to speak softly or in whispers.

Caleb gnawed nervously on one finger. He had made a minor change to the plans, delaying the send off of the other troops until the Shamans were

engaged. Everyone knew this was a possibility. In fact, they had trained for this scenario many times.

"We have contact with Major Howard. The Shamans are on the ground. No contact with the enemy as yet." said one woman.

Another woman placed marker on the map, this time near the old Hogwarts Express rail station in Hogsmeade.

*Pins on a map, Caleb thought sourly. Five hundred souls reduced down to a fancy tack with a little colored paper flag. I need to find a newline of work.*

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### **Hogsmeade Rail Station (0420 hours, April 10th)...**

"We're almost ready, sir," reported Sergeant Major Nichols.

"All of the illusion generators?"

Nichols frowned. "Nearly, sir. We're having a slight problem on unit two, but Captain Bledsoe says he'll have it available in five minutes. And we've made contact with the elves."

Howard scowled. Each of the five illusion generators had a limited range. They would locate and make five copies of every person within their field of reach. They weren't perfect, but they didn't need to be. They only needed to confuse the enemy into thinking there were more wizards attacking than Howard actually had.

The elves would be popping all over the place. They had learned an interesting fact about elf psychology. An elf would kill to protect someone and that was it. They wouldn't kill another person or elf. While that fact sounded limiting, there was a strange kink in their reasoning. They saw nothing wrong with using delayed action explosives. As far as an elf was concerned, the *explosion* might kill someone, but that wasn't the elf's fault. After all, they just placed the explosive charges. They did nothing to make sure there were humans around to be killed by them.

Howard pulled a pair of binoculars from his kit and surveyed the town before him. Many of the buildings had been destroyed when Voldemort took over. New buildings took their place and they were downright ugly in his opinion. They were all alike with no sense of character. The only thing they said about the people living in them was that they were a dull, unimaginative lot.

The town seemed asleep. There were few lights on and no one on the streets that he could see.

Howard put down the binoculars and turned to Nichols. "Very well. Tell Bledsoe he has his five minutes. Alert command about the delay. In the meantime, tell the elves to start laying their charges."

Nichols nodded and moved away at a crouch. Hogsmeade was just over the rise, and it was full of Death Eaters.

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### **Gringotts, Diagon Alley (0430, April 10th)...**

Tomgut ran a stone over his axe and waited, watching the Canadian in charge of the humans.

Captain Wilmer spoke softly over a special floo. When he was done, he closed it and handed it back to an aide. He turned and nodded to Tomgut.

Tomgut grinned and hefted his axe. "Karlök Gnish nag Luko" he shouted.

The head of his axe glowed briefly. The shimmering bubble encasing the building wavered and started to pulsate.

Wilmer looked at the goblins hefting their axes and clustering around the doors. "Make ready!" he shouted to his men.

The bubble exploded outwards violently, sending lethal crystalline fragments sheeting in every direction.

"Nag M'blow!" Tomgut yelled and the goblins surged forward, pushing through the doors and out into the alley.

A split second later, Wilmer and his people followed, yelling tribal battle calls, quotes from bad American movies, and just about anything they could think of that made them sound mean and nasty. Later, one female corporal would be teased greatly about her cry of not being bad, just being drawn that way.

Wilmer paused and turned to his top sergeant. "Inform command we've begun our attack!"

The man nodded and pulled a portable floo from his pocket, flicking it open.

Wilmer pulled his wand and his sidearm, crouching low he aimed at some Death Eaters up the alley way.

"Filiolus pango frendo!" he shouted.

The three Death Eaters flew backwards as the concussion from the blast at their feet slammed into them. They smashed through a window of a shop, the shards of glass adding to their injuries. Someone else hurled a small potion bottle through the broken window. The bottle crashed against a wall and the potion splattered everywhere.

Within seconds, Weasley Wizarding Wheezes had exploded in flame, catching the building adjoining it on fire.

The small number of Death Eaters were overwhelmed by the larger force, but they rallied well, proving their training had helped.

Caught off guard, the Death Eaters fell back to the Leaky Cauldron and holed up inside the building, using the windows to fire from. There was a stalemate for a short time, with the Death Eaters holding back the goblins and Canadians, but that didn't last long. One of the goblins broke ranks and ran towards the Leaky Cauldron, swinging a large jug attached to a rope over his head.

"Covering fire!" shouted Wilmer. He didn't know what the goblin was up to, but it was part of his job to support his allies.

The Shamans lit off, firing spell after spell into the open windows and doors, daring any Death Eater to show his head.

Twenty paces from the Leaky Cauldron, the goblin stopped, let go of his rope, and watched as the jug sailed into a third floor window. Once it disappeared, the goblin turned and ran as if the very hordes of hell were on his heels.

Wilmer took one look at the other goblins and he paled. "DOWN!" he shouted, diving for the ground himself. "Find cover!"

Every goblin was hiding, making themselves as small as they possibly could.

The Leaky Cauldron seemed to shrink in upon itself for a second, then the building literally flew apart.

There was a whumping sound that Wilmer felt more than heard and he bounced back a few feet. He shuddered, having never seen anything like it before. He had asked about the jugs when he met Torngut and all he had been told was they contained Greek Fire. From what he knew, Greek Fire was a weapon lost to antiquity. Apparently, the goblins had retained the secret well after the Greeks had lost it.

He peered over the pile of rubble he had been hiding behind. The Leaky Cauldron was gone. Completely and totally gone. There was nothing to indicate it ever existed, except a crater nearly two hundred feet wide and thirty deep.

The alley fell into silent shock. Those few Death Eaters who hadn't been able to make it to the Leaky Cauldron and were still alive wisely opted to escape while they could.

In one small part of England, the battle for the liberation of Britain had begun with a small, but very important victory.

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### **Haven Operations Center, War Room (0435 hours, April 10th)...**

The woman looked up from her floor and spoke softly to the woman manning the map, then she turned to Caleb. "Gringotts detachment of the Shamans reports engaging Death Eaters in Diagon Alley. They report no casualties and only moderate resistance."

"The Shamans advancing on Hogsmeade are under heavy fire," announced another woman.

"The US Navy is suppressing an armored column they've detected moving in London," called Group Captain Anderson.

"The Shamans in Hogsmeade requests air support. There's a large concentration of Death Eaters in a building, grid reference A6," called another woman.

Anderson turned and spoke tensely into his microphone for a moment.

"Contact Major Howard and ask if there's any sign of the castle force yet," Caleb told Terry.

Terry turned and picked up a portable floor.

Caleb sipped his coffee and tried to appear calm, but he could easily understand why Miles had developed an ulcer.

"Terry?"

Terry turned to look at Caleb. "Sir?"

"Send several scout elves to look at the approach road to Hogwarts. I want some warning, other than Major Howard, if possible."

Terry nodded. "I'll take care of it."

The door to the war room opened and Fred and George Weasley slipped in. Fred held the door open so that Inga and Helga could join them. They'd been in the room for the last major operation and had behaved themselves. Caleb nodded to the four, indicating they could stay, and pointed to some empty chairs.

Both sets of twins smiled gratefully at him and took seats.

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### **Hogwarts Castle (0445 hours, April 10th)...**

"Dammit! I'm coming!" Mulciber grumbled. The banging at the door continued, getting more frantic.

Mulciber had gone back to sleep after ordering the Death Eaters on alert. He didn't think anything would come from the warning they had received.

They had dozens of false alerts in the last week and he was exhausted.

Wand in hand, he threw open the door. "WHAT?" he bellowed at the Death Eater.

There was a distant rumble and the castle shook slightly. Mulciber blinked and stared at the floor. That had never happened before. He glanced up at the Death Eater. "Well?"

"My lord, Diagon Alley reported they were under attack by a force of wizards and goblins. We've lost contact with our people there and haven't been able to restore it. And Hogsmeade says they are under attack by thousands of wizards."

Mulciber stared at the man for a moment, his brows knitting in concentration. He lifted his wand and pointed it at the Death Eater. "*Imperio*," he said.

The Death Eater's expression went slack and his eyes glazed over. "You have done well, but you want to do better. You will take it upon yourself to awaken the Master and give him this news. If he asks, tell him I am awaiting his orders with his loyal servants."

The Death Eater nodded and turned away, while Mulciber hurriedly dressed and headed out of the castle.

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### **Hogsmeade Rail Station (0450 hours, April 10th)...**

Major Howard ducked and put both hands over his head. Above, two A10 Warthogs and several UK Tornados streaked over, dropping a load of cluster munitions on one heavily defended building.

Howard watched in awe as a bright blue bubble appeared around the building, shielding it from much of the damage.

When the smoke cleared, he peeked over the edge of the crater he was using. The building still stood! It was heavily damaged, but it was still standing. What was worse was the trail of the Stinger missile that arched up from the building to one of the overhead Tornados.

The Tornado banked heavily to the right, popping flares and chaff. The Stinger lost lock and plowed into the ground, killing several of his men and some elves.

"Nichols!" shouted Howard.

A few moments later, Sergeant Major Nichols landed in Major Howard's crater. "Sir?"

Howard nodded to the man, then pointed up the street. "Take two squads and flank that low red building. When we start hitting it with suppressing fire, I want your men to start unraveling the wards on it.

"Comm Comm!" he shouted after Nichols sprinted away. Someone passed him a portable Floo. He quickly dialed in the command circuit to Haven.

"Shaman Six Actual to Haven, we have muggle military in Hogsmeade. Repeat, muggle military in Hogsmeade. No estimate on force size, but they are armed with anti-air weapons," he said, bending over, trying to minimize the noise. Around him men were shouting curses, or calling for a medic.

Hearing an acknowledge, he snapped the floo closed and turned to face the red building again. "Suppressing fire!" he shouted.

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### **Haven Operations Center, War Room (0455 hours, April 10th)...**

"The Shamans report the presence of muggle military in Hogsmeade. Size unknown, but they are armed with anti-air weapons," said one of the women manning a floo.

"Haven Hospital reports incoming wounded and two fatalities," said another.

"I've passed the warning on to the naval air group. They're launching air defense suppression units now," added Group Captain Anderson.

"Is there any word from the elf scouts yet?" Caleb asked anxiously. If Voldemort didn't move out of the castle, the whole attack would fail!

"No word yet. The elves report the road is clear. We do have a report that the forces at the castle are mobilizing, but they haven't moved," Terry replied.

"I'm getting queries from the unit commanders asking what the hold up is, sir," said another woman.

"Send to all commanders who have not yet deployed. 'Enemy forces still occupying castle. We are holding until the bulk of the forces move'," replied Caleb. He glanced up to the observation deck. Amelia nodded in agreement. If they didn't move, they could recall the Shamans and abort the attack, conserving the bulk of their strength.

"Sir, the Diagon Alley forces says they have retaken the area. The goblins are implementing an interdict now. They have light casualties."

"Inform Captain Wilmer that he is to reform his unit and return to Haven as soon as the interdict is in place," Caleb replied.

*Damn you, Voldemort,* thought Caleb. *Move your scaly ass already.*

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## **Hogwarts Castle (0530 hours, April 10th)...**

Voldemort stepped over the still smoking corpse of the Death Eater who'd awoken him. He had put on his finest robes today, thinking it a day of celebration. He was dressed in fine, black silk robes that were adorned with protective runes drawn in a deep red, almost the color of blood. He cradled his scepter in his arms like a child.

He walked out of the castle, approaching the large group of Death Eaters who were clustered around Malfoy and Mulciber. Death Eaters, spotting Voldemort, sunk to one knee in homage.

Approaching Mulciber, he said a single word. "Report."

"L-Lord, Hogsmeade is under attack! So is Diagon Alley. London reported an attack of goblins and Wizards, then we lost contact with them," Mulciber stammered. "Your army is ready. Command us, lord!"

Voldemort shot Lucius an angry look. He was not pleased that London was no longer responding, but he would deal with that later.

Malfoy took a step back in fear, he knew the Master would blame him for London.

"Very well. Unleash my forces. Crush the invaders, but leave Potter to me! He is mine!" Voldemort said with a snarl. His anger finally getting the better of him, his aura became visible as his magic struck out. A dozen nearby Death Eaters screamed and crumpled to the ground as their flesh rotted from their bones.

Mulciber paled and nodded eagerly before he turned to the crowd. "To Hogsmeade and victory!" he shouted.

The crowd roared and surged toward the approach road. Voldemort walked behind as if he were on a Sunday stroll in the park.

Lucius shook his head and followed. Mulciber, in his eagerness to please, had reduced his carefully trained army into a mob.

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## **Padfoot Manor (0600 hours, April 10th)...**

It was early, very early, but sleep was impossible when so many loved ones were going into danger. By unspoken agreement, they met in the library. The manor house was quiet and felt empty. They sat at a large, mahogany table, their individual projects spread out before them, hoping to distract themselves with work. Their loved ones had left Haven to begin what everyone hoped would be the final battle against Voldemort and his forces.

Emma Granger was reading a textbook on transfiguration, while Dan studied the recent reports he'd received from their company, Granger Publications. The company was doing surprisingly well and the manager they'd hired to oversee the company was doing excellent work.

Susan Boot was going through her aunt's mail, separating the personal letters from those addressed to the Minister. It was something she did several times a week, and she figured it would take her mind off of the worry she felt for her friends. She felt restless and out of sorts, and was disappointed that she was unable to fight beside the other Brotherhood members. In her current condition, she felt bigger than the broad side of any barn, and knew a Death Eater would have to be blind to miss her, should he target her.

A small popping noise had all three raising their heads to look around. A house elf smiled at them and put a tray on the table near Dan. The tray held a pot of tea and a pitcher of juice, as well as cups and glasses and a small pile of biscuits.

"Thank you, Addy," Emma said, smiling at the creature. "It was kind of you to think of us."

"Yes, it was. I could do with a cup of tea," Dan added, reaching for the pot.

"Call if you need anything else," Addy told them before disappearing.

"Emma? Susan?" Dan asked, holding up the tea pot.

"I'll have a cup," Emma said, closing her book and stretching.

Susan shook her head. "None for me, thank you." The thought of tea made her stomach cramp rather alarmingly.

Dan stood and walked around the table. Placing the cup on the table in front of Emma, he leaned down and kissed the top of her head.

"Addy brought juice. Would you like glass? It's orange, I think," Emma asked the younger witch as she picked up her cup.

Susan grimaced and leaned forward slightly, shifting on her chair. "No, really. I'm fine."

Emma frowned as she watched the blond.

"Are you uncomfortable?" Dan asked sympathetically as he rubbed his wife's shoulders.

"All the time now," Susan replied, shifting once more and rubbing her stomach. "Even sleeping is becoming a problem. I can't get comfortable."

He nodded knowingly. "Emma had the same problem. And for some reason, her feet were always cold. I can't tell you how many times I woke up

with her cold feet plastered against me.” He grinned down at his wife, who ignored him.

“I’ve been keeping Terry awake, I think. He says it’s no bother, but I feel bad.”

“Don’t. We husbands feel rather helpless when our wives are pregnant. There’s not much we can do to help. A few sleepless nights give us the illusion of sharing the discomfort.”

Susan shifted again and pressed a hand to her stomach. “He said something like that, too.” She grimaced and leaned forward again. “And he takes naps when he can, but…”

“How long have you been having pains?” Emma suddenly asked.

Dan frowned down at his wife, but Susan’s eyes widened slightly.

“It’s not pain, really,” she protested.

“More like cramping? Moving from back to front?” Emma asked.

Susan nodded jerkily.

Dan looked between the two women, but remained silent.

“When did they first start?”

“Last night, after dinner. I had an upset stomach and didn’t eat very much.”

“How far apart are the cramps?”

“I… I don’t know. I’ve been trying to ignore them,” Susan replied, looking down at the table.

Emma stood up, brushed by her husband and went to Susan. Kneeling down, she smiled gently at the younger woman. “That won’t make them go away. You’re due any day, my dear. Why don’t we call Narcissa and have her run a quick scan, hmm?”

“But everyone’s so busy today! This can’t happen now,” she protested.

Dan grinned. “Babies run on their own time, Susan.”

“Let’s get you out of this chair and over to the couch,” Emma told her as she stood up. “Dan, give me a hand.”

Between them, they managed to get Susan on her feet. The blond had only taken a few steps toward the couch when she stopped and sucked in a breath and bent over slightly.

“Ouch,” she said, although it sounded more like a question.

The Grangers exchanged a look, then Dan went to her side. “I’ll help you,” he murmured softly.

“Addy?” Emma called.

With a small pop, the elf appeared. “Yous call Addy?”

“Yes. Please go to the hospital and get Narcissa for us. Tell her Susan may be in labor, Addy,” Emma told her.

The elf’s eyes widened and she bobbed her head before disappearing.

“Oh, dear. Emma?” Dan called.

Turning toward her husband, Emma managed to swallow her gasp. “Well, as your water appears to have just broken, I think we can say you’re definitely in labor,” she said with a touch of humor as she joined them both near the couch.

Susan’s face crumpled and she held her arms away from her body in disgust. “Maybe it’s just…” She trailed off and looked at the older woman helplessly.

Emma took Susan’s hands and smiled. “This is natural and you’ll have plenty of help. Birth is messy, hectic and scary. But it’s also beautiful and joyful.”

“And just think. You’ll soon be able to see your feet again!” Dan quipped.

Emma rolled her eyes, but said nothing. After all, he was right.

Susan laughed, then gasped and bent forward again. “Okay, that one hurt!” She fumbled with her robes, trying to grasp her Brotherhood medallion for comfort.

“Ah, I think that would be a bad idea,” Dan told her, pulling her hand away. “I don’t think your sisters would enjoy feeling the pain of labor while on the battlefield.”

She gaped at him for a moment, then scowled. "Take it," she said. "I'll forget and grab hold of it."

"Do you think you can make it upstairs?" Dan asked as he removed the amulet and put it on the table.

When Susan snorted, he shrugged. "Em, you're better at transfiguration than I am. Wanna change the couch into a bed?"

With a nod, Emma drew her wand. A few minutes later, they had Susan dry and as comfortable as they could make her in the transfigured bed.

When Narcissa walked into the library, she raised an eyebrow at the sight of the bed. "So, has the day arrived?" she asked.

"It would appear so," Susan said nervously.

"Her water broke a few minutes ago and she didn't think she could make it up the stairs," Dan explained.

"How far apart are the contractions?" Narcissa asked as she drew her wand.

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### **Haven Operations Center, War Room (0600 hours, April 10th)...**

"Elf scouts reporting a large body of Death Eaters leaving Hogwarts," Terry reported.

The door opened and one of Caleb's aides entered. He handed Caleb a handwritten note that read, "Blak Robes iz gone. Bring skool bak."

He folded the note and placed it in his pocket. He had seen similar notes in the past and knew they were sent through the portal from Peeves, the Hogwarts poltergeist.

"Order General Stanton and Colonel Potter to begin Operation Downfall. May Merlin's luck be with them," he said quietly.

Several of the women started speaking into their portable floos. The noise in the room went up a notch as people scurried around making adjustments to the maps and unit boards.

"Get me Major Howard of the Shamans," he ordered.

One of the women started speaking into her floo, while another reached up to the white board and changed the number of wounded and fatalities to twenty two and eight.

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### **Hogsmeade (0610 hours, April 10th)...**

Major Howard snapped the floo closed. "Orders Group!" he shouted.

"Orders Group!" Nichols echoed.

Three minutes later he had his company commanders in his crater. "We're shifting the axis of attack. They're coming from the castle. We need to set up a defensive line across the road along the edge of town. Nichols, use the air support to keep the Death Eaters off our backs. Command is asking that we hold for at least an hour, but I'm not sure we can."

Sergeant Nichols scowled in agreement. "That might not be possible, sir. We're down to eighty percent at the moment, but we could easily be overwhelmed."

"Then we'll have to slow them down. Lay down a line of fire ahead of their advance," Howard replied. "We need that time."

Nichols nodded. "We'll give it to you, sir," he said, then he turned and ran off.

Howard looked at his commanders. "You have your orders. Move!"

The men ran from the crater, while Howard pulled out his floo again. It was time to call in more air support. It was a dangerous move to make. Laying down that much fire would exhaust some of his men just when he needed them the most. He would have to pray that the energy restorer potions would help revive them enough to be effective.

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### **Hogwarts Castle (0615 hours, April 10th)...**

"*LIGHTS!*" Harry yelled in parseltongue. Hermione stood behind him, waiting for orders. The room torches flared to life. They both blinked in surprise to see all of the ghosts assembled. "Begin expanding the room," he ordered. "And tell Haven we're in."

Hermione gave a quick order, then pulled out her floo from a pocket and spoke into it. Around them, several members of the Brotherhood Brigade began carefully casting expansion charms to allow them to bring in all of the Brigade and the Raiders.

Harry walked over to the Bloody Baron. Members of the Brotherhood Brigade continued to step out of the portal against the wall.

"My lord Baron," Harry said with a slight bow.

"My lord," the Baron replied, eyeing Harry's uniform with interest, then he glanced over to the crowd of people and smiled. "I see the Lion's Pride has increased in numbers."

"It has, indeed, my lord," Harry replied with a grin, then he signaled to Hermione to join him.

"My lady, we are at your service," the Baron said with a bow.

Twister ran up to the pair. "All of the infiltration teams have arrived, sir."

Harry turned to Twister. "Good, the Baron will assign each team a guide. They will lead them to any people still in the castle. Remember, Twister, if they have the mark, take them down. If they don't, slap a portkey on them and let Haven figure out what to do with them."

"Very good, sir," Twister said, then he turned and trotted over to a large group dressed in dark grey combat fatigues.

Harry nodded to the Baron, then walked over to the outer chamber door. "*Open*," he hissed in parseltongue. The door locks snapped back and slowly the door swung open.

"So far, so good," he murmured.

Hermione nodded and they both turned to watch as more people continued to exit the portals.

Harry frowned and checked his watch. "I think we've just discovered the flaw in using portals to move troops."

Hermione turned to him. "What's that?"

"They take too long, Hermione. Had we used a portkey, we would have been here already."

"True and there wouldn't be room enough for us to breath when we all arrived at once. We knew this was going to happen, Harry. Be patient. They're expanding the room according to schedule. In fact, I think we're a little ahead, at this point."

Harry growled under his breath. How could he worry when his wife was busy shooting down his reasons for worrying?

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### **Padfoot Manor (0615 hours, April 10th)...**

"Any pain?" Narcissa asked.

"No, just pressure," Susan replied. "Whatever was in that potion you gave me sure did the trick!"

Narcissa laughed. "It was invented by a witch about thirty years ago. Normal pain relieving potions don't work that well for labor. The creator of Labor-Ease was a mother of five children and felt that not enough was being done to manage the pain of giving birth."

"Merlin bless her," Susan said, sighing.

"You're almost fully dilated, so rest while you can," Narcissa warned her. "I'm going to cast a few more monitoring charms on both you and the baby, then speak to Terry's father. The charms will be visible, so you'll be able to watch them, if you like. Emma and Jenny will stay with you. I'll be nearby, so don't worry."

Susan smiled softly and gripped her Mother-in-law's hand tighter.

A few minutes later, Narcissa left the library-turned-delivery-room and walked toward the dining room. She'd sent messages to Amelia, Terry and his parents, letting them all know that Susan had gone into labor. The Boots had appeared in the foyer of the manor, out of breath and excited, not long after they'd received the news. Terry and Amelia had replied with similar answers. Both were at the Operations Center and unable to leave.

On hearing the news, Susan had been disappointed, but understanding. She knew her aunt and her husband had been looking forward to being at the birth.

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### **Hogwarts (0620 hours, April 10th)...**

Tanzi Lakish was a young woman. In fact, she had gone to Hogwarts with Nymphadora Tonks, but the brown haired Ravenclaw didn't remember the Hufflepuff with the strange ability. She had been training to be a potions mistress when the end came. She had managed to hide successfully for many months, but one day she used her magic. It was a minor thing, really. She'd wanted to open a can of food.

For Tanzi, her descent into hell came when the capture teams grabbed her in mid December. Unable to send her to the camps set up to hold wizards, and being fairly pretty, she was sent directly to Hogwarts Castle to be one of the pleasure girls. That began a roller coast of rape and abuse that drove her sanity to the very breaking point.

Now she was locked up in what used to be the charms classroom along with ten other women, play toys for the Death Eaters who lived and worked in the castle. It was a marginally better life than what those in the pens experienced.

The castle shook several times and the women around Tanzi whimpered in fear. None knew what devilry Voldemort was up to, but it couldn't be good.

"I told you," hissed one woman to the rest of them. "They're bringing in dragons and they'll feed us to them!"

"Shut yer hole," said another, a muggle. They were a mixed group, but mostly witches. "You haven't any idea what's going on. Besides, they all went off somewhere. Even you could see that from the window, you skanky cow."

"Who are you..."

The woman fell silent and all of them clustered towards a corner of the room. The door began to glow and hum. As the glow increased, so did the sound, and the door began to crumble into sawdust.

"We're going to die," moaned one woman. Several others began to weep.

"I'm not going down without a fight," said the muggle as she picked up a chair and held it high over her head.

The hum increased, then stopped suddenly. The door crumbled away and the locks and knob made a clunking sound when they struck the floor.

Several strangely clad people stepped into the room. The muggle gasped and lowered her chair. "Oh, my God! They're British Army!" she cried. She sat heavily on her chair and started to weep.

The other women, not understanding, cowered back in fear.

Tonks stepped forward, examining those in the room carefully. This was the second group of people she'd encountered this morning, but they were vastly different than the first. The first group, three Death Eaters, had been trying to escape the castle. This group appeared to be prisoners, or worse.

"Please don't hurt us," whimpered one woman.

Tonks shook her head. "We're British Commandos. We're going to get you out of here and send you someplace safe."

Tanzi stood and stepped away from her group. "Safe?" she whispered.

Tonks frowned. The woman in front of her was heavily bruised and nearly naked, but she seemed vaguely familiar. "Yes, safe. We're here to fight Voldemort and you people are getting out of here."

She signaled to the men with her. The women flinched back and some screamed in fear. Tonks held up a hand. "Wait. Give me your portkeys. I'll hand them out," she said.

She collected the portkeys from her people and walked around, handing them one at a time out to the women. As she tapped each portkey, the woman holding it disappeared.

The muggle woman cringed back in fear. "No, no, no... Please don't hurt me."

Tonks knelt by her side. "Hey...Shhh... It's going to be alright. This won't hurt you. What it does is move you. If you let me active it, in less than a minute you'll be in Ireland and a healer will be looking over you."

The muggle opened her eyes and stared at Tonks. "It won't hurt me?" she asked in a timid voice.

"No, sweetheart, it won't. All it will do is take you someplace safe," Tonks replied, trying to sound reassuring.

Slowly the muggle reached out and took the little chain. Tonks smiled at her.

"Your nightmare is coming to an end, ducky. Tonight you'll sleep in a nice bed and have a good, hot meal," she said, then she reached up and tapped the portkey with her wand.

The woman vanished, then Tonks stood and turned to one of the men in her squad. "Alert command that the sixth floor has been swept clean. We rescued ten prisoners and killed three Death Eaters."

She left the room feeling very unsettled. Any one of those women could have been her.

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### **Haven Operations Center, War Room (0620 hours, April 10th)...**

"Colonel Potter reports Brotherhood Brigade is in Hogwarts. Infiltration units are clearing the castle now," said one woman.

"Haven Receiving Center reports receiving eighteen women and four boys from Hogwarts. They are being processed and will be sent on to Haven Hospital."

"The Shamans reports being heavily engaged and are taking heavy casualties. They are requesting an earlier evacuation time."

Caleb turned, hearing that. "Get a status on the movement into Hogwarts. Are all personnel moved yet?" he asked.

A woman spoke into the floo for a moment, then she looked up at him. "Colonel Walsh says that the Raiders need another ten minutes."

Terry walked over to Caleb. "If they jump too soon..."

"I know, but they're being decimated. We need to get them out of there," Caleb replied.

"General Stanton reports 806th Animagi has fully transferred and they are moving away from the portal point. The 102nd Broomsticks and 5th Sorcerors are still deploying. He expects he will need another fifteen minutes to complete the transfer."

"Talk to me, Terry," ordered Caleb.

Terry blinked, then he nodded. He and Caleb played a lot of 'what if' games like this. "Alright, the Shamans pull out. Voldemort mills around for a half hour, perhaps more, looking for the rest of our forces. He'll be confused."

Caleb nodded thoughtfully. "So if we're lucky, it could take him an hour before he orders his forces back to Hogwarts," he mused.

Terry frowned. "I think we should order Harry to start his warding teams right now, sir. I know it's a risk, but we need to get our own wards in place and his down."

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### Hogwarts Castle (0630 hours, April 10th)...

"Haven Six Actual, say again. I repeat, say again," Harry said into his portable floo.

"You heard me, Brotherhood Six. I'm ordering you to take down the wards now. The Shamans are taking a beating and we need to secure the castle," said the tinny voice of Caleb.

"Haven Six Actual, Brotherhood Six. Acknowledged. Initiating lockdown. Brotherhood Six out," Harry said, then he snapped the floo closed. He turned to Hermione, who was looking at him worriedly and shrugged.

"Twister! Baron!"

Two heads turned, one solid, the other incorporeal. A few moments later, the Baron and Twister had joined Harry at a small table he'd set up. Upon it was a map of the castle.

"We have a change of plans. We're not going to have time to take down the wards all nice and neat. I'm going to have to do it using brute force. Baron, can you show me a route to the top of the Astronomy tower?"

The Baron nodded. "I will take you there myself, my lord."

Harry nodded and turned to Twister. "Initiate lock down, Twister. Coordinate with Hermione. I want those instant walls Q Branch made for us in place in ten minutes. As soon as they go up, start putting people on the walls. Continue sweeping the castle with the infiltrator teams. I don't want to find any surprises left behind."

"Vickers!" shouted Twister. A man looked over at him. "Take a squad and provide security for the Colonel. He's going to go pull down the wards."

Harry turned to Hermione. "As soon as it's safe, make your way to the Great Hall and set up the CP. I'll meet you there once the wards are down."

She nodded and motioned for her staff to gather around her.

Harry expanded his staff to full size and nodded to the Baron, who led him out of the room at a trot. A few seconds later, another ten wizards followed him.

The Baron led Harry and his men on a wild path that was more maze than anything else. When the castle had been abandoned, many of the staircases froze in place, which sometimes meant traveling up two floors, then back down one floor, just to get to an area that would take you higher.

After five minutes of going up and down they finally emerged atop the Astronomy tower.

Harry looked around and was pleased to see the walls were going up quicker than he thought they would. A product of Q Branch, the portable walls were twenty meters thick at the base, twelve meters wide at the top and ten meters high, with a battlement and crenelated walls. Each wall section melded with an adjoining wall section whenever possible.

The walls were attached to a rolled cord. To deploy the walls, the cord was unrolled and tapped with a wand. The walls expanded and connected automatically, providing a defensive ring around the castle.

Seeing that the walls were being taken care of, he looked up, extending his senses. The wards were complex around the castle, but they had been cast when Voldemort took over the place. They were stronger than a typical set of wards, but no match for Harry's power.

The Baron and the security team watched silently. Harry's body burst in a coruscating halo of light and he raised his staff.

"Ego to order illa moenia occumbo!" Harry shouted.

A pale blue spiderweb of light appeared over the castle. The center pulsed a sickly greenish yellow color for a moment, then faded. There was a faint rumble and the castle trembled underneath their feet as the wards fell.

Harry swayed for a moment. Taking down the wards had taken a lot of his power. He needed a moment to catch his breath. Leaning against the parapet, he waited for his heart to stop hammering in his chest. Finally, he opened his eyes and straightened up again, ready for the next task.

Given his experience at Leeds, he had come prepared for this contingency. He reached into a pouch and pulled out four discs engraved with runes. One by one, he lifted the disc and murmured an incantation. Each disc rose in the air, then flew towards one corner of the castle grounds. When all four discs were in place, he lifted his staff and activated them. For a brief moment, four large overlapping golden domes covered the castle before fading away.

*"Inform Haven that the wards are down and an allied Anti-Apparation ward is in place. We have not yet engaged with the enemy and have no casualties to report,"* he sent Hermione. *"I'll be in the Great Hall in about five minutes or so. Get the rest of the warding team moving, I want our wards in place. I'll send the Baron down directly, so he can lead them up to the Astronomy tower."*

*"Twister says the castle is secure. We cleaned about thirty Death Eaters and found nearly forty prisoners and/or slaves, who we sent on to Haven,"* she replied. *"The command post is set up. Able, Charlie, Delta, and Echo Companies are starting to man their stations on the walls. The Raiders just completed their transfer and are joining them. As we discussed, Baker company is being held in reserve."*

*"Excellent. I'm on my way to you now,"* he replied, then he turned and started down the stairs again.

"Come on. Ladies and gentlemen. Let's give old lizard lips a surprise he won't soon forget," he said to his security detail.

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### **Haven Operations Center, War Room (0650 hours, April 10th)...**

"Sir, Colonel Potter is reporting Hogwarts is secured and under allied wards. They have not as yet engaged the enemy."

Caleb nodded in satisfaction. "Signal Major Howard to disengage and return to base."

His satisfaction slipped when he saw one of the women updating the numbers from Haven Hospital. The board now read fifty eight wounded and twenty four dead.

He turned and listened to Group Captain Anderson, who was ordering another strike, this time on the approach road.

"Buffalo flight, Haven Command. Have large body of troops in the open. Grid A4," Anderson said tensely.

"Haven Command, acknowledged. Buffalo six to outriders, let's send them a message," cackled the radio.

Anderson flipped a switch and looked up to see Caleb looking at him inquisitively.

"Just a little parting shot for Voldemort. And who knows? We may get lucky and nail the bastard," Anderson said.

Caleb nodded. He wasn't going to take the time to explain that only Harry could kill Voldemort. Besides, Anderson's idea was sound. It would kill a lot of Death Eaters and that was a good thing.

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### **Just north of Hogsmeade on the Hogwarts approach road (0700 hours, April 10th)...**

Voldemort's brow knitted in confusion when the sound of battle started to slack off. He turned to Mulciber, who seemed to be staying particularly close to him. "Well? What's happening? Why is my army no longer fighting?"

Mulciber looked equally confused until another Death Eater ran up to him. The man blanched, seeing Voldemort so close.

"Report!" snarled Mulciber.

"T-t-the enemy, my lord! They're running away!"

Voldemort took a step back and stared at the Death Eater incredulously. "We won? Where is Potter? FIND POTTER!" he roared.

"You heard the Master. Find Potter," Mulciber repeated.

The terrified man took off at a run, shouting, "Find Potter" at the top of his lungs. It should have been heard by everyone, considering the way he was screaming, but at that moment, Buffalo flight, four F18/A Hornets, screamed in low, dropping cluster bombs.

Voldemort stood dumbfounded. He had never seen muggle aircraft like these before. Once he left the muggle orphanage, he had dropped out of muggle life. To him, airplanes were still propeller driven crates that carried a few inaccurate bombs. Buffalo flight was over the target for less than two seconds, long enough to drop their munitions, kick the engines to military power and then speed away.

Lucius, taking his life in his hands, tackled Voldemort to the ground and covered him with his own body.

The ground shook and the air filled with smoke and dust. The noise was terrific!

Voldemort began to rise, pushing Lucius off him. Mulciber lay on the ground, bleeding from several places. Lucius staggered to his feet, one arm dangling uselessly by his side. Voldemort was about to curse him when he realized that Lucius had saved him from getting injured.

"Lucius," Voldemort said.

"My lord?" gasped the injured man.

"I am pleased. Now, go see the healer and have your arm tended to. Return to me once it's done," the Dark Lord ordered. He then turned to Mulciber and scowled. "Find me Potter. You said he would attack here. Alive or dead, I want him found and brought to me!"

All around the pair Death Eaters moaned or cried out for healers. Group Captain Anderson's parting shot had injured dozens and killed more than a hundred others.

---

### **Haven Operations Center, War Room (0730 hours, April 10th)...**

"Sir, the Diagon Alley contingent of the Shamans has returned to Haven. Here is the final tally of wounded and killed for the Hogsmeade assault force," an aid said as she handed Caleb a piece of parchment.

He glanced down at the numbers.

*Wizards*

*Wounded in Action, 72*

*Killed in Action, 35*

*Elves*

*Wounded in Action, 29*

*Killed in Action, 12*

Caleb glanced up from the parchment. "Send to Major Howard, 'If capable, assume control of Diagon Alley contingent and reinforce Hogwarts immediately.'" He then turned to Terry. "Redeploy some scouts on the Hogwarts approach road. I want some warning when he turns back."

Group Captain Anderson joined Caleb. "All aircraft are returning to base, sir, but we have one plane missing. We've picked up the pilot's beacon, but it's too far to reach by helicopter. Is there anything we can do?"

Caleb blinked in surprise. "A pilot is on the ground?" he asked, not familiar with the technology enough to understand completely.

"Yes, sir. He bailed out of his damaged aircraft," replied Anderson.

"And they want us to try to find him, right?"

Anderson nodded.

"Terry," Caleb called. He waited for Terry to approach. "One of the pilots that was helping us has

left his plane and is on the ground somewhere. Get some Haven portkeys and give them to some elves. Group Captain Anderson knows where the pilot is... right?" he asked, turning to Anderson.

Anderson nodded eagerly. He hadn't thought they would be of any help.

"Have them find that pilot and get him to Haven," Caleb concluded.

Caleb walked away, ignoring the stunned stares from the two men. Finally, Terry turned to Anderson. "Sir? Do know where your pilot is? Roughly?"

Anderson shook himself and reached for a map eagerly. "Yes, yes! I didn't think we'd be able to do anything, but yes, I know where he is."

Terry chuckled. "That's alright, sir. To be honest, I didn't expect that we'd be running rescue missions in the middle of a battle, either."

Both men grinned at each other, then Terry pulled out his portable floo and spoke into it, giving the necessary information for the rescue mission.

---

### **The Forbidden Forest, 806th Animagi Division (0730 hours, April 10th)...**

It had been a long and nerve wracking trip through the forest for the 806th Animagi Division. First the pathfinders were met by several of Slegg's advisors, who could speak. They led them to a large clearing, where they met with the Centaur tribe that roamed the forest.

The Pathfinders set up the portals under the watchful eyes of the Acromantulas and Centaurs, then the 806th started to cross over from Haven.

Amos Madison was not a happy person. As the junior most member of Able company, second battalion, he was tasked with taking the point position and following one of the acromantulas to their assigned position.

Word had quickly spread among the ranks that the Acromantulas and Centaurs were to be treated as friendlies, but their chittering and clicking was nerve wracking to Madison. It was hard to be friendly with an eight legged bug the size of St. Bernard.

After a slow forty minute walk, they finally reached the edge of the forest. Here they would wait until they received orders to come out.



Madison shrugged off his pack and pulled out the small shovel. Cursing under his breath, he began to dig, the hard way. They needed to be well concealed before Voldemort's forces returned.

"I want that at least a foot deeper, Madison," said Sergeant James.

"Yes, Sergeant," Madison replied. He struck down at the ground hard with his shovel, pretending it was the stupid officer who'd decided they couldn't use magic to dig their foxholes.

James crouched down and looked at Madison. "Look around you, squirt. The castle is less than a klick away and it's full of our people. But down that road," he said, pointing, "are several thousand wizards who might be able to detect magic from digging these holes. But they can't detect your sweating to make one."

Madison tossed down the shovel and looked up at his Sergeant. "I'm sorry, Sarge. It's just that the spiders are giving me the willies."

James looked at the tree tops, which were filling up with thousands of spiders, and scowled. "Yeah, I can't argue that. I'm just glad they didn't tell us about this ahead of time."

Madison picked up the shovel and started to dig again. He paused a moment later. "Is it always like this?"

James stood and looked down at him. "What do you mean?"

"The tightness in your gut, like a jittery feeling gnawing at you?" Madison asked.

"Every damn time. Remember what I said. At least a foot deeper, then pile some brush up in front of your hole and hunker down. Wait for orders."

Madison nodded and James walked over to the next man in the line to talk to him. Madison watched him slowly work his way up the line then he turned and started digging again. If Sergeant James wanted a foot, he'd give him two.

---

### **Hogwarts, Great Hall (0750 hours, April 10th)...**

Harry found himself delayed getting to the Great Hall because he kept stopping to talk to one of his Brigade members, answering questions or offering encouragement. When he finally jogged into the room, he skidded to a halt and stared in shock at the changes he saw.

The house tables were gone, but he had expected that. The head table had been replaced with a single carved throne that gave him the creeps just looking at it. The skylight charm had faded, of course, but he never expected the large pit in the center of the room, which had obviously been used to entertain Voldemort and his Death Eaters.

The floor and walls of the pit were splashed with dried blood, and an inward bending row of metal spikes lined the top of the pit. Gobs of...stuff...still stuck to the spikes. All in all, it made Harry want to vomit.

The pit now held Nagini. Someone had levitated the huge snake into the pit, penning it up.

Harry walked over to the edge of it and looked in.

*"Foolish humans. My master will kill you all when he returns,"* Nagini hissed in parseltongue.

*"Your master will return to discover I now own his castle, and my armies stand ready to crush his,"* Harry hissed back. *"So hold your tongue, foul serpent. Your day of judgment has arrived."*

Nagini reared up and coiled, as if preparing to strike. *"A speaker! Could it be Potter? My master will be much pleased when you writhe under his torments."*

*"Yes, I have returned, and tricked your master out of his own home so I could take it over."*

*"He will kill you."*

*"He can only try. Whatever he does, you will not live out this day."*

*"Fool, you cannot hurt me. My master will protect..."*

The hissing was suddenly cut off as a beam from Harry's staff neatly sliced the snake in two, lengthwise.

"That was a dumb conversation. Merlin, I hate snakes," he muttered to himself.

He turned when he heard giggling. Luna was laughing softly to herself. Next to her stood Draco and Hermione.

Hermione glanced into the pit and shuddered. She waved her wand, causing the pit to fill with sand and stones.

Luna walked up to Harry and looked at where the pit once stood for a moment, then she shrugged. "It was right to kill that snake. It had been twisted and made evil by Voldemort."

"You know, I can talk to snakes, but if the truth be said, I don't like them," he replied softly, then he looked up at Draco, arching an eyebrow in question.

"Shouldn't you be with your company?"

"I'm heading out there now. My floo stopped working and I need to come back in here to refill the container with powder. I also wanted to let you know that we have some elves situated on the road. They should give us some warning."

Harry nodded. "I'll be leaving to join Able company in a bit. I have a floo with me and Hermione can always reach me."

He looked at Hermione. She clearly wanted to go with him, but she knew she had to stay here with the command post.

---

### **Weasley Residence, Haven (0800 hours, April 10th)...**

Charlie stumbled into the small kitchen and sat down. Dilly, who had started taking care of both Melinda and the Weasley family, appeared and placed a plate of food in front of him.

"Thank you, Dilly," he said absently as he began to push the food around on his plate.

Bill joined him a few minutes later, and Dilly put a plate of food in front of him. He smiled at her. His experience working for Gringotts had made him much more accepting of the little elf.

"Thank you, Dilly," he said with a smile.

Dilly bobbed her head and vanished. She really liked the Weasley family. They laughed a lot and enjoyed a good joke. They even had quite a laugh when she served the twins spaghetti that had been heavily laced with Tabasco sauce.

"Has there been any word yet?" Bill asked Charlie.

Charlie stared at his food for a moment longer. "No, nothing. Dad, Fred and George are closer to the news than we are."

Bill pushed his food away and stood. "This isn't fair! Our baby sister shouldn't be doing this," he growled.

Charlie leaned back and looked at him carefully. "I'll remind you that it was you and the others that made it abundantly plain that our little sister is no longer a baby."

Bill gave him a sour look. "You know what I mean."

"I do, but I also know she and Neville both are doing what they were born to do, Charlie. We talk about Harry and the prophecy, but all of them have a role they were destined to play. My sister... Our sister has become a powerful witch with a strong sense of responsibility. She is doing what she feels she must. I didn't want to accept that, but it's the truth. Even I can see it now," Charlie said.

"It should be us out there fighting, Charlie, not her," Bill replied softly.

"No, it should be us by her side. We missed an opportunity, I'm afraid. We should have trained with her and insisted on being there."

Bill looked ashamed of himself. "I know," he whispered. "I will never forgive myself if anything happens to her. Any of them, really. They're fighting for us."

Charlie stood and put an arm around his brother's shoulders. "Let's just hope that Merlin is looking out for them, then."

"Do you think that Dilly might bring a note to Dad, asking what's going on?" Bill asked suddenly.

Charlie smiled. "That's a capital idea. Let's finish breakfast, then we'll ask her."

Reassured, the two men sat back down. The doubt and fear was still there, but they'd face it like they should, as a family.

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### **Just north of Hogsmeade on the Hogwarts approach road (0830 hours, April 10th)...**

Mulciber stood with Voldemort at what remained of the Hogsmeade rail station. They were waiting for word on Harry Potter.

"My lord, perhaps he became frightened and ran away," Mulciber finally offered after nearly an hour of fruitless searching.

"It's possible. He would be fearful of confronting me."

Voldemort paced back and forth. He shot dark looks at Mulciber from time to time, making it known who he felt was to blame for the failure to capture Potter.

"You there!" snapped Mulciber, gaining the attention of a nearby Death Eater. "Return to the castle and bring back a chair for Lord Voldemort!"

The Death Eater nodded, closed his eyes and tried to apparate. He seemed to flinch, then he turned to Mulciber. "My lord, I cannot apparate. There

must be a ward in place," he whispered.

Mulciber stared at him in surprise. "Go! Run to the castle and find out what is happening. Report to me as soon as you return."

Mulciber looked at Voldemort nervously. Fortunately, he was too preoccupied with the search for Potter to pay attention to what the Death Eater had just said. Hopefully, the man would return to tell him it was all a mistake, or a ward left over by the retreating British forces.

---

### **Haven Operations Center, War Room (0840 hours, April 10th)...**

"Sir, 102nd Broomsticks and 5th Sorcerer are in position and dug in," one of the women manning the Floo announced.

"What is the status of Hogwarts?" he asked.

Another woman turned to her floo and spoke softly for several minutes, then she turned to look at Caleb. "All wards are in place, the Brotherhood Brigade and Raiders are in position. Major Howard and the Shamans completed their transfer thirty minutes ago. Colonel Potter reports they're ready."

Caleb stood from his chair and walked over to the map. Terry joined him, staring down at it as if it held all the answers they needed.

"Elf scouts report movement on the approach road," announced one woman.

"In which direction?" snapped Caleb.

The woman looked at him alarmed and then spoke into her floo.

Everyone waited tensely. The door to the war room opened, allowing Helga and Inga to slip back in. Both women carried trays of food from the commissary. Caleb shot them a grateful look. No one had thought to bring food to the room and they had been there for hours already.

"They're toward the castle. No... Wait one...," the woman said, then she nodded. "Elf scouts say the walls around the castle have been spotted by a lone Death Eater. He turned around and headed back to Hogsmeade at a run."

"Send an alert to all commanders. The secret is out. Expect enemy attack," Caleb replied. He turned to Terry. "What's the status of the hospital?" he asked softly.

"Healer August says they're good. The Operating Rooms are clear again and they're ready for incoming wounded."

Group Captain Anderson took off his headset and wiped his face tiredly before walking over to join them.

"Well, that's about all we can do. Once they get in close to the castle, we can't use land and air support. We just don't have the right gear on the ground to paint targets. Besides, NATO and the Americans want to conserve their strength for their operation."

Caleb nodded. If all went well, then tomorrow would initiate the second part of Operation Downfall. "You've done more than we hoped for and you have our thanks, Captain Anderson."

"I do have one piece of good news," Terry offered, then he passed Anderson a slip of parchment.

*Pilot found and retrieved. Condition fair.  
Current location: Haven Hospital.*

Anderson read the note, then closed his eyes in silent prayer. Finally, he looked at Terry. "Thank you. I'll alert his commander that he's been located and is safe."

Anderson handed the note to Caleb, who glanced down at it and grinned. "Good news! Well done, Terry."

"Thank you, sir."

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### **Hogwarts Approach Road, just outside of Hogsmeade (0845 hours April 10th)...**

Mulciber turned when he heard the yelling, but he was too far away to make it out. Down the road, he could see a Death Eater running as fast as he could toward them.

"What is this?" asked Voldemort, his eyes narrowing dangerously.

"Enemy in the castle!" shouted the distant Death Eater, still running.

Mulciber's eyes widened and his face drained of color. The enemy couldn't be in the castle! They had routed them and sent them scurrying away in fear.

"We've been tricked!" Voldemort roared, turning on Mulciber. "This is your fault! You didn't leave enough men to guard my castle!"

Mulciber cringed back. "M-m-my lord," he stammered.

“Avada Kedavra!” Voldemort screamed.

Mulciber bent over, hands over his head, moaning in fear. The thick green beam arced from Voldemort’s scepter and impaled Mulciber. He straightened, his eyes filled with terror. His body glowed brightly in the gray daylight. Wordlessly he collapsed, his body reducing down to ashes.

“Lucius,” Voldemort called.

Malfoy, who had been standing nearby after returning from the healer, joined the Dark Lord. He knew he was an inch from dying. “Command me, my lord.”

“Mulciber has failed me for the last time, Lucius. He has allowed the enemy to gain control of Hogwarts. You will lead my army to victory,” Voldemort said, then he toed the empty robe that once held Mulciber. “Do not forget the price of failure.”

Lucius nodded nervously. He was not used to leading so many men in a coordinated manner. He quickly called together all of the commanders and set them marching back to Hogwarts.

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### **Hogwarts, Outer Wall, Sector Able (0845 hours, April 10th)...**

Harry stood on top of the wall and shook his head. The twins had outdone themselves with these walls. In less than ten minutes they had erected walls that completely encircled the castle.

He stood next to Allan Humbert, commander of Able company. Looking out toward the area where the Quidditch pitch used to stand, he spotted something strange. “Allan, what is that structure?” he asked, pointing at the walled-in enclosure.

“Slave pens, sir. We sent a team to investigate over an hour ago. Since then, elves have been shuttling boxes of portkeys in, getting everyone out,” Humbert replied.

Harry blinked at him. “Really? Where are we sending them?”

“Fort Ord. From what I understand, a number of the people we rescued last time are standing by to help cases like these.”

Harry shook his head in dismay. *We should have thought of this*, he thought angrily to himself.

“*They know we’re here, Colonel. Haven says elf scouts report Death Eaters spotting the castle walls and returning to Hogsmeade*,” Hermione sent to him. He smiled, underlying her message was a strong emotional message of pride and a little amusement.

“*Thanks, I’ll pass the word. I’m sure Chuck Stanton knows, but confirm he does and that his units are in place.*”

“Yes, sir,” she said teasingly.

“*Wench*,” he replied with a mental smile.

He turned to Allan. “Pass the word. They know we’re here. Everyone is to hunker down and follow the plan.”

The Brotherhood Brigade took their positions along the wall facing the approach road, the Raiders took the other clear wall that faced east. The other two walls crashed their way through the forest. No one thought the enemy would be able to approach from those directions because of the creatures there.

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### **The Forbidden Forest, 806th Animagi Division (0855 hours, April 10th)...**

“Pass the word. Keep your head down and wait for orders. Enemy coming into sight.” said the voice from the next foxhole.

Amos Madison gulped nervously and stuck his head just above the rim of his foxhole. “Pass the word. Stay down and wait for orders. Enemy coming into sight,” he said in a whisper that carried to the next foxhole.

*Bobmin*  
*FanficAuthors.net*

# Sunrise Over Britain

## Chapter 30 - Sunrise Over Britain (part 2)

He sunk down in his foxhole and wished he'd dug it a bit deeper. As it was, his was one of the deepest foxholes around. He piled brush up in front of the foxhole, then carefully arranged it so that he had several holes in the brush that he could peer out of and fire through.

From his position he could see a small rise, which the road dipped behind in one direction, and the castle walls only a few hundred yards away in the other.

Madison paused and tilted his head. It was a mannerism that came from his animal form. He'd worked hard to become an animagus and was proud to be a North American Lynx. His ears twitched. From up the line he heard, "Here they come! Hold your fire."

Amos tightened the grip on his wand and fingered the pistol on his belt. He felt the ground tremble slightly, then he saw them! They came over the small hill like a mass of black locusts.

His expression hardened. This wasn't an army. This was a mob of killers.

---

### Hogwarts, Outer Wall, Sector Able (0855 hours, April 10th)...

"Fire," Harry said softly, standing next to his Able company Commander.

"FIRE!" shouted Humbert.

The ground in front of the oncoming mass of humanity exploded with hexes. On the wall behind Harry, teams using mortar tubes were launching specialty weapons, strangler nets, jelly bombs and even the occasional explosive round.

Voldemort, in passing control to Lucius, had made a mistake. Malfoy was not use to commanding large groups. His response to being given command had been to order all of the Death Eaters back to Hogwarts as quickly as they could run. The result was a mess as they arrived in clusters, attacking in detail.

Harry didn't care. He had just over fifteen hundred troops under his command in Hogwarts and if the enemy was going to arrive in groups of three to four hundred wizards at a time, that was just fine by him. They would chew them up and spit out their husks.

*"Inform Haven that we are only partially engaged! Do not let General Stanton move in yet,"* he sent urgently to Hermione.

He received a startled emotional reply, then silence. He wasn't worried. She knew her job and would carry it out.

---

### Padfoot Manor (0900 hours, April 10th)...

When Narcissa entered the dining room, she smiled knowingly. John Boot paced the room nervously, while Dan Granger sat at the table, calmly drinking a cup of tea. She'd been in several hours before, but felt the men would appreciate being updated on Susan's condition. She'd also sent off messages to Terry and Amelia, letting them know that the baby would be delivered soon.

Spotting her, John rushed toward her. "How's Susan?"

"She's fine," she replied. "She's comfortable, but it shouldn't be long now."

"Are Terry and Amelia with her yet?" Dan asked her.

"No, unfortunately. They're both still stuck at the Operations Center, but I've kept them updated on her condition."

John ran a hand through his hair. "Poor Susan. I know she wanted them both with her during this."

"She understands," she told him gently. "And she's very glad Jenny stayed with her."

An urgent pinging sound echoed through the room.

"What is that?" John asked worriedly.

Narcissa's face was expressionless. "One of the monitoring charms I cast. I must go."

"But what does it..." He threw up his hands when she rushed from the room.

"Don't worry, John. Susan is in good hands," Dan told him. "I'm sure the charm was just to let her know that your granddaughter is about to make her entrance into the world."

Back in the library, Jenny was holding Susan's hand, trying to calm her, while Emma rushed to the door to call for Narcissa. Before she could reach it, it was thrown open and the blond rushed in, her wand already drawn.

Reaching Susan, Narcissa checked her monitoring spells quickly, and blanched. "Abby!" she called.

"You call, Mistress?" The elf asked a moment later.

"Abby, go to the hospital and find Healer McNeil," Narcissa said quietly. "Tell her Susan is ready to deliver her baby, but that the cord has prolapsed. This is an emergency, Abby, so you must hurry! When she's ready, I want you to bring her here. Do you understand?"

"Yes, Mistress. Finds Healer McNeil, tells about baby. When ready, brings healer to library!" the elf repeated.

"Excellent. Now, go!"

"Cissy, what is it?" Emma asked quietly as the elf popped away.

"The umbilical cord is being compressed," she said, silencing the alarm, but leaving the display visible. "It's not a common thing, and I'm not trained in relieving the pressure on the cord. That's why I sent for Danni."

"What's going on?" Susan asked, her eyes glued to the monitoring charm. She was beginning to panic.

While Narcissa explained what was happening, Emma watched the other charms. The baby was still getting oxygen. Her heartbeat was slowing, though not rapidly.

"Come on, Danni. Hurry!" Emma murmured, watching the numbers drop slowly.

---

### **Haven Operations Center, War Room (0900 hours, April 10th)...**

"Colonel Potter reports they are engaged with the enemy, but the enemy has not yet committed the bulk of his forces. He wants General Stanton to hold position until the enemy commits his forces," said one of the women manning a floo.

Another woman placed a flag next to the Hogwarts marker on the map.

Caleb looked up when the door opened. An older woman walked over to Terry and handed him a message. He paled as he read it. He said something to the woman, who nodded and left the room.

Terry looked up to the observation deck. Amelia nodded grimly.

"Terry?" asked Caleb.

Terry walked over to Caleb. "Sorry, sir. Susan... she went into labor a few hours ago. I've just been informed that she's very close to delivering."

"Will you be able to carry on?"

Terry straightened. "Yes, sir. I asked to be kept informed. Susan knew this could happen. If anything goes wrong, I'll leave."

Caleb eyed him for a moment, then nodded. "Good man. As soon as you can break away from here, go. Don't stick around, just go."

"Thank you, sir."

"Caleb," Group Captain Anderson called. "One of our observation aircraft did a fly over. Almost all of the Death Eaters are on the move. They estimate another ten minutes before the enemy will be fully engaged."

"Pass that information along to General Stanton and Colonel Potter," Caleb ordered.

---

### **Hogwarts Approach Road (0900 hours, April 10th)...**

There was a ring around the Dark Lord as he walked. No one dared approach him, resulting in a ring of empty ground between him and his nearest servants.

Not far away Malfoy shouted, trying to get everyone to move faster.

Lucius was afraid. Mulciber had been outsmarted and lost Hogwarts. If he couldn't recover the castle for the Dark Lord, his life would likely be forfeited, as well. To make matters worse, the muggle force that he had hoped to use in battle had drawn attention to themselves when they fired back at the airplanes attacking Hogsmeade. They had been literally wiped out to the last man.

He topped the last small rise and the castle was now in full view. He shook his head in wonder and waited for Voldemort to arrive. He was amazed to see that somehow the castle had gained huge walls!

Voldemort came up beside him and stared at the castle in shock. "How is this possible?" he asked.

From their vantage point, they could see the masses of dead and dying, and the Death Eaters throwing themselves against the walls again and again.

"My lord," Lucius said suddenly, turning to his master. "We must stop this. We cannot allow the attack to proceed this way or your army will waste itself against the walls."

Voldemort stared at the man for a moment, but Lucius turned away and signaled for everyone to stop.

"What are you doing, Lucius?" asked Voldemort dangerously.

Malfoy turned back to him. "My lord, if we are to take back Hogwarts, we must plan and attack properly. This way is useless and we will lose."

Voldemort looked at the men on top of the battlements, killing his servants. Not one servant had made it to the base of that damned wall alive.

"Very well, Lucius. We will try it your way," he said smoothly.

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### **Minister of Magic, Haven (0858 hours, April 10th)...**

Bertrand Lovegood slipped into the room looking extraordinarily pleased with himself. He had gotten permission from the Minister to begin broadcasting at precisely nine o'clock. He stood behind the glass and watched as several people cast the final spells, linking the Irish and French Wizarding Wireless Networks to the broadcast booth. In just a minute or two, the other networks would switch off for twenty four hours, allowing the British Wizarding Wireless network to restart operations, using their channels, as well as its own. And they were starting with a bang!

When they were ready, one of the technicians placed an old fashioned microphone in front of a man sitting at a desk. That the microphone had no cable and was, in fact, just a hollow shell, didn't bother anyone.

The man looked at Bertrand, who nodded and gave him a thumbs up. With a nod, the man turned to watch the clock as it counted down the seconds to nine o'clock. At exactly nine, he waved his wand and the sounds of Rule Britannia began to play.

"Wizards and Witches of the United Kingdom! This is the official British Wireless Network, returning to the air with joyous news. Even as we speak, forces of the United Kingdom and more than thirty allied nations are engaged in battle with Lord Voldemort and his army of Death Eaters.

"The British Ministry of Magic in Exile, with approval of His Majesty, King Charles, has formed alliances with nations throughout the world. The attack began early this morning and is still continuing. We will bring you updates throughout the day, so stay tuned.

"Here are some personal messages. All replies may come to us, the British Wireless Network, Haven, Ireland. And now for our messages. Mike and Susan want Uncle Elmo to know they are safe. Repeating, Mike and Susan want Uncle Elmo to know they are safe.

"William wishes to know if anyone knows the whereabouts of the Wilkins family. Repeating, William wishes to know if anyone knows the whereabouts of the Wilkins family..."

Bertrand bounced a little on his feet. This was almost as much fun as publishing a paper! Interspersed among the real messages being sent out to people were coded messages, to small resistance groups scattered about the country.

Around Britain, acts of sabotage against the occupying military forces increased tenfold.

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### **Hogwarts, Outer Wall, Sector Echo (0905 hours, April 10th)...**

Draco looked worriedly over the wall. The ranks of Death Eaters attacking seemed to be thinning out.

Luna stepped up to him. He had made her his aide in order to keep her close. They had talked about it several times before Luna got him to admit that he was afraid for her. He felt having her close would at least give him the illusion that he could protect her. He remembered that final conversation very well.

*"You still haven't told me the real reason, Dray," Luna said calmly. She sat on the edge of their bed, watching Draco pace back and forth in the room.*

*"Well, as my aide, you'll be able to run messages and carry things like my maps and portable floo," Draco replied. Why was she insisting on having this conversation again?*

*"Dray, you had a perfectly good aide for that. And I know you had to get Harry's approval for this change, so I want to know why."*

*Draco turned and faced her. "Because I'm terrified I'm going to lose you," he nearly shouted.*

*Luna stood and walked over to him, wrapping her arms around him. "Was that so hard to say? I know you love me, but I don't understand why you find it so hard to say so."*

*He buried his face in her hair and shuddered slightly in her embrace. "I'm just afraid I'm going to lose you."*

*She kissed the side of his head and pulled away a little so she could look into his eyes. "I don't think that's going to happen anytime soon. But if it makes you feel better, I'll be your aide."*

*He tightened his grip on her and she smiled to herself. She had chosen very well for a protector, and he was really quite good in bed, too.*



"I don't get it. First they were charging us, now they are just sitting there," said one of the men standing against battlement.

Draco pulled out a pair of muggle binoculars and looked the distant Death Eaters over. "Luna, contact the CP. Tell them that it looks like they are having some sort of conference out there. They're just outside the range for the magical mortars."

Luna nodded happily and snapped open her portable floo. "Hello? Is Hermione there?"

Draco winced. His wife would never learn to use proper communications procedures. She sounded like she was making a social call, planning to inviting Hermione over for tea!

"Oh, hello Hermione. Dray says the Death Eaters are staying out of range and not attacking anymore. It's too early for tea, so they must be doing something sneaky," she said, then she paused for a moment. "I really don't trust Death Eaters," she finished, confiding in Hermione.

Several of the men around Draco and Luna exchanged amused grins. Luna was a lethal adversary and everyone respected her, but she was decidedly odd, in their book.

"Alright, I'll tell him, Hermione. Bye," Luna said, then she snapped closed the floo.

"Draco, Harry says he thinks they're preparing for a more planned attack, instead of this mob tactic they were using." She paused and her expression changed. Turning away from him, she looked up at the castle, laughed, and then waved.

Draco walked over to her. "Luna, sweetie, focus. We have a situation here."

She tried to protest when Draco turned her to face the enemy again. "I need you to check in with each squad leader. Find out if we picked up any casualties and report back to me. Also, find out if anyone needs to be resupplied."

Luna nodded and smiled brightly at him. He wasn't interested in her news, but he'd find out about it soon enough.

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### **Memorial Lake, Haven, (0905 hours, April 10th)...**

In a wooded glen near the memorial lake, an incorporeal being appeared, hovering in the rising mist.

Checking the position of the sun, Eocho cast a circle and spread his arms wide, the palms of his hands facing the sky. "I call upon the beings of Air and Fire, Earth and Water. Hear me! Your children are in need of your strength, oh Gods of old. To you, I offer myself as sacrifice."

A soft breeze began to blow through the clearing and the sound of voices could be heard.

"Oh Gods, most of your children have gone to war. Bless them and raise them up. Give to them your wisdom and strength, your courage and protection."

As the breeze blew around him, the voices grew louder, though still indistinct.

"Not far from this spot, one of your daughters struggles to bring forth life. Both she and her child are at risk. Ease their pain, oh Gods. Bless them both with life and strength. Watch over and protect them as the next generation of the holy order is born into this world."

He bowed his head then and waited.

The breeze became a strong wind and it tore away the rising mist. The surface of the lake rippled in the distance, making the everlasting candles floating on the water dance.

"Be at ease, Eocho mac Tairdelbaig, son of Aonghas and Ceana. Your prayer has been heard," a female voice sighed on the wind.

"Thank you, Lady. Blessed be, the Gods of old," Eocho murmured as he bowed deeply.

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### **Padfoot Manor (0905 hours, April 10th)...**

"That's it, Cissy," Danni said as she gently eased the child's head out. "Keep the levitation charm on her until she's fully delivered."

Nodding, Narcissa glanced at the monitoring charm once more. The child's heart rate had returned to normal once the compression on the cord had been eased.

Danni looked at Susan and smiled. "I need you to stop pushing now. I know it's hard, and the urge to push is great, but it won't be for long."

"Is she okay?" Susan asked.

"Everything looks fine," Narcissa told her as she looked at the monitors.

Having cleared the baby's airway, Danni looked up and smiled. "Alright, Susan, push!"

Several moments later, a cry rang through the manor.

In the dining room, John Boot let out a whoop. Yanking Dan to his feet, he hugged him and began to dance around the room. "I'm a grandfather!" he exclaimed.

"Congratulations, John! I can't tell you how happy I am for you. Now, why don't you stop dancing with me and let me get the champagne?"

Terry's father laughed heartily. Pounding Dan on the back a few times, he then released him and did a little jig. "I wonder how long it will be before I can see them both?"

"They'll have to get her cleaned up a bit. And I'm sure Susan will want to be presentable. It shouldn't be too long. Do you want to send a message to Terry?"

Shaking his head, John grinned. "No, I'll leave that pleasure to Susan!"

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### **Haven Operations Center, War Room (0910 hours, April 10th)...**

"Colonel Potter reports that the Death Eaters are regrouping and staying just out of range. They have no casualties to report," said a woman manning the floo.

Caleb nodded thoughtfully and moved to look at a special map they were now using. It was a topographical representation of the area around Hogwarts. Several black flags flashed ominously not far from the castle.

"What are you doing?" he muttered to himself.

He turned to Terry. "He's waiting for something, but what?"

Terry stared at the map for a long moment, then he turned to Caleb. "Perhaps he's bringing reinforcements?"

Caleb shook his head. "No. Most of his wizards are already in the field."

"What about non-human help?" Terry said uneasily.

Caleb glanced back to the map. "Yes, that could be it. He's holding back to coordinate and plan the attack. We caught him off guard and he hasn't fully recovered from that yet. He could be planning his attack though, rather than bringing in help."

"Possible, but I think we should warn Harry anyway," Terry countered.

Caleb frowned. They had nothing more than a hunch to go on. It wasn't enough!

"No, we need more information before we give that sort of warning. How about if we send a small scouting force east and west of the Death Eater position? Let the elves check the forest for any of his non-human allies."

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### **Hogwarts Approach Road (0910 hours, April 10th)...**

After a hurried conference with the leaders of Voldemort's forces, Lucius turned back to the Dark Lord.

"I think we are ready, my lord. We have a good plan," he said.

"Then send my servants into battle, Lucius," Voldemort ordered. He amused himself by taking pot shots at the walls, but was unable to cause much damage from such a distance.

"My lord, we need you to summon your other servants. Our plan is to attack behind the dementors. The dementors will roll over them, causing a panic, and we'll be right on their heels."

Voldemort scowled. His dementor force had been hit rather badly. He had less than a hundred of the creatures still alive and they were becoming increasingly difficult to control.

He looked skyward for a moment, judging the cloud cover, then he held out his hand. The cloud cover dimmed the light to such a degree that there was no visible shadow. He might not be able to command hundreds of dementors anymore, but the sunlight was weak enough to allow his vampire allies to attack.

He held up his scepter. "Ego voco succurro!" he shouted.

A thick black beam lanced upwards, striking the clouds and darkening them further.

Hundreds of vampires appeared, using their own form of apparation, summoned directly to Voldemort. From the direction of Hogsmeade, a small dark cloud appeared on the horizon, moving steadily closer. The dementors were approaching.

"Dark Lord, command us!" cried the leader of the vampire clan.

"Await my bidding. Soon we go into battle," Voldemort replied. He turned to watch the approach of the dementors, they were still many minutes off.

Lord, what about the trolls or the banshees?" asked Lucius.

"Both are too far away for us to easily bring them here, Lucius," he replied. "Summoning them would delay the attack by several hours."

Lucius bowed his head in acknowledgment. "We will await your command, my lord."

Voldemort nodded absently, while he watched the dementors slowly approach.

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### **Padfoot Manor (0915 hours, April 10th)...**

While Emma and Jenny congratulated Susan, Narcissa and Danni cleaned and examined the baby.

Seeing the blond woman's frown, Danni chuckled. "Don't worry about it, Cissy. A prolapsed cord is nothing to mess with. Even a midwife would call a healer at that point. You're not far enough into your training to deal with the problems that can arise from such a situation."

"It was such a simple charm, I don't know why I didn't think of it myself," Narcissa told her.

"It wouldn't have mattered. In that situation, it takes two people. You can't be expected to maintain the charm and deliver the child. Besides, too much can go wrong. If you run into the situation again once you've finished your training, always call in another, be it a medi-witch, midwife or healer."

"I'm glad you were here," Narcissa said.

Squeezing the woman's shoulder, Danni nodded. "Don't forget to record the baby's weight and length. I'm going to check on Susan."

"She's beautiful," Jenny murmured, smiling down at the tired new mother.

"Thanks, Nana," Susan teased.

"You did wonderfully," Emma said.

"You were right," Susan said. "Beautiful and joyful."

"And tiring," Jenny said with a laugh, watching as her daughter-in-law yawned.

Danni joined them and smiled at Susan. "As you can hear, you have a healthy daughter with a great pair of lungs!"

While the other women laughed, Danni cast a few more spells, checking the new mother's health. Noting that Susan was bleeding a bit heavily, she cast a charm to monitor it and turned to her medical kit.

Digging through her kit, she pulled out a potion. Returning to her patient, she nodded at Emma, who moved aside.

"Susan, you're bleeding more heavily than I'd like. Your uterus isn't contracting as it should. This potion will help stimulate those contractions," Danni told her. "It doesn't taste very good, but I need you to drink it all."

Grimacing, Susan reached for the bottle. "One of these days someone will invent a potion that tastes good." Uncorking the small bottle, she brought it to her mouth, tipped it up and drank quickly.

With a twist of her lips and a shudder, she dropped the empty bottle into the healer's waiting hand.

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### **Hogwarts, Outer Wall, Sector Charlie (0920 hours, April 10th)...**

Remus scowled and pulled out his floo. "Command, Charlie six actual. I think he's about to attack with dementors and vampires."

"Charlie six, acknowledged. We see them. Pass the word to all hands, prepare to use your Sun Bangers," said a tinny voice from the floo.

"Charlie company!" shouted Remus. He still wasn't sure why Harry had placed him in charge of the company, but he wasn't going to argue about it now. "Vamprep!"

The command was echoed up and down the line. He could hear others yelling the same thing from the adjoining wall sections. Each man put on a pair of sunglasses to protect them from the extremely bright light of the Sun Bangers. As long as they didn't set them off at their feet, they would be reasonably far enough away to avoid a case of sun poisoning.

Everyone crouched down behind the wall and waited. A few, mostly officers and noncommissioned officers, walked the wall, offering encouragement where needed.

Remus eyed the mass of milling Death Eaters. The dementors had finally reached the front of their ranks. With a roar, the vampires and dementors rushed forward. There were fewer dementors than expected, but a lot more vampires.

"Make ready!" Remus shouted.

Tonks knelt at his feet. She already had a Sun Banger in her hand, waiting to throw it. She glanced up at him and grinned. He grinned back and put a hand on one of the Sun Bangers on his belt, pulling it off. It came free with an audible snap.

The vampires were running at full speed. They were barely visible, but they were coming from nearly a thousand yards out.

Remus waited, watching them pass the distance markers that they had laid out. Five hundred yards, three hundred, two hundred.

“NOW!” shouted Remus as the creatures hit the one hundred yard mark.

One hundred and forty Sun Bangers arced out from the wall in front of Charlie company, landing in front of the oncoming vampires. Daylight dawned in front of them and they recoiled back in agony. The leading elements of vampires flashed into fire and crumpled to the ground, a smoking ruin. Those in the back fell a little more slowly as their flesh charred and peeled away. They fell to the ground and writhed in agony.

The dementors flinched slightly under the light, but it had no real impact on them. While many others continued to hurl the light grenades, others started casting the Patronus charm to drive them back.

“Expecto Patronum!” shouted Remus. A silvery wolf leapt from his wand and charged into the massed dementors.

A second later, Tonks followed with her own patronus, causing a chameleon to leap from her wand.

The vampires faltered and their charge lost momentum. Not far away, Remus heard Harry shout “SOLARIS!”

The area in front of the castle burst into a blinding white light and the remaining vampires fell to the ground, screaming in their death throes. The Death Eaters that were closing the gap between themselves and the vampires flinched in the blinding light. Harry's spell had blinded many of those in the front ranks.

When Harry canceled the spell, Remus was surprised to find that the light didn't fade away. He glanced around in confusion, losing control of his patronus in the process. The sounds of battle died off as the confusion spread along the wall.

Remus glanced up towards the castle. There, along the parapets of the towers, perched the Angels of Haven. He smiled, hearing Luna's laugh ring out. It was a pure, bright sound, like the ringing of a crystalline bell.

The Angels unfurled their wings and their uplifting effects were felt by everyone. One by one, the Angels fell from towers in a dizzying plunge, then they pulled up to attack the dementors.

Voldemort's army of Death Eaters flinched and started to pull back, earning the ire of their master.

The Angels made very short work of the remaining dementors. It was possible to hear Voldemort's screams of rage, even from a distance. They had thrown back Voldemort's first serious attack on the castle, using only those defenders inside the castle.

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### **Padfoot Manor (0920 hours, April 10th)...**

Messages had been sent to Terry and Amelia, announcing the birth of Siomha Amelia Jennifer Boot.

John had been allowed into the room and, after hugging Susan, he got his first look at his first granddaughter. Once he'd taken her into his arms, he'd told those in the room that he had a new love in his life. Laughing, Jenny had taken the baby from him, rolled her eyes at his pout, and returned little Siomha to Susan.

As Emma and Dan watched the happy family, they both recalled Hermione's birth and smiled gently at each other.

Danni watched the monitoring charms with some concern. Susan's bleeding hadn't stopped. When her blood pressure reading began to drop, she grabbed her medical kit. Finding what she needed, she turned back to the bed, glanced at the monitor readings and narrowed her eyes. Susan's pulse was rapid now, and her blood pressure was still falling.

She approached the bed with two bottles in her hand, one quite large. “John, Dan, leave. I need to examine Susan.”

Emma's eyes flicked to the monitoring charms and she stiffened.

Feeling his wife tense, Dan looked at her, then at the monitors.

Squeezing Emma's hand in understanding, he walked to John and threw an arm over his shoulders. “Alright, Granddad! Let's go see what the elves have to eat in the kitchen, then we'll toast the newest member of your family.”

“Isn't she lovely?” John asked. The door to the library closed, cutting off Dan's reply.

“Danni?” Jenny asked, not fooled by the healer's excuse. “What is it?”

“The bleeding hasn't stopped,” Danni told her. “Susan, we're going to try another potion. You may just need a higher dose to get the contractions started.”

Taking the potion, Susan drank it as quickly. Dropping the empty bottle into Danni's hand, she shuddered. “I still say there has to be some way of making it taste better!”

"Now take this one. It's a blood replenisher. You've lost quite a bit," Danni told her seriously, "and we want to keep on top of that."

"How much do I drink?" Susan asked as she uncorked the new bottle.

"All of it," Danni replied.

Susan's eyes widened, but she nodded her head and did as the healer instructed.

Casting a charm over Susan's abdomen to monitor any contractions, Danni frowned. The potion, if was going to work, would act quickly. As the minutes passed with no contractions, she grew concerned. Canceling the charm, she looked at the monitors for Susan's blood pressure and pulse and swore silently.

Stepping away from the bed, she motioned for Emma and Narcissa to join her.

"She's hemorrhaging," Danni told them quietly. "I can cast a suspensor spell if I have to, but it will drain me and I'll be useless. Narcissa, you may have to do it, if it comes to that. Right now, I need another healer as quickly as possible."

"Dilly!" Emma called.

When the two women looked at her strangely, she held up a hand and waited.

With a small popping sound, Dilly appeared and flinched slightly. She'd never been called to the manor before and wasn't comfortable there. "You do be calling Dilly?" she asked nervously.

"Yes, Dilly. I need you to find Melinda and bring her here immediately."

"Melinda do be at hospital helping Pappy Healer," the elf told Emma.

"I know, Dilly. But we have an emergency and need her here, now. Tell her we have a patient with postpartum hemorrhaging. She'll know what to bring. If she can't come, tell her to send another, but don't take no for an answer!" Danni said urgently.

"Dilly will be doing as Mistress says!" With a pop, she was gone.

"Alright. Emma, explain to Jenny and Susan what's happening, but do your best to keep Susan calm. Narcissa, let me explain the suspensor spell. We may not need it, but let's be prepared."

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### **Hogwarts, Outer Wall, Sector Able (0930 hours, April 10th)...**

Harry leaned against the wall and breathed heavily. Reaching into his potion box, he pulled out an energy restorer. The light spell hadn't been easy.

"*Are you alright?*" Hermione asked.

"*Yes, just a little tired. Inform Caleb that we've repelled an attack composed of nearly one thousand vampires and some dementors. I don't think any vampires got away. The enemy has pulled back and seems to be regrouping again.*"

He waited for a minute. "*What is the status of the other units?*"

"*Most of the units used up their supply of Sun Bangers. If more vampires attack, we're back to using the Solaris spell, which, when cast by most people, will only drive them off. Not all of us are capable of killing with it,*" she replied.

"*Yeah, yeah. Here's to hoping we don't face any more of them, then.*"

Hr paused and peered over the battlements, looking at the army in the distance. They had to be at least four thousand strong still.

"*Hermione, message all company commanders. The Death Eaters are conjuring ladders. I think this next attack will be where he commits his forces. Also, contact Major Howard of the Shamans. Have his unit move into the Entrance Hall. I want them ready to plug any holes that might develop. And let Haven know, so they can pass the word to Chuck.*"

"*We should have arranged to have at least one portable floo that could contact everyone,*" she replied rather grumpily.

He spotted something fly out from the walls controlled by Echo company. Frowning, he watched the object sail high overhead before exploding in a silent puff of black smoke. Glittery objects rained down on the ground in front of the walls.

Curious, he decided to walk over and see what they were doing.

"*I agree, but we always forget something and I hope this is the last time we do this. I have far more important things to do with my life than kicking Voldemort's scaly arse,*" he shot back at her.

"*Your messages are passed, m'lord,*" she said playfully. Talking mentally like this, neither of them needed to resort to official Brigade speech. "So, *what's more important than beating Voldemort?*"

*Lot's of things. Friends, family, peace, you stretched out on the bed, tied down, naked, and me with a feather, maybe some of those edible body paints,*"he replied with a grin.

There was a moment of silence across their bond, as if his words had shocked her completely, then he noticed the wave of arousal she was trying hard to hold back and he nearly laughed out loud.

"*Gotcha,*"he sent softly, smiling to himself.

Harry walked calmly along the walls, heading towards Echo company. He nodded to people as he passed them. Most seemed to be in excellent spirits, but he knew part of that came from the Angels perched around the castle roof.

"*I'm going to hold you to that,*"she finally replied.

"*I'm happy to serve, my lady. I'm with Echo company. I need to speak to Draco, so I'll get back to you in a bit.*"

"*Alright. Be careful, love.*"

Harry walked up to Draco, who was watching Luna. She was supervising several men who were loading a strange looking contraption.

"Can I ask what you're doing?" he said softly.

Draco jumped and whirled on him. "Merlin! Harry, don't do that," he exclaimed. Shaking his head, he tried not to glare. "The twins asked us to test something for them. They didn't have time to get these into production and the mortar teams would have been too busy to play with them. So Luna volunteered to put a small team together for them."

One of the men placed a quaffle sized ball in a basket attached to the machine. He fiddled with the ball for a moment, then nodded to Luna.

"Pull!" she commanded.

The man then yanked hard on a lanyard and the basket flung upright, hurling the ball out over the battlement.

Harry watched for a moment, then turned back to Draco. "Wouldn't it be better to wait until the Enemy is attacking?"

Draco chuckled. "No, she's seeding the ground with poisoned caltrop portkeys. The caltrop is little more than several pieces of sharpened metal that form an X. No matter how you throw them, one pointy side always faces up. The poison is fast acting, causing paralysis in under a minute. But just to make sure they do the job, the caltrop is also a portkey, its destination set to the North Atlantic ocean, somewhere off Greenland."

Harry shuddered at the thought. Paralyzed and sent to drown? He made a mental note never to offend the Weasley twins.

"Of course, most will probably hit your ward and bounce back to explode on the field, but if there are any unmarked wizards, they'll go swimming," Draco said in conclusion.

Harry shivered again at the ruthlessness of it.

"Pull!" Luna commanded cheerfully.

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### **Padfoot Manor (0930 hours, April 10th)...**

"There!" Melinda said with some relief. "Do you see them, Danni?"

Suspended above Susan's unconscious form was an image of her uterus. It had taken several charms, layered over each other in a very precise order, to create the image, but it had worked. The procedure normally called for three healers, but no one else could be spared from the hospital and they'd had to teach Narcissa on the fly.

Emma was monitoring Susan's blood pressure and pulse, while Jenny watched over Siomha.

Danni shook her head. "I thought that might be the problem, but without an image to work from, there was just too much background clutter from the birth for a reliable reading," she said, scowling.

Visible on the image, once it had been enhanced and enlarged, were several tears in the lining of the uterus.

"At least it's easily fixed, now that we know what the problem is," Melinda told her gently.

Stepping back from the image, Danni nodded. "Right. Let's get it done."

Ten minutes later, the damage had been repaired and the bleeding stopped. As Susan was unconscious, they used a syringe to inject the blood replenisher into her system. While Danni and Melinda canceled the imaging charms, Narcissa explained to Jenny what had happened and what steps had been taken to correct the problem.

"She'll be alright?" Jenny asked, watching the two healers closely. She hadn't been as close to Susan as she would have liked. Both her and John felt their marriage had been forced on them, and they took it out on Susan. In retrospect, Jenny realized that they had been wrong, and Susan had born the brunt of their ire far better than most would have. It shamed her deeply and she promised herself she'd make it up to the young woman who

had just given her a granddaughter.

"She should be fine," Danni called as she recast the monitoring charms. "We'll watch her for a bit, but I don't want to wake her up until we're sure."

Nodding, Jenny held her granddaughter closely, her face creased with worry.

Walking to the table, Danni sat down on a chair and rubbed her face tiredly. "You didn't bring anything to restore energy, did you, Melinda?"

Medical kit in hand, Melinda joined her at the table and opened it. "I did, actually." Retrieving the potion, she passed it to her colleague.

"How many do you have with you?" Danni asked as she opened the bottle. Drinking the entire bottle, she blanched and silently agreed with Susan; potions should taste better!

"Four. I brought mostly blood replenishing potions and a few others that might be needed for a patient with postpartum hemorrhaging."

"Good. Drink one yourself, and give the other to Narcissa." At Melinda's questioning look, Danni sighed. "We have to get back the hospital. They need as many of us as possible. I know you don't feel it now, but you'll need all the energy you can get before the fighting is finished."

Melinda closed her eyes, opened another bottle and drank the contents. Shuddering, she opened her eyes and smiled wanly at Danni. "I'll give Narcissa a dose and check the monitoring charms."

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### **Haven Operations Center, War Room (0935 hours, April 10th)...**

"The Brotherhood Brigade reports repelling an attack of a thousand vampires," one of the women manning a floo.

The room fell silent and everyone repressed a shudder at the thought.

"Haven Hospital reports all Operating Rooms are clear and most of the critical care cases have been stabilized. They haven't had to send any patients off to any of the backup facilities."

Terry walked over to Caleb looking rather pleased with himself. "Sir, we had nearly two hundred elves pop to various locations in and around Hogsmeade. We have been unable to locate any significant forces of non-humans. No trolls, no dementors, nothing."

"Then Harry must have just done away with Voldemort's non-human forces already. We might have caught a break," Caleb murmured.

"Sir," called one of the floo operators, "Colonel Potter says the enemy is conjuring ladders to scale the walls. He believes the enemy will commit his forces fully in the next attack."

Terry looked at him. "It makes sense. Voldemort has got to be nearly insane with rage by now."

"Relay that message to General Stanton," Caleb ordered.

Terry turned, hearing a small pop behind him. The elf handed him a note, then popped away.

He unfolded the note and read.

*Terry,  
Congratulations Daddy. Siomha Amelia Jennifer Boot born 9:07 this morning. Seven pounds, four ounces, twenty inches on the nose. Mother and Daughter doing well. Susan will likely send you a note herself later.*

*Love  
Mum & Dad.*

Terry closed his eyes and whispered a prayer of thanks, then he looked up to the observation deck. Amelia beamed a huge smile down at him. Arthur handed her a tissue so she could wipe the tears from her eyes.

"Congratulations, Dad," Caleb said softly, clapping a hand on his shoulder. "I wish I could let you go, but I need you here."

Terry nodded. He couldn't wipe the smile from his face however. "I understand, sir."

Both Weasley boys shot him a thumbs up.

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### **Hogwarts Approach Road (0945 hours, April 10th)...**

Voldemort paced angrily. Around him lay the corpses of several Death Eaters he had killed when his army pulled back from the castle without orders.

Finally he stopped and turned to Lucius. *Damn fool can't do anything right! I'll have to do it myself*, he thought. "Lucius, summon my Chosen to me," he snapped.

Lucius paled and nodded, then he turned and sent Death Eaters scurrying to find and bring the Chosen in.

The Chosen had served two purposes in Voldemort's ranks. They were usually commanders, in charge of large bodies of Death Eaters, and occasionally he'd use them as sources of magic. They were ritual enhanced wizards, some of them as powerful as five wizards. They were his special weapon, only Lucius wielded more power than any of his Chosen, but Lucius had never experienced the ritual. The power that Malfoy wielded came from his proximity to Voldemort.

Voldemort waited until his twelve Chosen were assembled before him. Their uniform was slightly different, it was the only way to tell Chosen from regular Death Eaters. They wore a slightly better grade of robe with a wide red belt around their waists.

"You Chosen and I, will lead our army to victory. We shall approach under cover," he pronounced.

Lucius looked worried. "My lord? There is no cover," he said hesitantly.

Voldemort looked at him as though he was an imbecile, and Malfoy cringed back. He pushed his way forward through the Chosen, then he lifted his scepter.

"Ignotus nostrum progressio," he said in a loud voice. Then he turned to the Chosen, who raised their wands and cast the same spell.

A thick mist rose around them, quickly rising above their heads. Visibility suddenly dropped down to mere yards.

"Have my army follow me. You can manage that much, can't you, Lucius?" Voldemort asked in a scathing tone.

"Y-y-yes my lord," Malfoy stammered back.

"Good. We move silently."

Voldemort moved off at a slow, steady pace, knowing that he had to maintain the slow pace to keep under the mist. His Chosen followed right on his heels.

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### **Haven Operations Center, War Room (0947 hours, April 10th)...**

"Sir, General Stanton reports the enemy is advancing within a thick cloud bank. He is unable to gauge their progress," said one of the floo operators.

"Get me Colonel Potter," Caleb said quickly.

A moment later someone handed him a portable floo.

"Brotherhood Six actual, Haven Six actual, what's your situation?"

"The Death Eaters are advancing under a dense mist, reducing visibility to nearly zero. We're shooting blind, and we're trying to come up with a counter for the mist," said the tinny voice of Harry Potter.

"Can you hold?"

"Yes, I believe we can, but I need to go. We're kind of busy here, Haven Six Actual," replied Harry.

Caleb blinked in surprise. "Acknowledged. Haven Six Actual out," he replied, then handed the floo sheepishly back to the woman. He hadn't expected Harry to be so blunt, but in retrospect, he had been keeping him from doing his job.

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### **Hogwarts, Outer Wall, Sector Echo (0950 hours, April 10th)...**

Harry handed the floo back to Luna, then turned to look at the slowly moving cloud bank. "We need to slow them down. What about some area effect spells? A wall of fire, perhaps?"

"That's going to take a lot of power to do. It's a lot of area to cover," Draco countered. "It won't do any good to slow them down if you exhaust everyone before they actually get here."

Harry nodded thoughtfully. "*Hermione?*" he asked. He hated rushing her almost as much as she hated him rushing her, but he needed a solution and he needed it ten minutes ago!

"*Patience is a virtue,*" she replied.

He winced and glared at the cloud bank for a moment longer. He could use the same spell he used at Azkaban, but if he did, he'd use a lot of power and end up going into his fight with Voldemort tired. He waited, knowing full well that Hermione was scrambling through her book bag of requirement, trying to find a counter.

He turned back to Draco. "Alright, area effect spells then. Hammers, flame, freezing, that sort of thing. Pass the word and give the word to fire at will. I know firing blind is a terrible way of doing it, but it will slow them down."

"*Hermione, pass the word to all company commanders. Use any spell that has an area effect. Fire at will. We need to slow them down until we can clear off that cloud,*" he sent.



"FIRE!" shouted Draco.

The wall erupted with flashes of spellfire. It seemed that Harry had given people an opening to use their favorite spells. He saw people flaming the leading edge of the cloud, others casting explosive hexes, and still others casting charms sheeting the cloud with bunches of flechettes. One industrious person even used a spell to uproot a small tree and was currently directing it like a club.

Screams sprang from the cloud and it visibly halted under the onslaught. Harry nodded with some satisfaction, but he knew that they were not doing as much damage as they could.

*"I'm on the wall with Able Sector,"* Hermione sent him.

Harry frowned. *"You're not supposed to leave the command post,"* he chided.

*"Oh, and you're going to learn this spell and cast it right the first time?"* she asked archly.

He flinched from her angry mental tone. *"You're right. I'm sorry. I'll be there in a moment."*

"I'm heading back to Able company. Keep firing," he said to Draco, then turned and trotted along the battlements in the direction of Able.

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### **Hogwarts, Outer Wall, Sector Able (0955 hours, April 10th)...**

Hermione knelt on the top of the wall, and using her wand, engraved the runes needed for power concentrating. It didn't take her long to have the small circle set up, then she rummaged through her backpack until she found her shrunk down staff. She enlarged the staff, then stepped into the circle.

The incantation she needed was long, and unfortunately for her, it was in Swedish of all languages!

She began by invoking the power concentrating runes and asking for a blessing from the Celtic Gods. Inwardly, she hoped they wouldn't be too upset if she didn't cast a Celtic spell.

The runes in her circle began to flicker and glow. The air seemed to come alive with magic that snapped. Sparks flared all around the edge of the circle. Her work even distracted the soldiers along the walls. Few had ever witnessed ritual based magic on this level before.

She was working her magic to a frenzy, which would result in a single massive burst of magic, far more than she was normally capable of.

The runes at her feet were pulsating wildly and a buzzing sound tore through the air. She raised her staff over her head with both hands. The staff glowed and the metal end cap pulsated in time with the runes at her feet.

"Vända den här dimma till rök!" she screamed, then she whirled her staff so that the end cap faced the cloud. A bright blue beam of light arced out and for a brief moment, the entire cloud fluoresced, then the light faded, and with it, the cloud bank changed. It became darker, almost oily in appearance.

Shouts of alarm came from within the cloud, then heavy coughing. She had changed the mist into smoke.

Hermione slumped to her knees and leaned heavily against her staff. Harry, arriving late, jumped to her aid.

"That was different," she mumbled groggily.

"You gorgeous idiot," Harry said softly. "Why didn't you wait for me? I could have loaned you some power. What were you thinking?"

"I was thinking about keeping my handsome but moronic husband alive by leaving him with all his magic, thank you very much. You need your power for when you face him. I'll be fine, just give me a moment," she replied, panting heavily.

Harry fumbled with his potion box and pulled out a single dose energy restorer. He popped the cap and placed it to her lips. She weakly batted at his hands and glared at him, then accepted the inevitable, and drank the potion. For a moment, nothing seemed to happen, then a waft of steam rose from her head and she climbed to her feet.

Harry turned to look at the spectacle out in front of the walls. The cloud bank was thinning rapidly under the shouts from Voldemort and others. Harry smirked. The Death Eaters were doing what he had thought about doing, they were creating a wind and, in the process, exhausting dozens.

Over in front of Echo company, large groups of Death Eaters rushed forward, then vanished, only to return a second later and explode in a gory shower of Death Eater bits. The Caltrop portkeys were a success!

Voldemort stood with his Chosen and Lucius, while the Death Eaters, shaking off the effects of the smoke, screamed in defiance and charged the castle walls.

"FIRE!" shouted Harry, then he cast a wide field stunner, taking forty Death Eaters out of the fight permanently.

Harry turned to Hermione and quickly assessed her condition. "Go, get back to your post," he ordered.

Turning back to the fight, he could see that some of the Death Eaters had gotten smart. They were shielding their fellows from attack while they held

back. More Death Eaters saw that the tactic was working and copied their behavior.

The Death Eaters, now being covered by their fellows, rushed the walls. Voldemort and his Chosen started concentrating fire on just one wall.

*"Hermione, Delta Company, the wall closest to the Raiders, is under attack by Voldemort and a group of his servants. I can see from here that they're starting to undermine the wall. Tell Neville he needs to clear that section of the wall, then alert Major Howard that he is to hold the courtyard at all costs, in-case they break through. Finally, contact Haven. Tell them that now would be a really good time for General Stanton to do something. Next..."*

Harry paused and started firing reductors at Death Eaters climbing a nearby ladder. They were starting to get a little too close for comfort.

*"Harry? Harry?"* Hermione called nervously.

*"I'm alright,"* he replied. *"We've got Death Eaters scaling the walls. We need Chuck to move in."*

Suddenly Harry fell to the ground, a heavy body laying on top of him. He looked up just in time to see a killing curse fly past.

"You want to be more watchful, sir," said the private laying on top of him. She grinned down at him. "Can't wait to tell the girls I got to lay on the famous Harry Potter. Er...Oops. Sorry, sir," she said, her brown eyes dancing with humor then her expression changed. Grunting, she slid off of him and collapsed to the ground.

Harry rolled in the opposite direction and climbed to his knees.

He saw a swatch of black robes still struggling to climb over the battlements. Harry raised his staff and banished the man. The Death Eater flew back and upwards, screaming as he went. Several nearby Brigade members paused to admire the Death Eater who continued upwards at a great speed and continuing to accelerate. He was out of sight when his body caught fire due to friction when he passed the sound barrier.

Harry stood and saw that things were getting really tight. He started pointing his staff and exploding Death Eaters as they crested the battlements. His body was glowing brightly in the gloomy morning light. With a shake of his head, he walked over and grabbed hold of one ladder, vaporizing it, and the Death Eaters climbing on it.

Several of his other men rushed up to support him. He turned to see a medic working on the young private. She had been hit with a cutting hex that sliced her from her shoulder to her hip.

Harry turned away, aiming his staff and picking off Death Eaters milling around not far from the base of the wall.

*"Send me two squads to reinforce my position,"* he ordered Hermione. He barely registered her acknowledgment.

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### **The Forbidden Forest, 806th Animagi Division (1000 hours, April 10th)...**

Sergeant James stared at the seething mass of Death Eaters assaulting the walls. *This was going to be interesting,* he thought grimly. He pulled his wand in his right hand and his pistol in the left.

*"ANIMAGI DIVISION! LET THEM HEAR YOU ROAR!"* he shouted at the top of his lungs. Word had come down from command; they were needed. As one, the men hidden in the forbidden forest came out of hiding and fired upon the milling group of Death Eaters.

Amos gripped his pistol and wand tightly, then he sprang from his foxhole yelling and firing curses just like everyone else in his unit. His company moved to just inside the tree line, while another company moved into the holes made by him and his mates. The 806th poured both spell and gunfire into the massed Death Eaters.

On the other side of the castle, the 102nd Broomsticks pulled an identical maneuver, enclosing the Death Eaters into a cul de sac.

The 5th Sorcerer Infantry braved the open ground, moving rapidly into position to cut off the Death Eaters from the road to Hogsmeade. The Death Eaters were now surrounded on three sides and pinned against the castle walls.

Between American positions, Acromantulas streamed out of the forest by the hundreds. The Death Eaters flinched back and pulled into a tight group. This wasn't a set battle, it was becoming a slaughter.

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### **Haven Operations Center, War Room (1005 hours, April 10th)...**

The mood in the war room became increasingly tense. The order for the Americans to move in had been given nearly five minutes ago. Since then, no word had come from any of their forces as to what was happening.

Caleb glanced worriedly towards the Observation deck. Amelia, down from the euphoria of the birth of her grandniece, was chewing worriedly on a fingernail. Arthur Weasley sat next to her, leaning forward in his chair.

Caleb turned to Group Captain Anderson, wondering if maybe they could get aerial reconnaissance of the area.

One of the fliers flared to life and the woman manning it huddled over it, speaking rapidly. Caleb watched her intently.

General Stanton says the 806th, 5th and 102nd have cut off the Death Eaters. They're trapped against the castle walls!" she said.

"Haven Hospital is reporting large numbers of wounded arriving. They're activating their Irish support plan," said another.

"Minister, the US Navy Task force in the channel is receiving reports of fighting in London. We may be looking at a civilian led revolt against the army. According to my sources, they're trying to confirm that. If it turns out to be true, we may see their timetable moving up significantly."

Caleb eased himself into a chair, then looked up. "What is the status of the 2nd Shamans that remained in Camp Outhouse?" he asked.

Terry looked up after consulting his notes. "They're finished resupplying, but are only at sixty percent strength."

Caleb stared at the map for a moment, then turned to Terry. "Order them through the portal. Let them link up with Major Howard as an extra reserve."

Terry nodded and picked up a portable floo to issue the necessary orders.

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### **Hogwarts, Outer Wall, Sector Delta (1010 hours, April 10th)...**

Harry suddenly turned and stared. Voldemort, along with the group of strangely dressed Death Eaters, had managed to bring down one of the wall segments that Delta company was watching. Harry realized that the Death Eaters had just been given a way into the castle. Even as he watched, they were scrambling over the debris and entering the court yard as quickly as they could.

"We have a wall breach! Alert Haven, then tell Colonel Walsh to release any company on the wall that is not engaged. We need to plug that gap. I'm heading to Delta sector right now," he shouted to Allan Humbert, commander of Able company.

Harry ran to a stairway and quickly made his way down into a clear area of the court yard.

In Delta sector, Neville Longbottom was trying to stem his panic. His wife, Ginny, was one of the people that had still been on the wall when it came down. In less than a second, one third of his command had vanished in a pile of rock and debris.

Neville saw the look of surprise on Ginny's face as the wall collapsed. Once the dust cleared, he could see arms and legs sticking out from places under the rocks, but he couldn't see Ginny. And worse, Death Eaters were scrambling into the breach.

"Delta company! To me!" Neville roared, then he scrambled down the steep incline on the broken wall. A Death Eater wearing a wide red belt paused, spotting Neville sliding down. He aimed his wand at him.

"Avada Kedav..."

Neville continued his slide down the slope. He had seen the wizard pause and aim at him. Unable to get to his wand, he pulled his pistol and fired one shot, hoping to startle the wizard.

It startled the man for about one tenth of a second, then the bullet crashed through his brain and out the back of his skull. The man fell to the floor, twitching. The Chosen might have more magic, but bullets still killed them.

Behind Neville came the rest of Delta company, sliding their way down into the gap, trying to stem the tide of Death Eaters. Emboldened by Neville's example, many of the brigade pulled their sidearms and started using both, but the damage had already been done. Several hundred Death Eaters, Voldemort and his Chosen, would make it past the wall before Delta Company could plug the breach.

Colonel Walsh, seeing Delta company on her flank thinning out as they left the wall, immediately sent her own Delta company down the opposite side of the wall, helping plug the gap and take some of the pressure off Neville and his company.

Voldemort turned and spotted the two companies now blocking the breach in the walls and he roared in anger. He threw out his scepter, hurling killing curses at a blindly fast rate. The Chosen copied their lord. They surrounded him, acting as both a shield and an attacking force. They would protect their lord with their lives.

Several more of the Chosen fell to bullets. Like Harry had predicted, there were few wizards who knew of shields capable of stopping a bullet. Unfortunately, Voldemort was one of those wizards.

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### **Hogwarts, Outer Wall, Sector Echo (1010 hours, April 10th)...**

Draco cursed and headed for the stairs. When the wall went down, most of the remaining Death Eaters shifted towards the breach, leaving him with an empty sector. He ordered forty of his people to join him, leaving two thirds of Echo company still on the wall.

The interior courtyard had become a major battle zone. The Shamans were protecting the entrance to the castle, but the Death Eaters were well situated in the courtyard. They had transfigured a large number of rocks and boulders so they had many places to hide.

In one protected corner, two of the Chosen began to chant. When they were finished, they collapsed dead, their magic spent, but it was well spent as the inner courtyard plunged into darkness. The forces within the courtyard had just lost the support of those on the walls.

Draco skidded to a stop at the bottom of the stairs. The darkness wasn't complete. He could see, just not well. A hand touched his shoulder and he

turned enough to see Luna pointing along the wall. He nodded. Following the wall would make sense, and it would limit the directions from which they could be attacked. In a crouch, he led his force towards the breach, flinching at the many flashes of spell fire arcing across the courtyard.

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### **Hogwarts, Outer Wall, Sector Charlie (1010 hours, April 10th)...**

Like Echo company, the number of Death Eaters in front of their area of responsibility lessened dramatically. Remus noted the breach and he split his forces, half firing down into the courtyard, and half guarding the outer wall.

He reached for a portable floo. "Charlie Six Actual to Brigade Command Two. The wall along Delta sector has been breached. We have a large body of Death Eaters inside the inner courtyard!"

"Charlie Six Actual, Command Two, acknowledged. Have lost contact with Echo Six Actual and Delta Six Actual. Can you see them from your position?"

"Negative, Command Two. The interior of the courtyard is covered in some form of magical darkness. It comes up to about ten feet below the top of the walls."

"Standby, Charlie Six."

Remus glanced to the darkness that roiled and bubbled like water within the confines of the courtyard. Ever so often, he'd see a curse break from the surface of that darkness or hear people cursing.

"Charlie Six Actual, relaying orders from Brigade Six. Hold your position. Repeat, hold your position. Raider reinforcements will be passing through your section shortly to bolster Delta and Echo positions."

Remus frowned. "Charlie Six Actual, acknowledged. Out," he said, then snapped the floo closed. He looked over to Tonks, who stared back at him worriedly. She was frightened. Things were spiraling out of control.

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### **Padfoot Manor (1010 hours, April 10th)...**

They had moved Susan to her bedroom and she was now resting comfortably, little Siomha in a bassinet next to her bed. Jenny had placed her there before sitting down to leaf through a book. John sat with Dan and Emma, talking quietly in a nearby sitting room.

It had been a roller coaster of a day for everyone, so far. Susan problems in childbirth would not have been so bad under normal circumstances. But with every available healer in the country busy with the war effort, things had been touch and go for awhile.

The stress of the morning was beginning to wear off when the peaceful atmosphere was shattered by the portkey alarm.

Dan sprang to his feet and pulled his wand. "Incoming portkey?" he asked as he rushed from the room, Emma hot on his heels. Except for the elves and the Boots, they were alone in the manor. Narcissa had already returned to the hospital.

They were almost to the portkey room in the basement when the alarm switched over to indicate a medical emergency.

Dan hit the door at a full run, nearly knocking it from its hinges.

"Sweet Jesus!" he exclaimed, then jumped to help Ginny. She lay on the floor, bleeding profusely. One of her legs seemed to be mangled, the other was missing entirely, halfway below her kneecap. She was conscious, but only barely.

Emma gasped and ran to help Dan. She felt for a pulse and her eyes widened. "Dan, use your belt! Stop the bleeding from her leg, then help me. I can't get a pulse!"

Dan ripped his pants pulling the belt off, then wrapped it tightly around the young woman's leg, stemming the source of most of her blood loss. Emma stood and ran to a first aid kit they kept in the room and pulled out a large blood replenishing potion.

Dan reached for her neck. "I've got a pulse," he said, taking it from her carotid artery. "It's really faint though."

"Prop her up so I can give her this potion, then we have to get her to the hospital," Emma commanded.

Together they managed to give Ginny some of the potion. Once done, Emma applied a field dressing to Ginny's leg.

Dan lifted the petite girl in his arms. "There's a portkey on the wall over there," he said, nodding to the large brass ring hanging from the wall.

Emma handed her husband the ring. "I'll be back as soon as I can, but it may be a while."

"Don't talk, just go," she said tensely. They were both annoyed with themselves. They had forgotten about the Brotherhood medallions and what they would do if the owner was badly injured.

Dan vanished only to appear a moment later in Haven's receiving room, which was, to his surprise, empty.

He staggered for a moment before righting himself. He didn't know that the hospital had set up a triage center between the main hospital and the out buildings. Looking around, he opted for moving toward the sound of people shouting.

"Melinda McKinney! Danni McNeil!" he called as he ran. Finally, he passed a window and, spotting hundreds of people waiting out on the lawn, he ran for the nearest exit.

Approaching the people, he aimed for one woman in healer green. "HELP!" he shouted.

The middle aged woman blinked at him for a moment, then shook herself alert. She had been taking a break from surgery when a strange man ran up to her holding one of the soldiers. The girl's legs were badly injured and one leg looked to be missing the bottom third.

"Get me a stretcher!" she shouted.

One of the nurse's aides came running up with a levitated stretcher following behind her like an obedient puppy.

Dan gently placed Ginny on the stretcher. Healer O'Donnell quickly examined the girl, then turned to the aide. "Get her to OR 2, right now," she ordered.

"But there are others ahead of her," protested the aide.

"NOW!" roared the healer. "If we don't help her now, she'll be dead in five minutes!"

The aide nodded and ran to the main building and the operating rooms, the stretcher following behind her.

The healer took one look at Dan, noting all the blood on him. "Are you alright?" she asked.

"I'm fine, the blood is hers. Please, help her," he replied.

"We'll do our best," O'Donnell replied, then she turned and trotted off in the direction the aide ran.

Dan slumped against the wall and slid to the ground, emotionally drained. He felt exhausted.

"Mr. Granger? Are you alright?" asked a familiar voice.

He looked up at a very concerned Melinda McKinney. "I'm fine, Melinda. We just screwed up. We forgot that the Brotherhood medallions would portkey them to the manor if they were injured."

Melinda's eyes widened in alarm, figuring Dan wouldn't be here unless Hermione was involved. "Is Hermione hurt?"

Dan shook his head. "No, it was Ginny. So much blood. She's lost part of her leg and the other looked like it had been crushed flat."

"Ginny?" Melinda breathed. "Oh, Merlin. Where is she?"

"A healer named O'Donnell took her straight to OR 2."

Melinda looked relieved. "Well, Healer O'Donnell is one of the world's finest vascular healers. If she can't help Ginny, no one can."

She looked at him, quickly assessing his condition. "Wait here. I am going to find Narcissa and have her take you home. Since there is a chance of wounded arriving at the manor, I think we need to keep her there, just in case."

Dan nodded wearily and closed his eyes for a moment.

Melinda took a few steps away from him and took a deep breath. "Dilly," she called.

Dilly appeared with a pop, looking up at Melinda happily.

"Dilly, I need you to find Arthur. Tell him Ginny has been badly injured," she told the elf.

Dilly's ears drooped and she nodded, then vanished again. With that task done, Melinda went to find Narcissa.

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### **Draco and Luna (1030 hours, April 10th)...**

He never knew what caused him to turn, grab Luna and throw her to the floor, but something made him do it. A second later, the curse hit him square in the back. He groaned and pitched to his knees, then fell face down.

The world tilted crazily for him. He was looking at things sideways. Luna was slowly climbing to her feet, looking upset and angry. He looked behind her and could see the silhouette of one of his people coming closer, so he wasn't worried. He was in a lot of pain, but hadn't lost consciousness. He figured he wasn't hurt too bad.

Luna turned to say something to Draco and she spotted him laying on the ground. She blinked as if she didn't understand what had happened, then reached for Fuzz, but she had disappeared when Draco threw Luna to the ground.

She took a step and the shape behind her lunged out and grabbed her around the neck, pressing a wand to her temple.

"Well, I never expected to be so lucky," hissed a familiar voice.

Draco's eyes widened. He knew that voice intimately.

Struggling, he climbed to his feet, trying to ignore the waves of pain radiating from his lower back.

"Drop the wand, boy," hissed Lucius Malfoy. "You two are going to be my ticket out of here alive. Once we're out, I'll kill you like I should have years ago."

Draco swayed and let his wand slip through numb fingers.

"Ah, so this bitch means something to you, does she?" Lucius said, then he roughly groped one of Luna's breasts.

Luna made a whimpering sound, then stiffened. Her eyes flashed with power. A strong wind kicked up, blowing dirt and dust in Lucius' eyes. Like so many times in the past, creatures of all shapes and sizes started popping into existence all around them.

Lucius howled in pain and released Luna as a venomous, eight toed monkey lizard bit into his ankle. Luna fell to one side, clearing Lucius of any cover.

That was all Draco needed. Wandless, he instead drew his pistol and shot Lucius four times in the stomach.

Lucius fell backwards. Hitting the wall, he slid down it to the ground. He peered up at his son. "I knew you had it in you to be a killer," he whispered with a smile. "Now take the bitch, you won her," he said with a cough. A tickle of blood slid down his face from the corner of his mouth and he groaned in pain.

Draco staggered up to his father. "You are a sick son of a bitch. And if you live through this and touch my wife again, I will rip you to shreds."

Malfoy's eyes widened at his statement.

Draco turned and bent down to scoop up Lucius' wand and his own. Luna stood nearby, her body glowing, surrounded by all manner of odd looking creatures. Draco swayed as he walked towards her. She stopped him with a hand.

She looked around at the creatures for a moment. "Go, feast on those dressed in black," she said, then giggled. Next to her, a little green man with a horn in the center of his forehead gestured rudely in Malfoy's direction.

Lucius seemed to be in a state of shock. He watched his estranged son reach for his wife, a woman of incredible power, who commanded nature herself. *What a son I have*, he thought. It was the last thought he ever had.

The wind Luna had created whipped around inside the walls, slowly increasing in speed and power. The creatures dispersed into the darkness, hunting.

Draco pulled Luna over to the wall and pushed her down for the second time in less than four minutes. This time, however, he was trying to protect her from the wind. It howled and whipped around inside the walls, tearing great rents in the darkness.

Puffs of blackness rose above the walls, where they vanished, having left the field of magic created by the Chosen. Luna's wind was clearing the inner courtyard!

Luna nestled uneasily against Draco's chest. The noise created by the howling wind was terrific, but she could feel the tremors vibrating through Draco's frame, and through their bond she could feel his increasing disorientation. She wrapped her arms around him, then pulled one away when she put it into something wet. She pulled her hand back and stared. It was blood, her mate's blood!

Luna's aura flared again and a large creature that looked like a cross between an hippo and a crocodile lumbered into view. The creature backed up against the wall and laid down, immediately creating a wind break for the pair. With the wind blocked, the strain on Draco lessened and he slumped into her arms. A second later, his medallion activated, pulling both of them out of Hogwarts and out of the battle.

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### **Neville Longbottom (1030 hours, April 10th)...**

Neville fought like a madman, convinced that Ginny was gone. He fought like a man with nothing to left to lose. He had taken several injuries already but kept going. So far, he had managed to put down six of the Chosen, and twenty Death Eaters.

A vicious wind had begun to blow. He knew it wasn't natural, but it was making everyone's life in the courtyard difficult. The wind was tearing away the darkness, but it carried a bite of it's own with all the dust and small debris it carried.

Neville crouched down behind a large rock. He was down to only three rounds in his pistol, and his wand, of course.

He was hunting. He had seen one of the Chosen heading in this direction and he was following the man, planning on putting him down like he had the others.

He peered around the large rock looking for the man.

"*Reducto!*" shouted a voice behind him.

Neville rolled, but it was too late. The curse missed him, but the explosion caught him, stunning him and throwing him nearly ten feet. When he

landed, he felt an odd snap in his wrist that he had felt once before.

He had broken his wand hand.

Groggily, he reached for his pistol, only to find the holster empty. The gun had been blown out of the holster when he was thrown.

A shadow fell across him and he looked up into the face of his killer. The man he had been stalking, one of the Chosen. Around them the wind began to fade as quickly as it had started. The silence created in its aftermath was deafening.

"So, you're Longbottom, one of Potter's inner circle," commented the man. "I want to thank you before I kill you."

Neville looked at the man incredulously.

"Yeah, I know it's strange. But you killed off my competition. Most of my so called 'brothers' are dead now, thanks to your efforts. That puts me in the prime position to become my Master's right hand man. So you see, I do have reason to thank you."

"You're welcome," Neville said sarcastically.

The man raised an eyebrow at him. "Oh, don't be bitter, boy. As a way of thanking you, I am going to make it quick and painless. Well, maybe not painless. No one I know of has lived long enough to tell me whether a killing curse is painless or not."

The man lifted his wand, pointing it right at Neville's chest. Neville closed his eyes, accepting his fate. *I'm coming, my Ginny*, he thought.

A buzzing sound distracted them both. The ground about twenty feet away fountained upwards and the Chosen turned to face the oncoming threat. His brow creased with puzzlement when he saw nothing to explain the torn earth.

"WHIRRRRRRRRR," roared Fuzz.

Suddenly, the fountain of dirt closed on the Chosen at incredible speed. The man screamed once, then went down in a shower of blood and flesh, ripped apart by an angry Snorkack who had become separated from her mistress.

Neville laid his head back on the ground, wondering if he should be relieved or disappointed. He closed his eyes against the pain that throbbed through him. His arm hurt and his back felt like it was on fire. Now that the adrenalin was flushing from his system, his body was checking in with waves of pain, letting him know he was not alright. He didn't care anymore, he was tired and wanted only to be with Ginny.

He felt a small weight climb onto his chest, so he opened one eye.

"Meep Whirr?" asked Fuzz softly.

"I don't know, girl," he whispered, then his eyes closed and his body relaxed into unconsciousness. His medallion activated, sending him back to Haven.

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### **Brigade Command Post (1030 hours, April 10th)...**

"Brigade Command Two to Delta Six Actual. Come in Delta Six actual," said a short man, hovering over the floo.

Nearby, Hermione stood and watched with a worried expression. She had lost contact with Neville, then Draco. She still had contact with their seconds, and contact with Harry and Remus, but she had no clue what had happened to the others.

*"I still can't reach either of them, Harry. All I know is that they were last seen in the courtyard,"* she sent worriedly.

*"Alright, I'll see if I can find them. What have you heard from General Stanton?"* he replied.

*"He says they're starting to mop up out there. He estimates that only a few hundred Death Eaters might be alive. His units are tightening the ring around them. In the meantime, Felicia says the Raiders and what's left of Delta company have plugged the hole. Nothing is getting in or out."*

*"Well, that's something, at least. Inform Haven that, except for the Death Eaters in the courtyard, we may be coming down to the end here."*

*"What about Voldemort?"*

She waited for a reply. She could feel him considering the question.

*"He's got to be in here somewhere. I'm looking for him, too,"* he replied coldly.

She shivered. She knew he wasn't mad at her, but he was directing his anger and concern for his friends into his fight for their lives. She hadn't wanted to say anything, but since they arrived early this morning, the power behind his mental voice had been steadily increasing. Everything was coming together and it filled her with a little bit of awe and a whole lot of fear. She carefully hid her fears behind her occlumency shields, but every time she had a free minute, a single thought ran through her mind over and over again: *"And either must die at the hand of the other for neither can live while the other survives"*

It terrified her right down to her soul. She swore to herself that, if they survived this day, she was going to take her husband into their bedroom and do everything in her power to make this day seem like a bad dream for both of them.

"Be careful, my love," she whispered aloud, while her mind echoed it to Harry.

Harry replied by opening their bond wider and sending his feelings for her back down the link, then he turned and looked around him. He still had work to do.

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### **Haven Operations Center, War Room Observation deck (1030 hours, April 10th)...**

Dilly appeared with a small pop next to Arthur Weasley.

Arthur looked at the little elf in surprise. "Dilly? You shouldn't be here. What's wrong?"

"Mister Minister man, Melinda says you do be coming now to the hospital. Little Red do be hurts real bad. Melinda says you should not be dawdling, it be too important," Dilly said.

"Little Red?" asked Amelia in a worried tone.

"My daughter, Ginny," Arthur said in a strangled voice. He stood and looked around wildly, torn between his desire to help here and his need to be with his Ginny. He turned to Amelia, ready, if necessary, to resign on the spot.

Amelia frowned for a moment, then made her decision. "Go, Arthur. Don't wait here. We can get along without you. When you can, come back or send word, alright?"

Arthur looked at her gratefully. "Thank you, Amelia," he said, before turning to Dilly. "Tell Melinda I'm swinging by my house to pick up my sons. We'll meet her in the lobby of the hospital."

Dilly nodded, then vanished from the room.

Arthur hurried over to the door that led to a set of stairs down to the war room itself. He took the stairs and ignored the looks people were giving him. He stepped over Fred and George who had sat quietly since early morning, along with their fiancées.

The boys looked up at their approaching father and noted his grim, almost haggard look. All thoughts of jokes and pranks disappeared.

"Boys," Arthur said quietly, "your sister has been badly injured. She's at the hospital right now. I'm going home to pick up Bill and Charlie, then I'm going to meet with Melinda in the hospital lobby. Do you want to come with me?"

Fred and George paled and stood. "We'll come with you Dad," said Fred. George nodded in agreement.

"Fred, give me your house keys," Inga said softly.

Fred looked at her curiously and she sighed. "Look, none of you are going to be interested in coming home and cooking tonight. Helga and I will get Mama. We'll make sure there's a nice hot meal waiting when you get home."

Fred nodded, handing over the keys and Arthur gave the girls a grateful look.

The two girls kissed their respective future husbands and watched for a moment as they rushed out of the room, heading to the Operations Center apparation point.

"Go home and get Mama, Helga. I'll go to the boy's place," Inga said softly. Both girls were terribly worried. They loved Ginny like a sister and knew just exactly how much the twins loved her. Ginny was the baby of the family, the only girl, and the glue that pulled them all together, holding them together as a family. Without Ginny, it was doubtful that the Weasleys would have survived as a family when Britain fell, and they all knew that.

---

### **Padfoot Manor (1030 hours, April 10th)...**

Narcissa conjured a couch for herself, Dan and Emma. They sat anxiously, just outside the portkey receiving room in the manor. Earlier, Emma had explained the problem to Susan, Jenny and John Boot. Susan immediately offered to get out of bed, but Emma convinced her to stay. The three of them would take care of things, with help from the elves.

Narcissa had brought Emily Watkins home. She was a third year student at St. Luke's School of Healing Arts. Although Narcissa was not a fully qualified healer as yet, she had mastered several aspects of the arts and was very close to receiving her mastery in healing. As a result, she was allowed to bring along Emily as a helper, should the need arise.

They hadn't been seated more than a few minutes when the alarm sounded. Narcissa bounced out of her chair, her bag of healing potions gripped tightly in her hand.

The four clustered around the doorway, waiting for the incoming person to arrive. Suddenly there was a whooshing sound of the incoming portkey.

Luna and Draco appeared on the floor. Luna was kneeling and Draco was leaning up against her, unconscious and bleeding heavily from several holes in his back.

"Dray," Luna said through her tears. She looked up at Narcissa, pleading with the older woman. "Help him, please, Mum. I can't feel him anymore."



Narcissa rushed forward, kneeling next to the pair. In the background, the medical alarm wailed in the manor.

Narcissa pulled her wand and used it to cut away his shirt. "Emily, pull out two blood replenisher potions from my kit, and get me several self sealing bandages."

Dan watched for a moment, then he pulled out his wand and conjured a camp cot. He stepped back, inordinately pleased with himself for such a difficult conjuration. Emma smiled at her husband's efforts, then she walked around Narcissa and her helper. She gently pulled Luna away from them, standing her up and walking her to the door. Luna tried to stay; she didn't want to leave her husband.

"He saved me, twice. He pulled me down and took a spell that would have hit me, then he killed his father when he threatened me," Luna said in a trembling voice.

Narcissa paused for a moment, hearing that Lucius was dead, then she went back to treating Draco. She was relieved to see that Draco's wounds, while serious, had not damaged any internal organs. She was able to close up the wounds and set him up with an IV drip for his the blood replenisher. Normally, the potion worked best when ingested, but an IV could be used if the patient was unable to drink.

Narcissa and the student levitated Draco to the cot, then they moved the cot into the corridor, in case another portkey emergency arrived.

"Luna, sweetie," Narcissa said, enfolding the younger witch in a hug. "Draco is unconscious, but he's going to be alright. He lost a lot of blood and the next few days are going to be very painful for him, but he's no longer in any danger."

Luna looked at her mother-in-law, the gratitude written all over her face. She was about to say something when the incoming portkey alarm rang again. Dan, Emma and Narcissa grimaced and turned to face the room, wondering what injuries they would have to deal with this time.

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### **Tom and Harry (1040 hours, April 10th)...**

Voldemort had become separated from his Chosen and the other Death Eaters when the darkness descended in the courtyard. He could see in the darkness, but his followers couldn't, and the attacks from all sides slowly reduced those following him until he was alone.

He was heading towards the back of the castle. There were fewer British troops manning the walls and less spell fire to worry about back there. He also knew that there was an unblocked passageway that would allow him to enter the castle.

His plan fell apart when a strange wind blew most of the darkness away. He now found himself pinned down behind a pile of rocks, held there by a near constant barrage of spellfire from the people on the walls.

Suddenly, a voice rang out. "CEASE FIRE! CHECK FIRE! CHECK FIRE!"

The noise of the spells being cast or hitting the castle walls behind him slowly stopped and a sullen silence descended into the courtyard.

"You know, Tom, I expected to find you, but I thought you would have gotten over your cowering phase," said a hated voice.

"Potter," Voldemort snarled, as he stood up to face his enemy.

"Look around you, Tom. Appropriate, don't you think?"

Voldemort looked around, realizing he stood in the castle graveyard.

"You came back to life in a graveyard, now you'll lose it in one," Harry said quietly. He stood poised and ready. He had cast his leg strengthening spell just before he called off the troops. Voldemort was trapped, only he didn't know it.

The ghosts had given them a detailed map of the castle. The passageway Voldemort had been heading for had been collapsed earlier. He couldn't apparate and there was no other way out.

"This is where you will meet your end, boy," Voldemort said with a sneer. He was surprised to see Harry holding only a wand. *Maybe Potter isn't as powerful as I am*, he thought to himself gleefully. He leveled his scepter. "AVADA KEDAVRA!" he shouted.

A thick pulse of sickly green light shot out from the end of the scepter and arced across the graveyard, striking Harry squarely in the chest. A scream of dismay came from the ever growing crowd atop the defensive walls, as people hurried to watch.

Harry flinched and patted quickly at his shirt, which was smoking. "Damn, that stings," he said in a voice loud enough to be heard by the onlookers.

The troops atop the wall were in awe at what they had just witnessed. The legend of Harry Potter, in that very instant, assumed epic proportions.

Voldemort stared at him in shock and more than a little fear.

Harry looked up from his shirt and smirked at his enemy's confusion. "Basics of Wand Making 101, Tom. Why can't a blood wand be used by a wizard to commit suicide using the killing curse?"

Voldemort stepped back for a moment, thinking. Then his eyes widened. "Because the wand recognizes the blood as coming from the wizard and reduces the power below a killing point," he replied. "But that means..."

My blood was mixed with yours during your resurrection. Therefore, you have my blood in that scepter of yours. But let me show you what my staff can do," Harry replied. His 'wand' immediately expanded to full size.

Voldemort's eyes widened seeing Harry's staff with the brightly glowing emerald at one end.

"Cruor vas praemium," Harry said softly.

A blue-yellow beam arced from the emerald of his staff and Voldemort dived out of the way. He recognized the spell as one that would crush blood vessels, ceasing all blood flow in a body. The spell, which should have had no effect on anything non-living, hit a headstone. It exploded, spraying Voldemort with marble chips.

The Dark Lord rolled and came up behind another headstone. He knew he couldn't rely on the killing curse, but that was fine in his book. He'd take Potter apart one piece at a time.

He popped up and aimed his scepter at Harry. "Exuro per liquidus incendia!"

A stream of boiling white liquid flew from his scepter, Harry ducked, while Voldemort tried to direct the stream, following Harry. Wherever the liquid touched, the area began to smoke and sizzle.

Harry ran. As he did, he pointed his staff and shouted, "Solacium ut calx"

The spell clipped Voldemort in the hip. He screamed and quickly cast a counter curse to halt the progression of the spell that was turning his bones to stone. He limped to another headstone.

Given a brief respite, Harry popped up from behind a headstone. "*Reducto!*"

Voldemort cast a shield, but Harry's spell crashed into it and obliterated it. Unfortunately, the spell lost most of its energy to Voldemort's shield. What remained to hit the dark wizard was barely enough to open a gash in his shoulder.

Blood ran down Voldemort's robe, infuriating him.

Voldemort looked at Harry in shock and anger. First blood had gone to Potter, and the brat dared to smirk at him!

"CAECUS POENA!" shouted Voldemort. It was an older version of the modern Cruciatus curse, and not nearly as powerful. He wanted to torment the boy before slaying him. Given his current power levels, the old curse was every bit as painful as the Cruciatus curse was.

The movement and casting had been so sudden and so unexpected, that Harry didn't have time to dodge. He fell to the ground, screaming, muscles and bones straining to the breaking point.

Pain exploded up his bond to Hermione and she cried out before crumpling to the floor of the Great Hall. Several people rushed to help her.

She threw up all of her occlumency shields. "*Harry,*" she whimpered across the bond. She realized she was only receiving a faint echo of the real spell and her heart broke, knowing what kind of pain he must be in. "*You must fight it!*"

Voldemort stood and walked toward Harry, a victorious grin on his face.

Slowly Harry pushed back the pain. Standing, his power flared and his body was surrounded by a bright glow. "NO!" he roared. The pain curse exploded back up to Voldemort and the Dark Lord flew backwards, stunned by the power. Harry's magic had not only thrown off the curse, but had amplified it many times before returning it back onto its caster in a single, blinding blast of energy.

Harry threw his staff to one side and leaped upon the stunned Dark Lord.

Grabbing Voldemort's head with both hands, Harry attacked with his legilimency. He knew what he needed to do, having planned this with Echo many times. Being stunned, the Dark Lord was unable to block Harry's assault on his shields.

Voldemort began to struggle beneath him, but Harry was delving down past the conscious mind in a searing attack that burned a wide swath of destruction in Voldemort's mind. Down he plunged, into the region controlled by the beast, the autonomic areas. Deeper and deeper Harry went, tearing and clawing his way down, looking for Voldemort's core. In the process, he tore through areas of Voldemort's mind, causing irreparable damage.

Harry could have stopped then and there, but he was beyond reason. His enemy was finally within his grasp after a lifetime of suffering at his hand. He was not only going to kill Voldemort, he was going to emasculate him, cutting him off from his magic.

Voldemort had ceased breathing. The area of his brain that controlled respiration had been destroyed. But still, Harry dug deeper and his victim's struggles grew more frantic as he tried to throw Harry off and drag air into his burning lungs.

Harry's hands shifted as Voldemort could no longer move in a coordinated manner. Somehow, Harry knew he'd destroyed that portion of his enemy's mind and his hands moved to grip his neck.

Pushing through the last barrier, Harry found Voldemort's core.

The core, the place where all beings, even muggles, centered their magic, differed only slightly. A wizard had connections from his mind to the core; a muggle did not.

Harry ripped through these connections savagely and Voldemort stiffened beneath him. It was Voldemort's magic that was sustaining his resurrected body and Harry was cutting off the sustaining magic at the source.

Voldemort gave a choking gasp and his body went rigid. The light of hatred burned in his eyes and he glared at the enemy he so despised. Then, with a gurgling sigh, the light in his eyes began to fade quickly and he went limp.

Harry slowly eased up on the pressure, coming to the realization that he was throttling a corpse. He released his hands around Voldemort's throat and crawled off the body.

He climbed to his feet and swayed, then he felt a massive rush of energy hit him through his scar. His occlumency shields crumbled under the onslaught and he pitched to his knees, moaning in pain, the heel of his palm pressed firmly to his forehead. He dimly felt Hermione panicking and desperately trying to call him, but he couldn't reply. The pain and power continued to increase. Then, as suddenly as it started, it was over.

Harry fell to his hands and knees and crawled over to a nearby headstone. He turned and sat, leaning against it, his head pounding and his limbs shaking as if he were cold. It took him a moment to realize what had happened.

With Voldemort's death, his magical core emptied, it had used the only link it still had to the outside world - the curse scar. Harry's core had expanded to absorb as much of the energy as it could before it bled the rest away in a bright aura and near blinding pain. He shuddered when he realized that he was stronger than he'd ever been, a lot stronger. It was almost enough to make him laugh. The last thing he needed was more power!

Those on the wall were stunned silent. They had watched the vicious duel in silence, not understanding what had transpired. The power flowing off Harry at the end was enough to cause people to stagger back.

When it finally began to dawn on people exactly what they had witnessed, they turned to the neighbors and smiled or slapped each other on the back. Then, from the crowd, a cry when out.

"Voldemort is dead!"

The cheer spread around the wall like a brush fire under a stiff wind.

Their master's death resulted in a stunning blow for most of the surviving Death Eaters. A pulse of magic erupted from their dark marks, causing most to drop to their knees in pain. The Brigade and the Raiders took advantage of the opportunity and moved among them, disarming and binding them all.

Outside the wall, the Americans turned a blind eye to the fact that the Acromantulas were darting out of the forest and grabbing the stunned Death Eaters, only to pull them back into the forest and their deaths.

*"Inform Haven Command that it's done. Voldemort is dead."* he sent to Hermione in an exhausted mental voice.

*"Are you alright? You don't sound too good,"* Hermione said in a meek tone.

*"I'm tired, but I think I'm fine. Right now, I think I'd like nothing better than to crawl into your arms and let you hold me while I slept."*

*"Tonight, beloved, I promise. I'll pass the news along to Caleb. I'll see you soon,"* she said. The bond then narrowed as she went about her job.

Harry slumped against a headstone not far from where Voldemort lay, breathing heavily and not quite understanding what he had accomplished. He placed his arms around his knees and rested his head atop them.

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### **Haven Operations Center, War Room (1050 hours, April 10th)...**

"Stand by one," said the woman, then she turned to Caleb.

"Sir, Brigade Command Two is requesting to speak to you," she said.

Caleb frowned. The news for the past hour had been mixed, at best. Several commanders were missing, and a large number of Death Eaters had managed to get in to the castle grounds. On the plus side, the bulk of the force had been surrounded and annihilated. Voldemort's army no longer existed.

Caleb stood and reached for the floo. He glanced worriedly at Amelia in the observation deck. She leaned forward, anxious to hear what Hermione had to say.

"Brigade Command Two, Haven Six Actual. Go ahead."

"Haven Six Actual, Brigade Command Two. Brigade Six has killed Voldemort. Repeat, the Dark Lord is dead. The remaining Death Eaters are milling around in confusion." said Hermione in the tinny voice the portable floos gave everyone.

Caleb swayed. He grabbed hold of the edge of the table and looked around wildly. The room had descended into shocked silence, with everyone staring at him.

"Haven Six Actual, do you copy?" said the floo again.

With a shaking hand, he lifted the small boxed flame. "Brigade Command Two, Haven Six actual, acknowledged. Voldemort is dead. Say your status."

"Haven Six, we're mopping up the inner courtyard now. Request you send the medical teams through. We have a large number of wounded that cannot survive a portkey."

Caleb looked up. "Get that medical unit moving now!" he barked, then he turned to Group Captain Anderson. "You might want to tell your people, Group Captain, that they can initiate Downfall anytime they want."

Anderson grinned wolfishly and turned to his radios.

Everyone in the war room was grinning as though Christmas had come early. Caleb frowned. There was still a lot of work to do.

"Listen up, people. We've come a long way and we've done a good job, but we have a lot of hurt people to help now. So, focus on your jobs and let's get things going."

Caleb glanced up at the board.

*Wounded 1021*

*Killed 292*

*Missing 47*

He sighed. Those numbers didn't include those killed in action and not sent back via portkey yet. He turned and went for another cup of coffee. The day wasn't over.

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### **Hogwarts Castle (1100 hours, April 10th)...**

"Harry?" Hermione sent in a worried tone. She could feel him via their bond, and what she felt scared her. His emotions flitted quickly from one to another, as if he didn't know what to feel.

"Yeah?"

She winced. Even his mental voice trembled from the aftereffects of the pain curse. *"Don't move. I've contacted Haven and passed the word on, and I've talked to General Stanton. It's beginning to look like we're going to have very few prisoners to deal with. We have about a hundred who were inside the walls. But according to General Stanton, the acromantulas got most of those outside the walls."*

*"I've had to report Draco, Luna, Neville and Ginny as missing. No one has seen them since the darkness descended in the courtyard. Now that the fighting is over, I'm letting my second take over here for a little bit. I'm coming to you."*

"But..."

*"No! I'm already half way there, so for once, don't argue with me,"* she replied firmly. *"I'm not coming alone, so you don't have to worry about me stumbling on a stray Death Eater."*

Harry nodded a little to himself, not really able to work up the energy to reply to her. She could feel him via the bond, so he didn't really have to reply.

He looked over at the body of his lifelong enemy. Voldemort lay, eyes staring upwards with an expression of outrage on his face, almost as if he couldn't understand what had happened. Harry could sympathize. He wasn't really sure what happened either. One moment he was dueling with the man, the next he had his hands around his neck and was attacking him via legilimency.

It had been a method that he and Eocho had discussed many times. He still wasn't sure that Eocho was right about Voldemort's body being powered by his magic. Eocho was sure that the body, being an artificial construct, had to have a direct connection to Voldemort's magical core.

*It doesn't really matter, does it?* he asked himself. *I killed him finally. I avenged Mum, Dad, Cedric, Sirius and all those countless others whose names I'll never know. Merlin, I'm tired. Voldemort has been a part of my life since I was fifteen months old. I know what I told the others, but do I really believe it? Peace, family, friends? Is that enough? Is there more? Why am I asking myself these questions when I'm too tired to care?*

He sighed and fought the urge to sleep.

"Harry?" said a familiar voice softly.

He lifted his head and peered into Hermione eyes.

She was a little alarmed by his appearance. Kneeling on his other side was Sam, the American healer attached to one of their medical units.

"Hi there," he said tiredly.

Sam ran a wand over him, assessing his condition, then he reached for his bag. "We're going to fix you right up, Colonel," he said with a smile. "You just need to take a few potions I have for you and you should start feeling better. You're exhibiting all the effects of a Cruciatus curse, although I've been told it wasn't what was used on you. Let's try an anti-Cruciatus potion first and see how well that works."

Harry nodded and let Sam administer the potion, grimacing at the foul taste.

"I killed him, Hermione. Why does it feel different than any other person I've killed?" he asked plaintively.

"And now an energy restorer, Colonel," Sam said soothingly.

"I don't know, Harry," Hermione replied softly. "But we'll figure it out."

Harry nodded, a little stronger than before.

"Finally, Colonel, a little of this calming draught. Your nerves are all keyed up. Tonight, I am going to want you to take a dreamless sleep potion. But for now, this will help you get through the day."

Harry took a couple sips from the offered bottle, then he leaned his head back against the headstone. Sam stood and looked at the pair. "You'll be fine, Colonel. You'll ache for a few days because of the pain curse, but that's about it."

Harry peered up at Sam and smiled. He absently noted the weather was clearing and the sun was coming out. "Thank you, Sam. Please see to our other wounded."

Sam nodded and hustled off, looking for others to help.

Hermione sat next to him, looking at the body of Voldemort.

"So, what now?" she asked finally.

Harry looked at her for a moment. "Now comes the hard part. Now we have to learn how to live and to rebuild what we've lost."

Hermione grimaced. "Do we have to do that today?" she asked with a hint of a grin.

He placed his arm around her shoulders. "No, I think we can wait until tomorrow for that."

She leaned her head against his shoulder and chuckled softly. Around them, members of the Raiders and the Brigade relaxed where they could, while medical teams sent by Haven dealt with those needing help.

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### **Hogwarts, Outer Wall, Sector Charlie (1100 hours, April 10th)...**

Remus leaned against the battlement and closed his eyes for a moment. It had been a long, hard fight, especially once the Death Eaters had made it to the courtyard, then they were facing a threat from inside and outside.

Tonks sat down next to him and nudged him with a shoulder. "Hey, no being grumpy," she grumped at him. She pulled her pack and placed it between her legs, rummaging through it.

"What's the word? And I'll have you know I'm not being grumpy. This is my tired face. I left my grumpy face back at the manor," he replied.

Tonks pulled a small box out of her pack and looked at it happily. "AH HA! I knew I packed it!" she exclaimed, then she looked at him. "Major Howard has the Shamans cleaning up the courtyard and locking up any live Death Eaters. So far, they've taken nearly a hundred prisoner. The Broomsticks have been tasked with cleaning up in front of the walls. They're looking to find all the traps that we laid down and any unexploded ordinance.

"Hermione is with Harry, who, despite the best efforts of a now dead Dark Lord, is very much alive and mostly whole. He was on the receiving end of one very nasty curse similar to the Cruciatus. Outside of exhaustion, which I think most of us are suffering from, he's fine and Voldemort is doing a marvelous job of playing the corpse," she said with a grin.

She paused for a moment and her grin faded. "Draco, Luna, Neville and Ginny are among the missing. No one's heard from them since the breach. I've detailed several squads to check the courtyard. They are looking through the rubble by the wall and checking bodies. I don't want to guess at the number of wounded and dead we have. If Charlie company is an example, then the number is going to be painfully high.

"That's the bad news. The good news is, we won," she concluded as she expanded the box until it became a small crate. She banished the lid and reached in, pulling out a bottle of champagne. Handing it to Remus, she pulled out another bottle for herself.

Remus grinned as he worked the cork out and took a drink from the bottle before passing it to the man next to him, who accepted it gratefully. Tonks took a drink from her bottle, then she passed it the other way.

"Good news for the most part. I'm just sorry we can't get back to Haven to see how the others are doing," he said softly.

"So, what do we do now?" she asked, reaching for another bottle.

Remus smiled broadly.

She looked at him and nudged his shoulder with her own again. "What?"

"I know what I'm going to do now that this is over," he said softly.

"What?" she asked again, starting to get annoyed.

"I'm going to cancel all those contraceptive charms we've been using 'just in case'. And then I'm going to do my best to see if the healers were wrong about werewolves being sterile," he said with a smile.

Tonks' mouth dropped open and she stared at him. "Do you really mean that?" she asked in a squeaky voice.

He turned to look at her. "If you want to, then yes, I do."

She cuddled into his arm, sharing her bottle with him. "I'd like that. I'd like that very much," she said softly.

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### Authors Notes:

(Takes a deep breath and smiles at the readers) Well, wasn't that fun? Maybe not for Voldemort and his little munchkins, but that's not really the point.

As always, on with the AN!

igotbannedfroma2k: As so many of our readers informed us, the video clip was called Boundin' and it's on The Incredibles DVD.

FiskyPixie: Yes, Harry did heal himself of a relatively minor wound. His knowledge of the healing arts, however, does not extend to muscle and nerve regeneration or vascular structures and repair. We know your question was probably just idle curiosity, but both Bob and I have been rather surprised by how many people just can't accept a hero with a physical limitation. As everyone has now seen, Harry's leg did not slow him down when it came to the final battle, so all those worry warts can now settle down and take a deep breath. And no, we still won't fix his leg! (Evil cackle)

We were surprised by the number of people who liked the conversation between Alim and Harry about God. We're glad you all liked it. And for those who asked, sure, you can repeat it if you want. It's been used in many things and certainly doesn't belong to us.

Fenris Ulf: You're scary. You realize that, don't you? (Grin)

heart\_bloodline: Phone conversations? Have you been tapping my phone line? Oh, and the "normal" disclaimers are all Bob's fault. We're hoping you'll be able to catch this chapter before you head out. If you do, and you're reading this, good luck and stay safe!

Dr.T: We were telling o.T. to check his meds, not you. Sorry for any confusion.

DizzyG: We thought that was obvious by now. Fawkes left Dumbledore because the man was clearly crackers. While not "evil" in the typical sense, he was too dark for any self respecting phoenix to want to stick around. The whole thing took place just before we started Sunset...sort of an off-camera thing that was mentioned in passing to give those around the old nut job a wake-up call.

Meg: Ask and you shall receive (sometimes!). Hope you enjoyed the chapter.

shadowtrey: No worries, your ladies didn't die. Oh, and thanks for reviewing. When readers stay silent, we don't have a chance to get to know them.

Princess Fictoria: Bob ate the flowers, scratched and sniffed at the milk, and shared the cookies with the cats. I think I need to talk to the doctor about his meds again. (Grin)

mike: There are several things "wrong" with us, and you should be thankful (assuming you enjoy the story, anyway). If we weren't twisted, this story and the others we've written never would have happened. (Manic giggle)

Tracey: Actually, that line, or one very similar, has been used in many things. The Stand and Fiddler on the Roof are two that come to mind off hand. As for the coming chapters, we're hoping to tie up plot points and maybe show a bit of the future. We'll see how it all works out.

That's it for now, folks. A short AN for a long chapter. For those who asked, Bob's doing much better. The doctor is talking about putting him on the oral meds if his numbers continue as they have been. Thanks for all your good wishes. We really appreciate them!

The story is winding down now and we're planning on two more chapters to wrap up, though it might go to three, depending on length. We hope you enjoyed the chapter!

~Alyx and Bob~

*Bobmin*  
*FanficAuthors.net*

# Sunrise Over Britain

## Chapter 31 - A New Day

### Standard Disclaimer:

The curtain opened on the stage and from one side came Alan Rickman, leading a shetland pony and a midget dressed in a cowboy costume. Rickman looked bewildered, but determined. The midget looked strangely like Professor Flitwick.

Rickman stopped center stage and bowed to the audience. Behind him, a backdrop of a space scene appeared, showing the Battlestar Galactica and the Death Star.

A heavy breathing sound came from offstage and Rickman suddenly looked nervous.

"The authors of this story wish for me to tell everyone that they do not own any rights to Harry Potter or the Harry Potter Universe," he said in a trembling voice.

Darth Vader, wearing a pink tutu, stepped onto the stage. He pulled out his light saber and activated it. It glowed a shockingly fluorescent pink.

Rickman eyed Vader warily. "Furthermore the authors want everyone to know that they make no claims to Harry Potter, nor are receiving any monies for writing this tale."

Behind him, a line of barely dressed Vegas showgirls started high kicking. Vader approached Rickman, raising his saber for a killing blow.

"BOB!" shouted Alyx.

Bob started awake and looked around wildly. "huh? What?"

"You're dreaming again! You're supposed to be writing a disclaimer!"

"Oh," replied Bob sheepishly, then he thought about the sheep from Boundin' and he giggled.

Alyx walked off stage muttering about turning Bob in on a new model husband, maybe this time she'd get lucky and get one that was sane.

He watched her walk off stage, admiring her butt, then he sat down with a frown. "You know, I can't think of anything to write as a disclaimer!"

Hermione turned to Harry. "Do you guys really dream about that kind of stuff?"

"Most of the time," Harry said with a shrug. "Except for that time I had a dream about you, a gallon of ice cream and a walrus. That was strange."

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### Sunrise over Britain

#### Chapter 31

#### Minister of Magic, Haven (1100 hours, April 10th)...

The music suddenly stopped and there was a moment of silence.

"We interrupt this broadcast for a special bulletin from the office of the Minister of Magic. Less than half an hour ago, Harry Potter met and defeated the dark wizard known as Lord Voldemort in battle around Hogwarts Castle. We repeat, Lord Voldemort is dead.

"The Ministry further announced that British forces, in conjunction with allied nations, have defeated Lord Voldemort's army in a titanic battle around the former school in northern Scotland. Minister Bones released a very brief statement confirming that a large scale battle had taken place involving thousands of wizards on both sides.

"The Ministry press office announced that they would be issuing a formal statement later in the day. They also announced that they would be issuing instructions for all wizards and witches still living in Britain at this time. In the meantime, observers in Haven report intense activity at Haven Hospital, suggesting that a large number of casualties were received by the hospital.

"The British Wizarding Wireless network will continue to monitor and report on the situation as we obtain more information. And now, back to our show."

The news, first broadcast by the British wireless, was quickly picked up by several wire services. Soon the message would spread around the world.

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#### Haven Operations Center, War Room (1130 hours, April 10th)...

Amelia accepted Miles' offer of handling the allied representatives; she had other things to do. Important things. Once Miles had led them from the Observation deck she stood up and walked over to the door that led down to the war room.



Caleb saw Amelia descending the stairs and turned to Terry. "Be back here in two hours, three tops," he said, smiling.

Terry blinked in surprise, then flashed a quick grin and made a mad dash for the door.

Caleb chuckled. He walked over to Amelia and bowed slightly. "Madam Minister, I am pleased to report that your troops have led us to victory this day."

Amelia smiled with amusement at his formal tone, but she was working very hard to control her own reactions. Part of her felt like crowing with joy, and another part felt like she should crawl into a corner and have a good cry.

The one thing no one could ignore was the board on the wall with the numbers of wounded and killed on it. Those numbers continued to rise as bodies were found, or wounded lost their fight to live.

*Wounded 1037*

*Killed 312*

*Missing 21*

One of the women looked up from her floor and called to Caleb. "Sir, General Stanton is requesting that we begin relocating part of Camp Outhouse to the Hogwarts grounds. He'd like to start standing down parts of his command."

"Have the medical units completed their transfer yet?" he asked.

"Yes, sir, nearly thirty minutes ago."

"Very well. Tell General Stanton he may begin the transfer of the camp," he replied.

"Has there been any word from Colonel Potter?"

"Only indirectly, sir. Colonel Walsh witnessed his duel with V-V-Voldemort and reported him to be exhausted. While technically he's uninjured, she suggested we consider him incapacitated for the day," replied another woman.

Caleb frowned. "That's all very well, but remind Brigade Command that just because their Colonel is down, they don't stop working. I want to talk to Brigade Two as soon as possible."

The girl frowned. "Sir, Captain Black is listed as missing. Let me see if I can get hold of Brigade Command Two. She'll know who you can talk to."

Caleb scowled. "Do that." He turned back to Amelia. "I figure you want to transfer to Hogwarts to view the scene personally. Once I've got the area declared safe, I'll have a portal sent over to send you directly to the Great Hall where the Brigade command post is."

Amelia nodded in reply. She had a statement to give to the press later today and visiting the scene would help her put things in proper perspective.

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### **Padfoot Manor (1135 hours, April 10th)...**

John grinned broadly at his son, who had just entered the large sitting room. He stood and walked over to him.

"Hi, Dad," Terry said in a soft voice. Susan was in the next room with his mother and their baby.

"Don't stop to talk to me, Terry. Get going. You've got a wife and a daughter to meet," John said, waving Terry out of the room. "We'll talk later."

Terry nodded and went to his own room, carefully opening the door to peer inside. His mother sat dozing on a nearby chair and Susan was asleep. In the bassinet was a small blanket wrapped object that he assumed was his daughter. Every so often the blanket would move a little.

He walked over to the bassinet and stared down at the very little person. Siomha blinked her eyes and yawned at her father. Apparently, she was finding her birthday pretty boring. He bent over, looking intently at his daughter and performing a ritual that has been performed by fathers since the dawn of time. He counted. He counted her eyes, ears, fingers, making sure every part was where it was supposed to be and in the correct quantity.

"You don't have to do that, you know."

He looked up to see his mother smiling at him. "She has all the right parts." He brow creased in puzzlement. "How did you know what I was doing?"

"Your father counted all your parts when you were born. Said he wanted to make sure I did the job right," his mother replied with a bit of a smile.

"I thought I heard Terry," Susan said sleepily.

He turned to his wife and moved to the bed. "Hey, how are you feeling?"

She smiled up at him. "Sore, and a lot smaller," she replied. "Have you meet our daughter yet?"

He knelt by the edge of the bed. "Yes. She's beautiful, like I knew she would be, just like her mother." He lifted her hand, turned it over and gently kissed the palm.

Susan smiled, then her eyes narrowed. "What are you doing home? Shouldn't you be helping Caleb?"

Jenny Boot moved a little closer to the bed after checking on Siomha. Her daughter-in-law's question piqued her curiosity.

Terry looked between the two. "Caleb told me to come see you. He gave me three hours off."

As that moment, Narcissa walked into the room, followed by her helper. She stopped, seeing Terry.

"Terry? What are you doing here? I thought you were helping Caleb?" Narcissa said, repeating Susan's question.

Terry shook his head. "Hasn't anyone listened to the wireless in the past hour or two?" he asked in exasperation.

"Hello? I gave birth to a baby today. I haven't exactly been interested in listening to music." Susan said with some heat.

Terry grinned. "Well, let me be the first to tell you then," he said, then he turned to Jenny. "Mum, would you bring Dad and the Grangers in, please?"

Jenny hurried from the room, returning a few minutes later with her husband and the Grangers.

Terry squeezed Susan's hand gently. "Less than an hour ago, while our forces were destroying Voldemort's army of Death Eaters, Harry dueled with Voldemort and killed him," he said. Seeing the expressions of those in the room, he held up his hand in a bid for patience. "I don't have any real details, except to say the cost was high. We have received over a thousand wounded, and nearly three hundred killed. Last I heard, Draco and Neville were listed as missing. We haven't heard from Ginny or Luna, so I suspect they're missing also."

"No, they aren't. They're here. Well, some of them are," Dan said.

Terry looked up at him. "What?"

"Their Brotherhood medallions, Terry," Emma said quietly. "Remember the portkey? Draco is in his bedroom, resting about as comfortably as he can. Luna isn't far away, I'm sure. Ginny and Neville we sent on to the hospital. Ginny was hurt badly, Neville too."

Terry stood up and excused himself for a moment. He walked over to a corner where he pulled out a portable floo to report on the locations of Draco, Neville, Luna and Ginny. When he snapped the floo closed, he turned to find everyone, even Eocho, now staring at him.

"What?" he asked.

"What about Harry and Hermione?" asked Emma in a frightened tone.

"Or Remus and Tonks?" added Dan.

Terry smiled reassuringly. "Relax. Hermione was the one who told Operations that the fighting was winding down and that Harry had killed Voldemort, so I'm pretty sure she's fine. I don't have a lot of information on Harry, except what Colonel Walsh provided. She said he had been hit with a pain curse like the Cruciatus for a while, but he shook it off and that he's exhausted from his duel."

Emma choked back a sob, then gave up and began to weep.

"Emma?" Dan asked, concerned. He turned and pulled his wife into an embrace. "What's wrong Em?"

"Nothing," she managed to reply. The other women nodded knowingly, while the men looked clueless.

"Then why are you crying?" asked Dan in confusion.

Emma pulled herself out of Dan's arms and glared at him. Then, in a very Hermione like motion, she stamped her foot at him. "Why not? I've saved this up for a long time now. I didn't cry when we were forced from our home. I didn't cry when we were forced from our country. I have been saving this cry for ages and I'm going to enjoy it!" she said, then she collapsed against Dan again, letting him hold her while she wept.

Dan glanced helplessly around the room, noting the knowing smiles of the women and the looks of sympathy the men gave him. With a sigh, he steered Emma over to a love seat and sat them both down where he could wait out her emotional storm.

Narcissa smiled briefly at the pair. "I'd best go check in on Draco."

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## Hogwarts (1135 hours, April 10th)...

A not so subtle coughing caused Harry to open one eye. Standing nearby was one of Hermione's people, looking anxious.

"What's wrong?" he asked softly. Hermione was dozing against his shoulder and he didn't want to disturb her.

"Sir, Haven Command is asking to speak to Brigade Command Two," the man said, his eyes darting nervously towards the sleeping Hermione.

Harry stuck out his hand. "Give me the floo, I'll talk to him."

The man nodded, handing the small device over.

"Brigade Six Actual to Haven Six Actual, over."

Haven Six Actual, Harry is that you?" Caleb said, breaking communications protocol. Harry smirked at the little device.

"Yeah, it's me. Hermione's taking a nap. So was I until you woke us. What's so bleeding important, Caleb?"

There was a moment of silence from the floo and several people that had been guarding the Potters laughed and exchanged amused grins.

"Well, Harry, I know you're tired, but there's still work to be done," Caleb said as if he was suddenly unsure of himself. He had known for a long while that Harry would have to face Voldemort. But he was quickly coming to the realization that, in doing so, and winning, Harry was the most powerful wizard alive and not really someone to cross.

"Alright. Give me a half hour to figure out what is going on, then I'll get back to you. Brigade Six Actual out," he said, then snapped the floo closed and passed it back to the man.

Harry sighed. As much as he wanted to nap, he knew he really couldn't. He nudged Hermione and she slowly woke up.

"*Huh? What'd you wake me for?*" she sent him sleepily.

"*Caleb called to remind us we still have duties to perform,*" he replied.

"Bugger him and his duties. I was comfortable," she muttered sleepily and shook her head slightly. She was comfortable and warm, and definitely not interested in any duties, but he was right.

Harry chortled at her reaction, then he stood, slowly and painfully. He turned and offered her a hand up.

Noting his pain, she ignored his hand and stood up on her own.

"I'm going to go check the units, Hermione. I'll meet you back at the Command Post in half an hour. In the meantime, I want you to contact Haven. Have them get the camp moving, in particular the field kitchens. Let's get a hot meal into everyone while we figure out what we're doing."

She nodded and moved off in the direction of the Command Post, while he walked over to one of the wall units and took the stairs to the top.

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### **Haven Hospital (1140 hours, April 10th)...**

Melinda McKinney escorted Healer O'Donnell to the waiting Weasleys. She had set them up in a private waiting room. It was one of the few spaces in the hospital that wasn't being used for bed space at the moment.

Melinda walked over to Arthur, who stood shakily. She grabbed his arm and he looked at her with haunted eyes.

"Mr. Weasley?" asked Healer O'Donnell.

Arthur nodded and the rest of his family clustered around him, waiting to hear the news.

"Your daughter came through the surgery well enough. The bones in her left leg were shattered. We removed the fragments and have started her on a skele-grow regime. Unfortunately, we were unable to do much for her right leg and were forced to remove what remained of the leg from her knee down."

Arthur gasped. The twins clutched each other, each drawing comfort from the other, while Bill and Charlie both looked angry.

"Most of the other damage was easy to repair." At their questioning looks, she shrugged lightly. "A ruptured spleen and several other broken limbs. Perhaps later today, or more certainly, tomorrow morning, you'll be able to talk to her. I expect her to make a good recovery, but we're keeping her unconscious for the time being.

"As to the condition of her husband..."

"What? Neville's been hurt?" blurted Bill.

O'Donnell looked at them in shock. "Didn't anyone tell you?"

All of the Weasley's looked surprised by the news. Even Melinda hadn't known about it.

O'Donnell sighed and pushed a strand of graying hair behind her ear. "Mind you, I'm not the primary care Healer on his case, but I have spoken with her. I'm afraid that Mr. Longbottom's injuries, while on the surface didn't appear as bad as your daughters, were a lot worse. Mr. Longbottom has slipped into a coma. We are doing everything in our power to help him, but I'm afraid you need to be prepared for the worst."

Arthur rubbed his eyes and nodded in understanding. He knew that losing Neville would probably kill Ginny.

"Bill," he said quietly. "Go to the school. Constance is his grandmother. She needs to be here."

"I'll be back as quick as I can," Bill replied, then he hurried from the room.

Arthur turned back to O'Donnell. "Can we see her? Please?"

O'Donnell smiled gently at the man. "Of course. We have her in our private care unit. She's one of the few in a private room. Healer McKinney will escort you."

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### **Haven School of Witchcraft and Wizardry (1200 hours, April 10th)...**

Minerva looked around the large dining area with satisfaction. Her school was coming together. Despite the attack on her by Orla Quirke, she had not lost her love of teaching. In fact, many would say her attitudes towards the children had mellowed somewhat by her brush with death. She was even known to smile and laugh now.

There were fewer students at today's meal than usual. Many had volunteered when the Hospital asked for people to help with a special exercise they were running.

She thought it odd that they would run an exercise in the middle of a supposed Dragon Lung outbreak. It was proof, in her mind, that there was no outbreak. She wasn't sure what Healer August was up to, but she trusted her friend enough to allow her students to help out.

Minerva had just picked up a platter of ham to pass to Ponoma when a squeaky voice started shouting from the doorway of the hall.

"The war is over!" shouted Professor Flitwick. The little man kept shouting the news as he ran up to the staff table, which was only used on special occasions like the opening feast. He hurriedly climbed onto a chair, then the table.

A silence settled over the hall and all eyes turned to him.

"I just heard on the wireless..." he said breathlessly. "A little over an hour ago our forces defeated Voldemort's army outside of Hogwarts. Harry Potter dueled Lord Voldemort and killed him! The war is over!"

Flitwick pulled out his wand and started firing off large, multicolored sparks. Everyone turned to Minerva, who had just been handed a message by a Haven house elf. She read the message, then she stood and walked to the staff table.

A hush fell over the students. Flitwick paused in his display of firework charms, watching Minerva approach.

"Professor Flitwick is right. I have just received word from Professor Pickerton who, as you all know, serves as a consultant to the Ministry of Magical Defense. He writes, and I quote, 'Hogwarts has been retaken by the Lions of Gryffindor. The war is over.'"

Minerva beamed a wide smile at the assembled students. "Classes are canceled for today and probably tomorrow. I expect all students to behave themselves. Tonight we will have a feast to celebrate," she said with a bit of a grin. And for the first time, people would swear she had a twinkle in her eye.

The Dining hall broke out into cheers, while many of the older teachers broke down weeping. Alicia fell into Oliver's arms, crying. Oliver was still employed by the school, while he worked up the plan to build the Haven Warriors into a team they could be proud of.

Oliver, having learned his lesson the hard way, took his girlfriend's emotional storm in hand, patting her back and whispering words of comfort in her ear.

Filius Flitwick scrambled down from his spot on the staff table and went over to Ponoma Sprout. The poor woman appeared to be in a state of shock. With a look of glee on his face, Flitwick scrambled up his chair and tapped her on the shoulder. When she turned to him, he pulled her into a passionate kiss that sent most of the older students howling with wolf whistles and cat calls.

He had always wanted to do that.

Minerva watched the celebration and felt like doing a jig. It was really over! Scanning the crowd, her smile slipped when she saw Bill Weasley crouching down next to Constance. As he spoke to her, her complexion paled and her hands began to tremble.

Constance stood and said something to Bill. He nodded in reply.

Minerva walked over while Constance Longbottom hurried off. When she made to follow, Bill stopped her.

"Professor, she needs a little time," Bill said loudly, so he'd be heard over the yelling students.

"What's going on?" Minerva asked.

"Neville's been badly injured, Ginny too. Ginny will make it, but the healers aren't sure about Neville. They told us to bring his family to the the hospital," he told her.

Minerva gasped and sat down heavily on a chair. In her joy at the ending of the war, she had forgotten that it would come with a price. Bill's comment reminded her that the price of freedom was often purchased by the blood of the young.

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### **Inverness, Scotland (1200 hours, April 10th)...**

Sean McDougal felt the barrel press into the back of his head and he froze. He had been helping his friend Michael, who owned a small sail boat.

Between the two, they were able to do enough fishing to feed their families and trade for other important essentials, like milk and bread. It was a hell of a way for a man like Sean to survive, but he had children to care for.

"McDougal? Sean McDougal?" hissed a voice.

"Aye? What do yer want?"

"You're a pilot?"

"Aye, I was," he replied.

Suddenly a black hood was thrown over his head and he was picked up and carried to a vehicle.

*I'm dead, thought McDougal. Mary, forgive me. The black robes and their ilk have finally come for me.*

After about twenty minutes of driving, with a lot of starts and stops, the vehicle came to a stop and he was unceremoniously pulled from the vehicle. He stood on shaky legs. He could feel two men, one on each side of him, holding him up. Then they were walking him up a ramp.

There was a sound of machinery noises, and a loud, regular, thumping sound. The men holding him pulled off his hood and released him. He looked around wildly, then the floor tilted and someone grabbed him, steadying him. He was inside a helicopter!

He recognized some of the other men, all pilots. A man came by with a box full of headsets and helped each man put it on and plug it in. The sound of the helicopter faded.

"Good morning, gentleman," said a black man in an unfamiliar uniform.

McDougal stared at the man, spotting the American flag patch on his arm. "I'm Captain Rodue, United States Marines. You're here with us today, courtesy of Uncle Sam and your King Charles. Our destination is Task Force 626, where we will use your services as harbor pilots to pilot our invasion fleet in."

One of the harbor pilots looked out a small porthole and exclaimed. He pointed and the others clustered around the small window. In the distance, they could see the task force of over two hundred ships carrying the 1st Marine Expeditionary force, the 1st Armored Division and 4th Infantry Division.

The helicopter was flying a precise route and at a precise altitude. Any deviation from that path would have resulted in it being shot down.

The airport was already in the hands of marine recon units and 3 Scotts. Naval aircraft had been pounding Fort George since dawn. All this in preparation for an amphibious landing, followed by the heavy container ships carrying the bulk of an armored division and several aviation regiments.

Captain Rodue wouldn't give them any information, except to say that other forces of the Allied Nations were also in the field, engaging the enemy. The harbor pilots exchanged grateful glances. Their families might be worried about them for a few days, but they would come home to them.

The large Chinook helicopter maintained its precise heading and altitude. Above it, flights of ground attack fighters flew towards land. Below them, LCACs of the United States Navy were busy bringing in the men and equipment of the first Marine Expeditionary force. They were the advanced guard, the ones who would secure a toehold. The real forces wouldn't start arriving until later tonight.

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### **Padfoot Manor (1300 hours, April 10th)...**

Draco opened his eyes and bit his lip, trying to stifle a groan. He was laying on his stomach, something he hated! But he found himself in too much pain and too weak to move. He tried anyway, and knew in an instant he had made a major mistake. He had pushed up on both of his arms so that he was above the bed slightly.

His arms gave out and he fell the scant two inches he had managed to raise himself. He lay on the bed, trembling, as waves of pain pressed against his mind, threatening to overwhelm him.

"Shh... It's going to be alright, Dray," said a soothing voice. Then something was placed against his lips.

"Drink this. It's a pain relief potion."

He sucked eagerly on the straw, drinking down the foul tasting concoction. As he ingested the fluid, the pain began to drift away. He finished the potion and gave a heavy sigh of relief.

A hand brushed the hair from his eyes and he looked at Luna. Fuzz, who had returned to the manor with Neville, rested on her shoulder, whirring and looking at him with sad eyes.

"Thank Merlin you're safe," he whispered.

"I am, thanks to you, my protector," she murmured, then her expression changed and she wiped at a tear that threatened to fall. "Mum says you'll heal, but the curse that hit you lingers still, slowing the healing. She said it's going to be painful."

"Can't someone dispel it?"

She shook her head sadly. "No one knows what curse it is, so they can't try a counter curse for it. And..." She paused and dashed away some more tears.

"What's wrong?"

"I asked for them to send for Ginny so she could try neutralizing it, but she can't. She's in the hospital, badly injured. Neville too. They say he's in even worse shape," she told him.

"Harry and the others?" he asked worriedly.

"They're fine, as far as we know. Word came from Hogwarts that Harry killed Voldemort. Now you must rest. Your Mum has returned to the hospital, but she'll be back in two hours to check on you and Susan."

"Susan? How did she get hurt?"

Luna smiled gently at his confusion. "She's not hurt, Dray, she gave birth to little Siomha today. I saw them a little while ago while you were sleeping. She's fine and the baby is very nice. I think I want one."

Draco smiled and nodded in his drug induced haze, not quite understanding what he was agreeing to. "Anything you want, love."

His eyes drifted closed as the pain relief potion started to affect him more. He was nearly asleep when his eyes suddenly sprang open.

"Luna?"

"Mmmmm?" She sat not far away, humming absently to herself. She had conjured several hubcaps and was contemplating the possibilities of using one of them as a hat.

"Did I just promise to give you a baby?" he asked.

She repositioned the hubcap on her head and applied a sticking charm, then she leaned over and patted his hand. "You did, but don't worry. I think we should practice for another year or two. Besides, it's not like we can do anything now," she said disappointedly.

"It's not like I planned this," he protested.

"I know," she said, grinning at him. "But it was very Gryffindorish of you."

Draco moaned and closed his eyes in shame. He'd never live this down.

Fuzz, her eyes narrowed, stared at the hubcap with suspicion.

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### **Hogwarts Castle (1300 hours, April 10th)...**

Hermione went about her job in the Command post, ignoring the urge to find Harry, apparate to their room at Padfoot and sleep for a year. She had managed to put together a picture of the Brotherhood Brigade and it wasn't a good picture.

She also kept her link to Harry wider than usual. His pensive mood bordered on melancholy and it worried her. Part of her understood why he felt the way he did, and another part didn't. She recognized that Voldemort had been a critical part of Harry's life since he was fifteen months old and now he was gone. The magnitude of what he had accomplished was hidden behind the aftermath of the fight.

Hermione shook her head and tried to concentrate on the latest batch of numbers she had been handed. She realized that even she wasn't fully understanding the magnitude of what happened here today. She looked down briefly at the parchment in her hand.

Wounded 161

Dead 80

Missing 6

*One third of the Brigade*, she thought with a heavy sigh.

"*What was that? One third of the Brigade what, Hermione?*" Harry asked anxiously. He was out examining the collapsed wall in Delta sector. There was no way to repair it. It would have to be replaced if they intended to keep the castle walled.

"*More than one third of the Brigade. That's our casualty figures,*" she replied tensely. She waited anxiously, expecting him to explode.

There was a long moment of silence and she could feel his emotions warring within him. She winced slightly when he ruthlessly pushed them down.

"*I see,*" he replied. "*And the Raiders? What of their casualties?*"

She scrambled for that information. As the field commander for the British led assault, he had access to that information so he could keep Haven apprised of what was happening.

"*They're in much better shape than we are. Total casualties are just under one hundred.*"

Again there was a long silence while he mulled over the numbers. *"Inform Haven of our operational status and suggest that the Brigade and the 2nd Shamans be pulled from the line. The Raiders can fill in our position and we can leave them Baker company as a reserve."*

*"I'll do that now,"* she sent in reply.

*"Good. Is there anything else?"*

*"Yes. We have a few dispatches from Haven. Do you want me to read them to you or just give you a summary?"*

*"Just a summary, please."* She could almost feel his smile.

*"Right then,"* she replied as she flipping through the parchments. *"Oh, here's good news. Draco is wounded, but he's alright and currently at the manor with Luna and Fuzz."*

*"Good. I was worried about Fuzz,"* he replied wryly.

She frowned. *"Ginny and Neville are badly injured and at Haven Hospital. We don't have any more information more than that, I'm afraid. Oh, and Terry must have slipped this in. I'll read this one verbatim. 'Maglios, the Boots are proud to announce the birth of Siomha Amelia Jennifer Boot at 9:07 this morning. Mother and Daughter are doing well.' Isn't that great news?"* she asked.

*"Yes, we could use good news. Anything else I need to worry about?"*

She flipped through more parchments, most of which were routine stuff that she'd take care of. *"Oh, here's something,"* she replied, then she frowned and reread the message.

*"Hermione?"*

She glanced at her watch. *"You better get back to the command post, Harry. Amelia, Caleb and a contingent of reporters will be here in about fifteen minutes."*

*"Oh, bugger,"* he replied. *"I'm on my way."*

She placed the dispatches on the table and turned to his pack to dig out a clean uniform for him. *The shirts and ties will expect him to be clean when he gives the tour,* she thought to herself. She chuckled as she finally came to understand what REMF stood for.

Ten minutes later, Harry limped into the Great Hall and Hermione tossed him his uniform. He caught it and nodded, then she pointed to a small curtained off area where he could change.

She watched him and her eyes narrowed in suspicion. He ducked behind the curtain and she followed him, watching carefully as he changed out of his stained and torn uniform into something cleaner.

"What?" he asked, looking up at her.

"You used that spell on your leg, didn't you?" she asked angrily. "Dammit Harry, that strengthening spell can cause damage!"

He sat back, his shirt unbuttoned and glared at her. "Hermione, if I hadn't used that spell, you'd be talking to a corpse right now. I know what the spell is going to do."

She deflated and sat down heavily next to him. "You're right. Merlin! I'm sorry," she said tiredly. "I guess today is just catching up to me. So what? The spell wore off an hour ago?"

When he nodded, she opened the potion box still attached to the belt on his dirty pants and rummaged through it, finding the nearly empty bottle of pain reliever. She frowned, then pulled out an unused bottle from her own kit and put it in Harry's.

He looked at her and she shrugged her shoulders. "You have the Minister and others coming. You'll need to be able to walk around. I know tonight is going to be painful, but we'll get through it, together. I shouldn't have yelled at you like that."

He smiled at her and patted her hand before buttoning up his shirt. "It's alright. I've always known I'd need to use that spell just to give me the mobility I needed. I thought it was more important to do whatever it took to come out of this alive..."

She smiled at him. "We're all coming out of this alive," she said softly.

He nodded in agreement, but his expression was more somber. "But not unchanged," he murmured, thinking of Draco, Neville and Ginny.

"No, not unchanged," she agreed, her own thoughts echoing his.

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## **Around the World (1300 hours, April 10th)...** **British Refugee Camp at Fort Ord, California, USA.**

The number of wounded and critical patients had slowed to a trickle, then stopped several hours ago. The healers at Fort Ord were perplexed by the sudden lack of patients, but they were also grateful. The respite gave them time to go back and deal with other, less critical issues with their

patients.

The volunteers among the staff, mostly made of up witches and wizards rescued from the British prison camps, still rushed around helping people. News trickled in slowly to the hospital from the thousands still living at Fort Ord in the hopes that they'd be allowed to go home someday.

At first, no one wanted to believe it. It wasn't until the chief healer had the public address system tied into the American Wizarding Wireless that the news became believable. Harry Potter had killed Voldemort.

It was the wireless services that broke the news to the world, the message spreading like a pandemic of happiness.

In Egypt, one of Sheik Alim's sons rushed into his tent on the plateau at Giza and hurriedly turned on the wireless. Within minutes, the entire camp was celebrating the victory. Later that evening, Sheik Alim would father three more sons and two daughters. One son would be named Harry, and a daughter Hermione, in honor of his friends.

In Brussels, Belgium, the mood was more somber and serious. News of the death of Voldemort and the defeat of his army pushed NATO into high gear. They were the coordinating agency controlling the muggle invasion forces, although the largest forces were British and American.

Voldemort's defeat had caught the muggles off guard. Officially, they had expected it to take much longer to defeat him than it had. As a result of this earlier victory, they switched to an alternate plan that had been developed by the Americans. Instead of invading at dawn, they would avail themselves of the American's capabilities and invade at night. The American army had turned night to their advantage. It was something that made all potential adversaries of the American's wary.

In Washington D.C., the mood was mixed. The Prime Minister of Britain and the King had been invited to spend a few days at the White House. Publicly, it was hailed as a gesture of friendship between the two nations. Privately the PM and the King would be watching from the Situation Room of the White House. From there, they would be able to monitor what was happening and issue orders to British Forces.

When the news came of Voldemort's defeat, both men bowed their heads, overcome with relief and grief. Taking Voldemort out of the picture had been the job of the wizards. Taking back the country and returning it to it's rightful government would be their job.

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### **Padfoot Manor (1330 hours, April 10th)...**

Emma caught Narcissa in the grand foyer. She was returning to the manor to check on her charges. Between Draco and little Siomha and her work done today at the hospital, she had, according to Sylvia August, picked up several major points needed for her full Healer certification.

"Cissy, I'm glad I caught up with you," Emma said hesitantly.

Narcissa gave the woman a tired smile and reflected on how a few years ago, she wouldn't have even spoken to her, and now she considered her a friend.

"Is there anything wrong, Emma?"

"No, I was just wondering how Ginny and Neville are doing."

Narcissa frowned. Ordinarily she wouldn't discuss patients with anyone except spouses and family members, but in a sense they were all part of a much larger extended family. She bowed her head for a moment, thinking, then she looked at Emma with a grim expression.

"Ginny was badly injured. She's lost her leg from the knee down and her other leg was crushed. That's relatively easy to fix. The loss of a limb, however, is not," she said, then she paused and motioned for Emma to follow her into the sitting room.

Taking a seat, she waited while Emma got comfortable.

"You never met Alastor Moody, did you?" she asked.

Emma shook her head. "No. I remember Hermione writing about him in her letters, but I never met the man."

Narcissa smiled slightly. "In some ways, muggle medicine outstrips magical medicine and in others, we outstrip them. For example, we can regrow bones and even an organ or parts of an organ. After all, a liver is a liver, and a lung is a lung. When Harry was shot, it was easy for the healers to regrow parts of his lung.

"Moody was an example of the fact that we can't regrow a limb. It's just too complex, compared to an organ that consists of one type of tissue only. A limb has bone, muscle, nerves, skin and blood vessels. There are so many little specialty pieces that makes it much more complex than a single organ.

"We can't even regrow muscle mass properly. That's why Harry's leg hurts him when he strains it. The muscles have grown back, but the tissue is scarred and improperly formed. Unlike organ tissue, muscles require specific layering or the muscles will knot and cramp.

"Now Ginny will recover and once she's gotten over the psychological trauma, she'll be fine. She'll be fitted with an artificial leg, and unlike what Moody used, hers will look almost real. Moody was a purist and insisted on using a plain, old fashioned peg leg."

Narcissa paused and let Emma absorb that information before she continued.

"Neville is a different story. He was badly injured and the healers worked very hard to help him. The problem is that, right now, he's in a coma and



they don't know why. They think he was hit by a curse, but they don't know what it was so they can't use a counter curse."

"That's because he wasn't cursed, Mum," said a voice from the door.

Narcissa turned to stare at Luna. Behind her was Echo.

"How would you know what's happening with Neville, sweetheart?" Narcissa asked.

"I told her," Echo said.

"I asked Echo about what I was feeling coming from my brotherhood bond. Like Harry, I tend to feel the others more than everyone else. When Dray fell asleep, I was able to concentrate on what had been bothering me. Neville wasn't cursed, he needs Harry's help. Harry is the only one who can help them now," Luna said seriously, then she blinked and smiled happily at a spot on the wall. Fuzz eyed the same spot on the wall and whirred softly.

Luna reached up and stroked her familiar. Both eyed the spot, wondering what it would do next.

Narcissa scowled. She knew without Draco's direct influence, Luna would have trouble focusing on things. "Luna, it could be days before the Brigade returns to Haven. Neville may not have that much time," she said softly.

"Nature's child is correct, healer. Neville is fast losing his battle to live, not because of some curse, but because he no longer wishes to remain alive," Echo said firmly.

Emma gasped and her hand flew to her mouth. "Why?" she demanded.

Echo turned to Emma. "Because he thinks his mate died in battle," he said softly, "and he does not wish to live without her. He lost more than his life when he went into battle, he lost his hope, his reason to live. I had feared that the Maglios would be in such a position, but he and his mate are both alive and well."

Narcissa frowned. She knew such a thing was possible, albeit, very rare. Her problem was she couldn't understand how Harry could help.

"So, Harry is the only one that can help Neville?" she asked doubtfully.

Echo nodded. "The Maglios will need both of them in the same room, but yes, he can reach Neville. Of all of the Brotherhood, he is the most advanced in the magics of the mind and in manipulating magic directly. No one else has the power or the ability. Only the Maglios will be able to enter Neville's mind and show him that his mate still lives."

Narcissa stood and walked over to a table, where she quickly wrote out two notes.

"Dobby!" she called.

Dobby appeared and blinked in apprehension, seeing Narcissa had summoned him. Narcissa smiled at the little elf hoping to ease his concern.

"Dobby," she said gently. "I need you to deliver two messages."

She handed the notes to Dobby, instructing him to deliver one to Healer McKinney and the other to Harry. Dobby took the notes and vanished with a pop.

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## Hogwarts Castle (1335 hours, April 10th)...

The camera's flashed over and over again, flooding the area with bright light. Harry blinked back the after images of headstones and turned to look at Amelia, instead of watching the photographers from The Paper and other news outlets. Bertrand Lovegood stood behind his photographer, rapidly scribbling down notes on a pad. He was in his element, orchestrating a news conference, as well as getting what he needed for the special edition he planned on printing.

Harry was relieved to see the press using a standard dicta-quills, rather than the type Rita Skeeter used to use. This story was so good, it didn't need embellishment.

"So, that's him?" asked Amelia after several minutes of staring at the body.

Harry nodded and averted his eyes. He had only glanced at the body once since the fight, but it was an image that would be forever burned into his memory. "Yes, that's him," he replied. He leaned against a headstone, resting his aching leg.

Caleb stood next to Amelia, looking down at the body. Finally, he looked up at Harry. "What is your condition?"

Harry mistook his question. "We're down to about sixty percent. I'd say, just as a guess mind you, that another ten percent are borderline magically exhausted."

Caleb nodded. He knew the numbers before he arrived. "Yes, I know, but I meant you. How is your leg?"

Amelia watched the two for a moment, then turned to go speak with the members of the press. Caleb motioned for Harry to follow him away from the press conference that was starting up around the body of Voldemort.

Harry limped over to another headstone and leaned against it. "It hurts, but the pain relief potions keep the edge off."

Hermione appeared at the edge of his vision and he looked over at her. She stood waiting for him to acknowledge her. Next to her stood Dobby.

*"Message from Haven. It sounds important, Harry,"* she sent him.

*"Give me a moment,"* he replied.

"What do you want to do, Harry?" asked Caleb.

"Have we transferred all of Camp Outhouse to Hogwarts yet?"

"No. We're moving over enough to house at least two of the American divisions. It was our thought to house your units in the castle for now," Caleb replied.

Harry frowned. "I don't think that will work, Caleb. With few exceptions, most of the rooms are empty. The castle is just an shell at the moment. Realistically, both the Brotherhood Brigade and the Shamans should be pulled off for resupply and rest. The Raiders have few casualties, and I can leave them Baker Company to round out their unit."

Caleb looked around at the people manning the walls. Several of the soldiers had pulled out field stoves and were heating food and drink. They were in a stand down mode and Caleb knew it. The major threat was gone.

He turned back to Harry. "Let me talk it over with Amelia, but I think we can send your unit and the Shamans back to Haven by six tonight, if all goes well."

Harry nodded. He could live with that. When Caleb turned to watch Amelia, he motioned to Hermione, who walked over to him with Dobby following. Dobby reached up, holding a note, and Harry took it.

He read quickly and sighed. When Caleb turned and looked at him questioningly, Harry gave him the note and felt Hermione take his hand gently. He had let her read the note through the bond. She leaned against him and fought to hold back the tears.

Caleb glanced down at the note from Narcissa.

*My Lord Black,*

*Neville's condition is critical. Luna and Eocho both say that only your expertise in the mind arts can help him, at this point. We need you to return to Haven as quickly as you can.*

*Ginny's condition is stabilizing. She lost her leg from the knee down and her other leg was badly injured. We expect her to recover fully.*

*Draco and Luna are in the manor. He was injured and being held by Luna when his portkey activated, bringing both here. His injuries are not life threatening.*

*Narcissa Black*

Caleb's frown tightened and he handed the note back to Harry. "If Amelia doesn't give us permission to return by six tonight, I'm authorizing you to turn command over to Allan Humbert. You and your Brotherhood will then proceed back to Haven. Understand?"

Harry nodded gratefully to Caleb, then he turned to the house elf. "Dobby, return to Narcissa. Tell her we will be returning by six this afternoon. Do whatever it takes to keep things calm and stable until I get back."

Dobby nodded and vanished with a pop.

"I know you're worried, Harry," Caleb said under his breath. "But you'll get through this. In the meantime, it's time to help Amelia."

Caleb pasted a smile on his face and moved to stand next to the beckoning Minister. Harry and Hermione followed a moment later, although neither was smiling.

"Ladies and gentlemen of the press, it gives me great pleasure to introduce you to Harry Potter, commander of the British Forces and the man that personally dueled and beat the dark wizard known as Lord Voldemort," Amelia said, smiling broadly.

Harry winced and blinked as dozens of camera flashbulbs exploded in his face.

*"Patience, my love,"* Hermione encouraged. She knew his leg was hurting him, and he was very worried over Neville and Ginny.

"Lord Potter!" shouted a reporter from Boston Broom News. "How do you feel, having defeated you-know-who?"

"His name was Voldemort. If you can't manage that, call him by his real name, Tom Riddle," Harry replied coldly. "As to how I feel, I honestly can't say. Right now, I am more concerned with the condition of the brave men and women I led in this fight.

"Sure, I fought and killed Voldemort, but they fought off thousands of dark wizards. Thousands. They are the real heroes of this story, not I."

"But how do you feel?" shouted another reporter.

Harry ran a hand through his hair, not knowing that, in that instant, he would be providing Wizarding Time Magazine with their cover photo of the year.

"Voldemort has been a part of my life in one way or another since I before I was born. I guess I feel relieved and maybe a little saddened that it had to come to this point. He wasn't born a dark wizard, he was molded into one by an indifferent society that didn't care enough to look after their own kind. He didn't wake up one day and say 'I think I'll become a dark wizard today.' No, he slowly took a terrible path that led us all to this place.

"So I guess I feel a little saddened by it all. Because of him, I've been forced into situations where I've had to kill to keep myself and those I love alive. That saddens me."

"So what happens now to the Boy-Who-Lived?" asked Bertrand Lovegood.

Harry looked sharply at Bertrand. The man knew that he hated that title. But Harry also knew exactly what Bertrand was asking.

"Hopefully, you good folks will allow the Boy-Who-Lived to fade into obscurity and I can live my life as I have always wanted; as plain old Harry Potter, husband to the smartest witch alive, and maybe someday a father."

Hermione moved a little closer to Harry, smiling at him. The reporters laughed at his comments. Harry Potter was now the stuff of legends. He had as much of a chance of a quiet private life as the King of Britain did.

"What about the reconstruction of Britain?" shouted a reporter from the German daily, Die Lesestift.

Amelia stepped forward. "For the moment, Hogwarts and Diagon Alley in London will act as rescue and relief centers. Any witch or wizard needing medical attention, food or other assistance should make their way to one of those locations. It is our hope to open rescue centers in more than a dozen locations within the next few weeks. Right now, our principle concern is to make sure everyone is fed and has proper medical treatment. We will start rebuilding in a few days."

"Do you have any messages for any British citizens? Should they make their way to a rescue center?" asked Bertrand Lovegood.

Amelia shook her head. "No. If you are in need of food, shelter or a healer, come to a rescue center. If you are in good shape, stay where you are. We will be setting up a place you can go to register your location and look for any loved ones that may be missing."

"Lord Potter! Will you be helping in the reconstruction efforts, as well?" asked a reporter from the New York Daily News.

Harry stepped forward again. "I have promised Headmistress McGonagall that my wife and I will aid in the reconstruction of Hogwarts and Minister Bones knows that she can call on me. But I'm afraid my first duty is to the Brotherhood Brigade, which is now an officially sanctioned unit of the British Army. As some of you are aware, we have cooperated closely with His Majesty's government in the past year. The Brotherhood Brigade is partly the result of that cooperation and I owe His Majesty a debt."

Harry paused for moment, then he grinned. "Once the initial crisis is past, I think my friends and I are going to go away for a well deserved rest."

Harry glanced at Caleb, who nodded to him. With that, he turned and limped away. Hermione walked a little behind him, watching and gnawing on her lip worriedly. His limp was becoming more pronounced as the day progressed.

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### **The Forbidden Forest, 806th Animagi Division (1400 hours, April 10th)...**

The clean up detail in front of the castle had a very difficult job. There were thousands of trapped portkeys and unbroken vials of eruption fluid all over. Fortunately, in Amos Madison's opinion, Sergeant James was allowing the use of magic to clean up.

Amos walked side by side with fifty others of his unit, banishing everything they came across, including bodies that the acromantulas weren't interested in. Amos shuddered at the thought of it. He had learned an interesting fact today. Well, Sergeant James had thought it interesting, at least. Apparently, spiders preferred live food or, at the very least, freshly killed food.

The 806th was detached to the British Ministry for the duration, while the other American units took the portals back to Haven. From there, they would help the invading muggle forces.

"Madison!" shouted Sergeant James.

"YO!" Madison replied as he stopped and looked towards the man.

"Fall out and prepare for patrol duty. Hook up with your partner," James said.

Madison nodded and carefully backed out of the line. Turning, he moved away, watching the ground for anything they might have missed.

"Monroe, Wilson, Parkers, Chen and Jacoby! Fall out and join Madison! Line! Reform!" shouted James.

The other five men fell out of the line, mimicking Madison's slow walk out of the danger zone. Meanwhile, the men still in the line moved slightly, each man taking a little more space to make up for the loss of six people. The line would slow down and make three more passes over the area before they would declare it safe.

Madison waited by Sergeant James for the other men to catch up with him. James eyed the group, waiting until everyone was close enough.

"Alright, you meatheads, the CO says we're to patrol north and west of our position, looking for any signs of dark wizards or dark creatures. Avoid the acromantulas and the centaurs. They will cover their own territories for us. This is a six hour run, that's three hours out and three back for those of you too dumb to do the math. Mind you, this area is NOT declared pacified, so don't take any chances.

"The Limeys reported that some of the slaves broke from the pens before they were able to evacuate them all. We don't have a lot of information, except to say that some were seen heading west into the forest. These women haven't been treated well, so if you run across any, go easy on them. The best thing to do would be to phone it in, and wait for a female team to come get them. Understood?"

Everyone nodded and Madison walked over to stand next to Jacoby. "You ready?" he asked.

"Yeah, I'm good. Wanna flip for the honors?" asked Jacoby.

"Nah. I'll take it on the outward leg, you can have it on the way back," Madison replied.

Jacoby grinned. "Sounds good to me. Let's saddle up."

Madison nodded and his body swiftly flowed from his normal form, to his Lynx form. Jacoby would retain his human form while Madison ranged out in front of him, searching for danger. On the way back, Jacoby would assume his arctic fox form and Madison would return to human form. The Animal/Human pairing was a unique feature of the 806th Animagi Division and it was a tough tactic to beat.

Jacoby nodded to the Lynx and it trotted toward the tree line.

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### **Haven Hospital (1500 hours, April 10th)...**

Ginny was in one of the few private rooms, along with all of her family. The bone shards in her leg had been removed and the bone was currently regrowing under the watchful eye of Melinda McKinney.

Arthur sat, his face pale and haggard. He tried not to look at the bottom of the bed where they had tented the blankets to keep them off the stump. Nearby, Fred and George spoke in hushed whispers, while Charlie paced and Bill leaned against one wall, staring at his baby sister.

Ginny was unconscious and had been since her arrival, but it was a magically induced coma. Melinda had explained that she wanted Ginny to remain that way until the skelegrow had done it's job.

The door opened and Arthur looked up. He was surprised to see several volunteers wheeling a bed into the room. He stood to say something in protest when he saw it was Neville.

"Constance?" he asked of the old woman who followed the bed. "What's going on?"

Danni walked into the room and spoke with Melinda. Moments later, the two healers fussed around with several magical monitoring devices by Neville's bedside.

Constance Longbottom walked over to Arthur, but she watched the two healers anxiously. One of the monitors began to beep slowly, too slowly. She tore her gaze away from Neville and turned back to Arthur.

"I'm not sure, Arthur. Neville was in the critical care ward and then they came along and moved him here. But I know his condition hasn't improved," she said in a hushed tone.

Melinda walked over to them. She looked around and the other Weasley's moved closer to hear her.

"Arthur, Mrs. Longbottom, I'm sorry if we haven't been able to tell you what's going on, but I heard from Narcissa. You know that ghost thing you have up at the Manor house? The one that all the kids listen to?"

Arthur's eyes darted to Constance, then back to Melinda. "Healer McKinney, that entity is supposed to be a state secret."

"Oh, pish posh, Arthur," Constance said, looking at the man like he was daft. "Don't you remember I was present when they told us they had to get married? That creature was there then. It's no secret. Great Merlin's balls, they talk about him up at the school!"

Arthur winced and turned back to Melinda with a sigh. "Go ahead, Melinda. You were saying?"

"Anyway, Narcissa says that Neville isn't in the shape he's in due to a curse. She says, and I quote, 'Eocho says he went into battle thinking Ginny was dead and he had nothing to live for.'"

"No!" Constance gasped. Her complexion had gone pasty and she began to sway dangerously. Arthur and Melinda jumped to her aid and helped her into a chair.

"He's given up? He's dying?" Arthur asked in a strained voice. The loss would kill Ginny!

"We've done everything we can think of, Arthur, but he's still slipping away," Melinda said tightly. She hated losing like this!

"Isn't there anything you can do?" asked Constance plaintively. She was a strong woman, but Neville represented the hopes and continuation of the Longbottom line.

Melinda nodded. "We're trying a few things, and we're hoping that bringing the two of them together might help. But Narcissa says the only one that can help is Lord Potter. She didn't go into specific detail except to say that his expertise in the mind arts are needed at this point."

Arthur and the rest grasped onto this offered straw. "Is Harry coming?" he blurted.

Melinda nodded. "He is, but he can't leave Hogwarts until later. For now, we need to keep Neville alive and we're going to wake Ginny up early. We're not sure, but we learned from Lord Potter's hospital stay that the magical coma puts her mind out of reach. We think he'll need her awake."

Arthur blanched. "Awake? But the potion is so painful," he protested.

Melinda sighed and wiped a tired hand over her brow. "I know, Arthur, but I don't know what else we can do. Neville is dying and you know what will happen to Ginny if that happens. I promise we'll do our best to try to minimize her pain, but skele-grow limits our options."

Arthur glanced down at Constance, who was looking up at him with a pleading expression. Finally, he nodded in defeat. Neville was family and without him they would certainly lose Ginny, as well.

Constance laid a hand on Arthur's arm and he placed his over hers. "No matter what happens, Constance, you're family. We're all family and we'll see this through, together. For them."

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### **Hogwarts Inner Court, Delta Sector (1530 hours, April 10th)...**

Amelia and Caleb waited in the inner courtyard, where the wall had been breached by Voldemort and his Chosen. Members of both the Raiders and the Brotherhood Brigade worked over the rubble from the wall, looking for bodies.

Caleb stiffened, seeing a line of sheet covered bodies. Not far away was a larger pile of black robed bodies. He hated this part. And it didn't help that Bertrand Lovegood stood not far away, escorting members of the world's press. It was a necessary evil and he didn't blame Lovegood, but he didn't have to like it either.

Several men levitated a large wall fragment, then two medics scrambled into the hole made by the boulder. A moment later they scrambled back out, levitating a body behind them. Workers in the courtyard fell silent as the body was placed in the line and covered with a sheet. Several stood at attention, honoring their fallen.

"What will happen to them?" Amelia asked in a reverent tone.

"Some will be returned to their families. The rest we will take care of, Amelia. We give them the very best and we will remember them," Caleb replied.

"Look at this," Amelia said, pointing out the boulder strewn courtyard. "Can you imagine fighting in this? And in the dark, no less?"

She shook her head, marveling at how a school had been turned into a battlefield. Her fond memories of Hogwarts had been forever tarnished, seeing the school like this.

"Minister, with your permission, I would like to rotate the Brotherhood Brigade and the Shamans back to Haven as soon as possible," Caleb said, trying to change her mood.

She looked at him curiously. "Aren't they needed here?"

"Their presence wouldn't hurt, but it's not precisely needed either, Minister. The Brigade suffered nearly one third casualties, and the Shamans nearly half. Both units should be sent back for resupply and rest. I have already taken it upon myself to order Colonel Potter and his Brotherhood to return to Haven this evening. A message came from Haven saying that Neville Longbottom is close to death. They seem to think that Harry might be able to help."

"And his leg is quickly becoming a liability to him," she added.

Caleb looked at the line of bodies again. "Yes, that's true," he said quietly. "I think he deserves to be with his people, especially if they are at the risk of losing one."

Amelia turned to look at Caleb again. "You're the deputy Minister of Defense. If you feel the two units are best served by coming home, bring them home. I won't question your authority on this matter."

Caleb nodded. "Thank you, Minister. I will see that the movement orders are cut immediately."

He then turned and pulled out a small portable floo and spoke quietly into it.

Amelia walked over to sit on a large rock not far from the row of bodies and tears flowed freely down her cheeks. Victory had come, but not without a high cost.

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### **Hogwarts, Great Hall (1600 hours, April 10th)...**

Harry sat on a conjured chair, in front of a conjured desk, going over various reports that Hermione was putting together for him. He had wanted to

go check the people on the walls, but she had badgered him into staying in the Great Hall. He was bothering him, he really wasn't interested in walking very much, so he didn't fight her all that hard about staying in the Great Hall.

One of the field medics stepped over to where Harry sat and spoke to him for a moment, drawing Hermione's attention. She thought he was asking the healer for more pain relieving potion, but now she wasn't sure. She'd seen Harry talking to this medic earlier. Surely he couldn't be using the pain relief potions that quickly!

Harry's posture tensed and he levered himself to his feet. His free hand glowed briefly and he whispered an incantation, waving his hand towards his leg then he motioned to the medic.

Hermione walked up to Harry. "Where are you off to?"

"I'm going out to the medical unit they brought in this morning," he said, then he hesitated for a moment. "Here," he said, grabbing her hand.

Harry stared into her eyes. Recognizing that he was trying to commune with her, she relaxed and let him make the connection. A second later, he broke the connection, having passed the experience he had with the young soldier up on the wall.

Hermione blinked a few times while she processed the information, then she looked at Harry doubtfully. "You're going to go see her in the hospital?"

He shook his head. "No... yes, the medic says she's losing her fight. She saved my life Hermione. She shouldn't have to die surrounded by strangers, none of them should," he replied tensely.

Hermione nodded. "I'll go with you."

He smiled and waited while she told her second in command where she'd be. Together, they walked to the entrance.

"What did you do to your leg?" she asked, watching him walk. His limp had changed, become stiffer.

"I used the spell that Poppy taught me to lock the knee, remember?" he replied.

Both fell silent, remembering Poppy Pomfrey. It was hard to believe that it was just over a year ago that she fell victim to the giant attack in Hogsmeade. It seemed like it had happened in another life.

Ten minutes later, Harry and Hermione found themselves directed to a small room in the hospital sent over by Haven.

Harry paused just outside the door and looked Hermione, his expression suddenly horrified. "I don't even know her name," he whispered.

Hermione looked around and spotted a clipboard hanging from a peg next to the door. "The form identifies her as Alison Creevey," she said, then looked up at Harry. "Do you think she's related?"

Harry shrugged and pushed his way into the room. "I don't know," he muttered.

The lights were dimmed and the room contained only one bed. A medi-witch looked up from where she sat, then stood as Harry and Hermione entered.

A small beeping sound made Hermione glance around. She noted the monitors measuring Alison's lung capacity and heart beat. They were the same type of devices that was used on Harry when he was shot. Alison lay with a sheet covering most of her, but from her hip to her shoulder was a closed wound that glared an angry red and seeped blood.

"How is she?" asked Harry of the Medi-witch.

"She's slipping away. Her wounds were too bad for her to be sent back to Haven and we arrived too late to help her. We closed up the wound and gave her something for the pain," replied the witch quietly.

Harry nodded stiffly and moved closer to the bed.

Alison was awake and she smiled, seeing Harry appear above her. The bubble of oxygen around her head muffled her already weak voice.

"Hi Alison," Harry said.

"Boy the girls are going to go spare when I tell them that you visited me in the hospital!" she whispered.

"You need to rest so you can get better," Harry replied. He struggled to maintain his composure. She was one of his people, one of his Brigade and someone that personally saved his life.

She lifted up a hand and he reached for it with his own. "Don't be sad," she told him. "It doesn't hurt."

He wiped away a tear that slid down his cheek. Inwardly, he raged against this young woman's fate. She couldn't be more than five years older than he was!

"I'm afraid," Alison whispered. Her eyes widened and they darted around the room wildly. The heart monitor's rhythm seemed to falter.

Harry bent down, leaning in so he could hear her better. He gripped her hand tighter in his own. "You're not alone. We're here with you," he said to her.

Hermione stepped up behind him. She placed a hand on his shoulder and widened their bond, sending him all the comfort she could. She could feel his anguish.

Alison smiled again, seeing Hermione behind Harry, then her eyes closed. She exhaled a long, rattling breath and went still.

The heart monitor began to shriek. The medi-witch sighed and waved her wand, silencing the alarm.

Harry bent over and kissed Alison on the forehead. "I won't ever forget you, or what you've done this day," he promised her.

A few minutes later, Harry and Hermione walked out of the room. They took their time, stopping and talking to healers and patients before they left the hospital.

Harry glanced up the road towards the castle. He could apparate with Hermione, but his heart just wasn't in it. He knew the walk back would be painful, but he felt he deserved it.

The pair walked back in silence until Harry stopped for a moment to rest his leg. He looked at her and knew she was nearly as moved as he was.

Finally, he broke the silence. "Love, if we ever have a daughter, would you be opposed to using the name of Alison?"

Her smile was like sunlight shining into the darkened places of his soul. He couldn't help but feel a burden being lifted from his shoulders.

"I think that would be a fine tribute, my heart. A very fine tribute," she replied, hugging him tightly.

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### **Ministry of Magic, Haven, Office of the Minister (1630 hours, April 10th)...**

Amelia sagged in her chair and breathed a sigh of relief. To say that the day had been physically and emotionally exhausting was the understatement of the century. Considering how tired she felt, she was amazed that the troops they had sent over were still standing.

David, her aide, entered her office, bringing with him a fresh pot of coffee and a tray of sandwiches. A moment later, another aide followed, carrying a large bundle of parchments. David told the girl to put them on the coffee table.

"Mostly messages of congratulations from various nations, Minister. We also have messages from several nations asking that we consider helping them train up a force similar to our Brotherhood Brigade."

Amelia nodded tiredly, eying the large pile with distaste. She would enjoy reading them later, when she didn't feel so old and worn down.

"Anything from Department M, Ireland?"

David shook his head. "No, Minister," he replied, then he glanced at a wall clock. "I don't expect to hear from them until later this evening, if at all."

David turned to the pile and pulled out one piece of parchment, which he handed to her. "I have a request from Lord Potter, asking that you meet with him this evening at Haven Hospital. According to this, he's in need of some legal advice."

Amelia frowned and wondered what Harry was up to this time.

"Alright. I'll meet with him at the hospital, then I'm going to go see Susan and my new grandniece," she replied. "Did he say when?"

"At eighteen hundred hours, in the room they've have the Longbottom's in."

"Anything else?"

David rooted around in the pile. "There is a notice from Fort Ord in America, telling us that they have assembled a group of nearly one thousand volunteers who are willing to return to Britain as soon as possible to begin reconstruction efforts."

Amelia leaned back in her chair and tented her fingers, smiling at the thought. She had been worried about that. Finding the people needed to rebuild and re-ward places like Diagon Alley, Hogsmeade and the old Ministry building had been something she hadn't addressed yet.

"Who's in charge of that group?"

David looked down at the parchment. "Someone by the name of Anastasia Twonk."

Amelia thought for a moment. "Send a message to Ms. Twonk asking her to come to Haven to discuss using her group."

The Ministry currently controlled most of the wizarding access to Britain. Amelia didn't mind people helping, but she wanted it done in a controlled and coordinated manner.

"Yes, Ma'am," David replied, making a note in a small book.

"That will be all for now, David," Amelia said.

He nodded and left Amelia alone with her thoughts.

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## The Forbidden Forest (1630 hours, April 10th)...

Madison paused and flattened his ears against his head, his posture screaming warning. Jacoby stopped a few paces back and dropped to a crouch, a wand out in one hand and his pistol in the other.

The lynx relaxed a little, letting its ears raise. They swiveled back and forth for a moment, then he turned to Jacoby and pawed at the ground, giving him a signal that someone was nearby. Someone was talking.

Jacoby pointed upwards and Madison thought about it for a moment, then shook his head. They were still too far away.

Jacoby disillusioned himself and followed Madison as he ghosted closer to the source of the voices.

They approached a small break in the forest slowly. Madison turned and looked unerringly to his invisible partner, then pointed his head up. A moment later, the large cat was scaling a tree that would allow him to get nearly directly above the source of the voice.

The Death Eater must have been one of the stragglers from Hogsmeade. His robe was torn and bloody and one eye was swollen shut. He stood over two women who were barely dressed.

"I finally get me some bitches all to myself," the man chuckled.

He held the two women at wand point. Both were laying face down on the cold ground, tied with the ropes of an *Incarcerous* spell.

"Now, listen carefully, my ladies," said the Death Eater. "I'm going to untie you both, then we're going to have a little fun before we move off. We'll go south, I think. We'll be able to slip into regular society and hide among the muggles. *Imperio ! Imperio !*"

"You two will do as you're told," hissed the Death Eater.

Madison screamed once and leapt. The Death Eater looked around wildly, but it was too late. The powerful cat landed half on his back and half on his shoulders, digging his two inch claws into his flesh, then he bit the Death Eater in the neck.

"SHIT!" shouted Jacoby, then he dispelled his illusion charm and rushed forward. But it was too late. The Death Eater screamed and whirled causing Madison to be flung off his back. He grabbed at his neck, trying to stem the flow of blood, but it fountained between his fingers.

Madison landed on his feet and whirled to face the Death Eater, snarling at the man. The Death Eater pitched to his knees, bleeding out quickly. Madison had severed his jugular.

Seeing the man crumple, Madison flowed back into his human form. He shrugged off his backpack and pulled out two blankets, which he used to cover the two women.

The Death Eater fell face forward into the dirt, twitching slightly.

"Dammit, Amos! You scared the shit out of me!" screamed Jacoby.

"Sorry, Will, but you saw what he was doing," Amos replied, then he knelt next to one of the women. He cast a finite to remove any lasting effects from the Death Eater's curse, while Jacoby echoed his actions for the other woman.

The two women looked up at the strangely uniformed men in terror. They pulled the blankets around themselves tighter, as if it could protect them.

"I'll phone it in and see what they want us to do," offered Jacoby.

Amos nodded, then rummaged through his pack, pulling out two meal packs, offering them to the women. One of them, a young girl near his own age, was rather pretty, he thought.

She warily accepted the pack.

"You're both going to be okay. We're Americans, part of the force that destroyed Voldemort's army earlier today," Amos said. "My partner is going to arrange for you two to get help."

"You're not a Death Eater?" asked the girl.

Amos shook his head. "No, I'm Amos, from Wisconsin. And that's Will Jacoby, he's from New Jersey," he said, pointing to his partner. Will turned and nodded to both of the women.

"I'm Jennifer and this is Milly," said the girl with a shy smile. It was probably the first time she had smiled in months.

Amos nodded to the two women. "Just rest for now. Everything is going to be fine."

He stood and walked over to Will, who snapped the floo closed and turned to look at him.

"Sergeant James wants us to escort the women back to camp. They're setting up a relief center in the castle. In the meantime, he's sending the Loon and the Pelican out."

Amos chuckled. The Loon and the Pelican were a pair of flying animagi. They were able to cover an incredible area in much less time than a foot



patrol, as well as covering areas unreachable by others.

"Alright. Give them... what? Twenty minutes to eat, then we head back?" Amos asked.

"Sounds good to me. I could use something to eat anyway," Jacoby replied, rummaging through his own pack.

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### **London (1700 hours, April 10th)...**

By late afternoon, the city of London sounded more like Beirut than it did a major western city. First the city was rocked awake by a series of massive explosions as oil stores and chemical plants were destroyed, courtesy of some overzealous house elves. By mid morning, most of the remaining Londoners had hunkered down as a small arms war seemed to spread throughout the city.

Small resistance groups, sometimes armed with ancient weapons stolen from museums, had taken to attacking British Army forces wherever they could.

The cellular phone system, which had been commandeered by the British Army, collapsed under the onslaught of American jamming aircraft. With their only means of communications now gone, the British Army had to resort to using runners to dispatch orders from command in the Ministry of Defense building and units scattered throughout the city.

The city, however, was no longer safe for people wearing that uniform. Most runners never made it to their assigned destinations and their orders went undelivered.

To add to the confusion, Northern Scotland had gone off the air in the mid afternoon. British Army command knew an invasion was happening somewhere around Inverness, but were powerless to stop it.

The fight that occurred around Diagon Alley reduced the number of wizards in the city to a mere handful, most of whom had thrown away their masks and cloaks and had gone into hiding. The British Army had lost its controlling elements. Without the brain, the body of the army lashed out and was cut down.

An excitement seemed to sweep through the city. Rumors swept back and forth and people crawled out of their hiding spots, scanning the skies above them as hundreds of NATO and allied aircraft pulverized the remaining air defenses for the city.

At five in the afternoon, the BBC, broadcasting from the continent, interrupted its programming, announcing that the Prime Minister would be addressing the British nation and the world in a few short moments. At the same time, people looked up in wonder, seeing hundreds of helicopters heading inland from the channel.

Heathrow airport had been hit especially hard, but the runways had been left intact. With attack helicopters providing air cover, elements of the 7th Air cavalry and the 101st Airborne landed and began the difficult job of clearing the airport of combatants and civilians.

Communications with the airport was lost and British Army command, still acting under orders given while controlled by the *Imperio* us curse, dispatched its last remaining armored force, twelve Challenger tanks and fifteen Saxon armored personnel carriers. The convoy had barely gone a mile from their base before being pounced upon by allied air forces. In less than five minutes, it ceased to exist.

It would be another hour before the airport was declared secure. The US Army didn't mind the fact that dusk was rapidly approaching. Their motto of 'We own the night' was made glaringly obvious to anyone who doubted.

With the airport secured, the airlift began from a dozen airports on the continent. The skies above London all but groaned with the weight of the aircraft flying overhead. There hadn't been that many planes in the skies above the city since the Blitz.

It was the last straw, as many of the remaining British Army troops in the city shucked their uniforms and tried to fade into the civilian population.

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### **Inverness (1700 hours, April 10th)...**

The 1st Marine Expeditionary force came ashore not far from Inverness Airport, which was still in the hands of the 3 Scots. They had landed several hours earlier, then paused as armor was ferried ashore aboard the Navy's LCACs.

Driving west, the marines began a movement to cut the city's arterial roadways in the face of very light resistance. Another group, consisting of Navy Seals, Marine Recon and SAS came ashore in North Kessock, cutting the A9 bridge to the north. Inverness was being systematically isolated.

What little radio communications the forces in Inverness had with British Army command further south was being jammed by the US Navy. In a panic, the commander of the Voldemort controlled forces around Inverness apparated to his family home in Sussex. The home was unplotable and would keep him safe for a couple of months until he was caught.

For the people of Inverness, news of the attack came via an unexpected source. US Armed Forces Radio began broadcasting from Task Force 626 nearly an hour ahead of the main invasion force, telling people to stay indoors and not to interfere with Military operations. By the time the first RORO ships pulled up to the docks, the Marines had cut off the A9, the A96 and A82.

People listened to the radio and then did exactly what they were told not to do. They filled the streets, they hung out of windows, they cheered. For the first time in over a year, the British Union Flag hung from window sills or flagpoles.

What little resistance remained in the city was put down by the Marines as they spread out, taking over the city. They tried to be careful, but still civilian casualties climbed.

At the docks, vehicle crews manned their machines, preparing for a dash down A82, splitting the northern part of Scotland off from the south. Each Roll on, Roll off cargo ship unloaded their cargo and pulled out as quickly as they could. Behind them, ships containing medical, engineering and police units waited patiently for their turn to unload.

News spread by radio, television from the continent and even by word of mouth. The country was swept up in a surge of excitement, as what remained of the enemy seemed to stagger and vanish in the face of overwhelming fire power.

The skies above the country were criss crossed with contrails and people looked up with hope, seeing the familiar shapes of RAF and NATO airplanes.

Around the world, people paused in their lives and became glued to their televisions watching a drama unfolding that hadn't been seen since the liberation of Europe in 1945. Media crews, following the spearheads, showed images of burning buildings and crowds screaming in joy. The scene of American and British forces in Hummvees rolling into London brought tears to many an eye.

Reporters at sea, among the various invasion fleets, showed images of Naval Frigates and aircraft pounding ships trying to break the blockade.

The British Ministry in Exile had issued a cautiously optimistic press release via the White House Press Office stating that it appeared that all organized resistance was crumbling faster than anticipated.

Congratulations began to flood into the British Embassy in New York. The Secretary General of the United Nations announced an extraordinary session of the general assembly in order to discuss relief efforts. The Red Cross in the United States announced they were sending nearly ten thousand tons of relief material to airports for shipment to the United Kingdom.

The war was coming to an end. The monumental task of rebuilding and recovery would soon begin.

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### **Haven Hospital (1800 hours, April 10th)...**

Harry walked into the room where Ginny and Neville were being kept. He was immediately struck by the scene before him. Ginny lay in one bed, whimpering in pain and clinging to her father. Neville's bed was only a few feet away and, were it not for the monitors, Harry would have thought his friend was already dead.

He hurried over to Ginny. Seeing her like this disturbed him on many levels. He knew that had the dice landed differently, he could have easily fallen for her. Seeing her so devastated upset him. His eyes slide to the tented blanket and he scowled as he stepped up to her bed.

She turned a tear streaked face to him. He reached, grabbing her hand, then he bent down and kissed her forehead.

"You missed quite a fight, Ginny," he said, trying to lighten the mood.

She smiled weakly, but pain and fear were written all over her expression. When she tightened her grip on his hand, Harry looked at her father.

"It's the skele-grow, Harry," he murmured. "The healers thought she'd need to be awake, but they had already started her on the skele-grow."

He nodded and reached under the blanket so he could touch her leg. Everyone except Hermione glared at him for being so forward. He closed his eyes and muttered an incantation in Gaelic. Ginny moaned loudly and she tugged hard on both him and Arthur. She struggled to sit up for a moment, then she gasped and fell back on the bed.

Her eyes flickered down to Harry's hand resting improperly high on her bare leg, then she glanced up at him. He removed his hand quickly and blushed.

"The pain is gone," she whispered. "It's gone," she repeated, a little louder.

"I can't heal it, Ginny, but that spell will give you about eight hours of numbness," Harry replied.

Melinda rushed forward, pushing Harry to one side. She pulled out her wand and ran a few spells before she turned on him. "What did you do?" she demanded to know.

Harry shrugged. "It's an old Celtic spell, one of the unique spells revived by the Brotherhood. We don't have a Brotherhood healer yet, so Echo taught them to Hermione and myself. I can show it to you another time."

"Perhaps I should be the one touching the girls, Harry," Hermione suggested dryly. "People might get the wrong idea." She nodded toward Bill and Charlie. Both seemed torn between thanking Harry and hitting him.

"*You know...*" he sent to her.

"*Don't you dare say it! I didn't mean it like that,*" she replied. "*Get your mind back on track and out of the gutter. We can both get back in the gutter later.*"

Harry nodded and turned to look at the pale red head again. "Ginny, let's see if we can help Neville. When we're done, I'm going to see what we can

do to fix you up with a new leg.”

Melinda blinked and frowned. “Lord Potter, we can't heal that.”

Harry glanced at the healer. “I know, Melinda. That specialist I saw in St. Mungo's explained it to me, and then offered to remove my bad leg and fix me up with a fake one. What I have in mind is different, but I'll need to get permission first. That can wait a bit. Neville needs help now.”

“Can you help him, Harry?” Ginny asked pleadingly.

“I'm going to try, with your help,” he replied. Then he released her hand. “Would everyone, except Hermione, step away from the beds, please?”

The door to the room opened, admitting Narcissa, Luna, Sylvia August and Amelia Bones. Melinda McKinney walked over to the newcomers to explain what Harry had been saying.

Harry gestured and there was a screeching sound as Neville's bed slid across the floor. Those in the room slapped their hands over their ears, trying to block the horrid sound, and Harry glanced around apologetically. The bed came to a stop with barely enough room for Harry to stand between the two.

Ginny looked at Neville in anguish. His face was swollen and pale and his breathing was labored. When Harry took her hand, she looked up at him.

His eyes filled with magic and they burned with an eerie fire, trapping her in his gaze. She couldn't turn away even if she'd wanted to.

For the second time in less than a day, Harry called up his legilimency skills, penetrating Ginny's mind. He deftly slipped past her shields, pausing momentarily to soothe her fears.

*“Hermione, I need you.”*

Hermione started, then she moved up behind Harry. Somehow, she instinctively knew what he was asking for. She wrapped her arms around him. She pulled his shirt from under his belt and slid her hands inside, touching him, grounding him.

*“Ginny,”* he sent via his link.

*“Harry?”* came a startled reply.

Hermione mentally giggled. *“It's getting crowded in here, Harry,”* she sent.

*“Oh, Merlin, is this what you two share?”*

*“Pretty much,”* Hermione replied.

*“Ginny, I'm going to reach out and try to bring Neville into this link. He's fading because he thinks you're dead. He thinks he has nothing to live for. I am going to try to convince him otherwise. Then, when I'm ready, I'll call you and you can let him know you're alive.”*

*“Alright,”* Ginny replied nervously.

*“Don't be scared, Ginny. We're here with you,”* Hermione said softly.

Both women felt Harry's presence recede as he pushed them to one side of his mind. He held the connection between himself and Ginny, while Hermione kept their connection open. He needed the connection to Hermione to make sure that he didn't lose himself among all the different minds he'd be touching at the same time.

He picked up Neville's hand and he slipped into his mind, noting the total lack of shields. Unlike Ginny, who's mind was right up at the surface, he had to go slow and very gently. This was totally different than what he had done earlier with Voldemort. With the Dark Lord, he hadn't cared what damage he caused.

He searched for a long time in the region where Neville should be and found nothing. He could go lower, but doing so meant reaching through the autonomic regions and the core, where only the subconscious mind existed. The part that called itself Neville seemed to be missing.

He paused, perplexed. *Where is Neville?* he thought. It didn't help that Ginny could sense his confusion and was starting to panic. Hermione was trying to keep her calm, but Ginny knew why Harry had stopped looking.

Harry pushed the two gently into a corner of his mind and quickly constructed a nice room for them to wait. The walls insulating him from their chatter. Harry reached for his power, using it to boost his own sensitivity.

*“Talk to her, keep her calm. I need her desire to find Neville, but her panic is drowning him out,”* he sent to Hermione.

He received an impression of surprise from Hermione, then silence as she worked to calm and soothe Ginny.

In the room, everyone gasped when Harry's body burst into light. The light quickly enveloped Hermione, then Ginny. Finally, it slowly traveled to Neville.

Harry reached for Ginny's baser emotions until he found her love and desire for her husband. He used it to boost his own need to find Neville, then he paused to listen very hard.

Suddenly, he felt a falling sensation and everything around him solidified. He was on a featureless gray plain with gray skies. Everywhere he looked, it was the same; gray. Faintly, in the distance, he heard a wailing, haunting cry that tore at him, filling him with a feelings of despair and loneliness. He tilted his head several times until he was able to judge the direction to the sound, then he took off, trotting toward it.

After what seemed like hours, he realized he was finally reaching the source of the awful sound. He was also grateful that in this mind world of Neville's, his leg was normal, otherwise he would have pulled up lame rather quickly.

Harry slowly approached Neville, who knelt on the gray ground, pounding his fists against the unyielding surface.

“GINNNNNNNNNYYYYYYY!!!”

Harry winced and shivered involuntary. It suddenly struck him that he'd be in the same state, or even worse, if he ever lost Hermione.

Hermione, sensing his emotional turmoil, widened their link and caressed him, soothing his own fears. He smiled for a moment, then turned his attention back to Neville.

He moved around until he was in front of his friend, then he knelt and grabbed Neville by the shoulders.

Neville shook his head violently, tears streaming down his cheeks.

“Neville!” Harry snapped in a hard tone.

Neville stopped and glared at Harry.

“Go away, Harry. Leave me be.”

“No. You're going to listen to me, Neville. Look at what you're doing to yourself!”

Neville gestured and Harry suddenly found himself airborne, blasted backwards a good thirty feet.

“GO AWAY!”

Harry climbed to his feet, not knowing that what was happening here, was being echoed in the hospital room. A large purple bruise formed across his shoulder blades.

Harry trotted up to Neville, dodging when he gestured again. When he was close enough, he leaped on his friend, wrestling him to the ground. Neville lashed out, punching Harry several times in the head before Harry got a lock on him, pinning him to the ground.

Everyone in the room, except for Harry, Hermione and Ginny, gasped when Harry's lip split and started to bleed.

Harry sat atop Neville, leaning against him hard. “You're going to listen to me. Then, when I'm done, if you still want to kill yourself, go ahead. But, by Merlin, you're going to hear what I have to say!” he snarled.

Neville flinched back from him. He had seen Harry angry before, but he had never seen him in a towering rage.

Their little tussle, coupled with events of the day, was the final straw for Harry. He let loose the emotional storm he'd been holding back. His eyes flashed with magic and he glared down at his friend.

“Just let me go Harry,” Neville whispered.

“Oh, no, you're not doing this, Neville. Ginny is not dead!”

“Harry, please, just let me g... What did you say?” he asked in a whisper.

Harry's anger collapsed like a house of cards and he suddenly felt ashamed that he had allowed his anger to break free.

He slid off of Neville and sat on the cold ground. “She's not dead, mate. She's been hurt, but she's very much alive. You didn't see her when the wall collapsed because we all forgot about the medallion's portkey function.”

Neville sat up and stared at him in astonishment.

Harry nodded. “It's the truth. In fact, right now she's in a hospital bed about three feet from yours. But you've got to come back, Nev. She needs you, we all need you. You have to fight.”

“*Ginny, speak to him,*” Harry commanded.

Her voice was faint and tremulous, but they both could hear it in the place Neville had created for himself.

“*Nev? Please don't leave me alone.*”

Neville started and looked up at the gray sky. “Ginny?” he sobbed.

“It's time to come home, Neville. However, before I leave completely, I have something to do,” Harry said. Then he faded from Neville's world.

Harry's consciousness returned to the hospital room where he stood helping his friends. He straightened and stared down at Neville for a moment.

He released Ginny and Neville's hands, breaking the connection between the two. His aura dimmed until it was barely visible and the room went suddenly cold. The lights in the room dimmed. Harry gestured, causing both Ginny and Neville to glow in the darkened room. With each passing second their aura increased in intensity.

Harry gestured again and a tendril of light seemed to snake out from the both of them, coming together in Harry's hands. He cupped the point where both tendrils met and a single pulse of blindingly bright light escaped from between his fingers. Both Ginny and Neville gasped in their beds, and Neville's heart monitor registered an increased heart rate.

Harry staggered backwards. Were it not for Hermione holding him, he would have fallen. Arthur and Bill jumped to help Hermione, while everyone else was concentrating on the two in the beds.

Ginny turned and looked at Neville, her expression hopeful. The band of light still connected them, and even as their auras started to fade, people in the room could see it growing thicker and stronger.

"He knows I'm here!" exclaimed Ginny, then she burst into tears. "He's coming back. I can feel him."

Harry touched his split lip and looked at his bloody fingers. "He better know it. I don't want to think that was a complete waste of time. He packs a nasty punch," he muttered.

Hermione motioned to Arthur and they pulled Harry into a chair where she could seal his split lip. She had been holding him from behind so she was surprised to see the bruising forming on his face.

"What happened to you?" she exclaimed.

"Neville was... being difficult," Harry replied.

"So you hit him?" she asked in disbelief.

"Hey, he hit me first," Harry replied defensively.

"Men!" Hermione said in an exasperated tone, rolling her eyes.

Healer August walked over to him, whispering charms to reduce the swelling around his eye and cheek.

"His heart rate is steadily improving. So is his respiration," Melinda said quietly.

"I can't recall ever seeing a healing that was so... energetic," Sylvia told Harry dryly.

He grinned, then winced. The swelling might be going down, but he still hurt.

"You connected their auras?" Sylvia asked.

Harry nodded. "I bonded them using their auras. It was the only way to really prove to Neville that Ginny was alive," he replied wearily.

"Is it permanent?"

Harry shrugged. "I don't know. But even if it is, they're married and bonded in a way already. It's not the same bond that Hermione and I share, or like the one Draco and Luna have."

"No, it isn't," Luna said in agreement. "Draco and I share a unique bond. Harry and Hermione share one of the mind, their souls have touched in a different way than ours. What Harry has done here is different again. This is a bond of magic. He's joined them together using their auras, which stems from their magic and the light from their souls."

Arthur frowned. "Fine, but once they're better, they can break it, can't they?"

He didn't like the idea of his daughter being that closely connected to someone, even if it were her own husband. Bondings, with few exceptions, like Luna's bond magic, or a soul bonding, were normally used to control someone.

Harry shrugged. "Probably, but I doubt they'll want to. My bond to Hermione wasn't by my choice, but I wouldn't trade it for anything. Even if all the bond does is provide them with a sense of wellbeing for the other, they'll find it useful and comforting. I can't imagine life without my connection to Hermione. I wouldn't want to, at this point."

Hermione blushed and lowered her gaze. The bonding had been an accident on her part. They had never really discussed how it came to be. Harry had accepted it and let it go, although he had been inordinately curious about some of its features. She smiled to herself, remembering his interest when he discovered he could feel what she felt. That particular discovery had led to several hours of mutually enjoyable exploration on their part.

"While this is all very interesting, I'm sure this isn't why you asked Healer August and I to be here tonight," asked Amelia.

Harry shook his head. "No, it isn't. I need you here before we can help Ginny. Dobby!"

Dobby appeared a moment later with a small pop. "Yes, Harry Potter sir?"

Harry smiled at his little friend. "Would you bring me my pensieve please, Dobby?"

Dobby nodded and vanished again while Harry stood up and walked over to Ginny's bed. She had most of her concentration on Neville and the fact that she could now sense him.

"Ever since we got the message today of how bad Ginny was hurt, I have been upset by it," he said softly. Ginny turned and looked up at Harry, wondering what he was talking about.

"Ginny was hurt and neither magical nor muggle healing can make it any easier on her. Alastor Moody lived the last twenty years of his life with a wooden leg. But I just can't wrap my mind around letting that happen to her. She's my sister..."

"Harry, there's little we can do about it," Healer August said softly.

Ginny lay back and closed her eyes, allowing the tears to slide down the side of her head. She had briefly forgotten about her problem, having pushed it aside in her worry about Neville.

Harry turned to look at Sylvia. "You're wrong," he hissed angrily.

Dobby appeared with a pop, holding the empty pensieve up to Harry.

"But, Harry..."

He held up a hand, then took the stone bowl from the elf. "Thank you, Dobby," he said quietly.

He carefully positioned himself to lean against Ginny's bed, then he gestured, shrinking down his staff to wand size. Using the shrunken staff, he extracted a memory and placed it into the bowl.

"We, that is, Hermione and the others, have often discussed about how there is no dark magic and no light magic, there is only magic and intent. The lightest of spells can be used to kill and the darkest killing curse could be considered a mercy to someone terminally ill.

"What I am going to show you is a spell I know I can do and Hermione knows it, as well. I'm sure that most of the healers can probably do it, given a little training. The problem stems from the person you will be seeing perform the spell. I know for a fact this spell was not always considered a dark spell."

"What memory is this, Harry?" asked Amelia.

Harry sighed. "It's a small fragment of my encounter with Voldemort during the last task of the Triwizard Tournament. It shows Voldemort casting a spell on Peter Pettigrew and it's the reason why I asked you here, Amelia. You need to make a ruling, is this spell dark or not? Or just very old and forgotten, except by a master wizard like Voldemort?"

Healer August and Melinda looked extremely interested, but Amelia frowned.

"Are you saying you can regrow a limb?" asked Melinda incredulously.

Harry shook his head. "No, not regrow, but replace what has been lost with a fully functional limb. The limb will work like normal, once she learns how to use it."

"I don't see how a spell that can do that would be considered evil," Melinda said softly.

"Voldemort was a master at corrupting everything that was good and pure, Melinda," Arthur said, then he turned to Amelia. It was really her call, as Minister. "Amelia..."

Amelia held up her hand. "I'm sorry, Arthur, but I need to see this memory before I can make a ruling. I know exactly what you want, but I can't give it to you without seeing it for myself. Harry's right, in asking me to make a ruling, I just wish it had been under less personal circumstances."

Ginny watched the conversation, her eyes growing very wide. Harry turned back and smiled, reassuringly at her.

"I don't like this," she whispered. "It's bad enough that I'm now a freak."

Harry's expression turned to stone. "Stop that," he snapped.

Ginny blinked and stared up at him almost as if he had slapped her.

"You are not a freak, not now, not ever. You are a beautiful woman who has been hurt. We're going to try to fix your injury the best we can, but I don't want to hear you talking like that. Not ever, Ginny," Harry said, then his voice dropped to an intense whisper that only Ginny and Hermione could hear. "Believe me, I know what being a freak is all about, and you are no freak."

Hermione frowned at his comment, but a hospital room full of people was no place to be dealing with it. "What now, Harry?" she asked.

He ran a hand through his hair. "I suppose Amelia and Sylvia should view the memory. I'll run it in display mode for everyone to see, then let them enter the memory so they can see it up close."

That caught everyone's attention. Amelia nodded reluctantly, so Harry limped over to the table at the end of the bed and put the pensieve down. He

touched two runes and a still image appeared above the pensieve, quickly expanding in size.

Harry reached for the rune to activate the playback, but Amelia stopped him. "What are we looking at, Harry?"

"This is the graveyard at Little Hangleton. If I'd begun the memory a few minutes earlier, you would have seen Pettigrew kill Cedric Diggory and Voldemort's rebirth. They used a ritual that required a number of ingredients, including my blood, forcibly taken," Harry said, his voice emotionless. He couldn't help but shiver, remembering the terror he felt that night.

Hermione turned to stare at him. She could feel his remembered terror and it seemed to be coming close to forcing him into a flashback of some sort. She stepped up behind him and wrapped her arms around him again. He leaned back into her embrace and took a few calming breaths, while he fought against the rising panic.

Amelia looked at him in surprise, seeing him struggling with the emotions caused by that terrifying night. A moment later, he relaxed, still leaning against Hermione, drawing strength from her.

"What you see is, or was, his inner circle at the time. Most of them were all from the first war. Malfoy, Dolohov, Avery, Nott and so on. Part of the ritual included Pettigrew cutting off his own hand to add to the potion. What you'll see is Voldemort replacing the hand. That's all I've included in this memory. It's not a good memory for me and if I didn't think it was so important for Ginny, I wouldn't show it you now."

Arthur stepped up to Harry. "Thank you," he murmured.

Harry nodded at the man, then looked around before turning to Amelia. Seeing her nod, he touched the rune to play back the memory.

*"Yes, Master," moaned Wormtail, "please, Master... please..."*

*"Yet you helped return me to my body," said Voldemort coolly, watching Wormtail sob on the ground. "Worthless and traitorous as you are, you helped me... and Lord Voldemort rewards his helpers..."*

*Voldemort raised his wand again and whirled it through the air. A streak of what looked like molten silver hung shining in the wand's wake. Momentarily shapeless, it writhed and then formed itself into a gleaming replica of a human hand, bright as moonlight, which soared downward and fixed itself upon Wormtail's bleeding wrist.*

*Wormtail's sobbing stopped abruptly. His breathing harsh and ragged, he raised his head and stared in disbelief at the silver hand now attached to his arm as though he were wearing a dazzling glove. He flexed his fingers, then trembling, picked up a small twig on the ground and crushed it into powder.*

*"My Lord," he whispered. "Master... it is beautiful... thank you... thank you..."*

Harry pressed a rune on the bowl, halting the playback, then he pressed another, rewinding the recording to the starting point.

"I'll invite Amelia, Sylvia and Melinda to enter the memory..."

"No, not Healer McKinney," Amelia said, interrupting him.

"You can't be serious!" protested Sylvia August. "Just because someone evil used the spell, that doesn't make it evil. He gave that man a working hand!"

Amelia turned on Harry. "What's involved in this? Voldemort did a silent casting, so you had to look this spell up!"

"I did," Harry said with a nod. "It's on the proscribed list of spells because someone could cast it on a person that doesn't need a limb replacement, effectively crippling that person. It was declared illegal, over the protests of the Healers at St. Mungo's, nearly two hundred years ago because someone used it in a duel. I stumbled upon it in my family grimoire."

"But that would mean it was invented by a Potter!" exclaimed Melinda.

Harry smiled at her. "Yes, about six hundred years ago. She was a healer, too."

Amelia's expression fell and she stared at Harry.

Harry decided to press his case home with one final thrust. "Healer August, since this morning, how many amputations has the hospital been forced to perform?"

Amelia winced.

"Over one hundred, my Lord," Sylvia said quietly. She was savvy enough to recognize Harry was embattled in a political fight with Amelia, and her hospital and patients would be the real winners if he convinced her.

Amelia glanced down at Ginny, her eyes fixed on tented blanket protecting her stump and she shivered slightly.

"Oh, all right!" she snapped. "I suppose if I didn't allow it, you would have gone ahead and done something anyway."

Harry blinked in surprise, then he shrugged. "Actually, no. I would have suggested that Arthur and Neville send her to America. They have a similar spell, but not quite as good. The limb needs to be replaced every five years with their spell. This is permanent."

"One of these days we're going to sit down and have a long talk about what you can and can't do, Harry," Amelia said.

Hermione stepped forward, laying a hand on Harry's arm. "I don't think you have to worry about that, Amelia. With the war over and no Wizengamot to worry about, I think our days in politics are coming to an end, at least for now."

Amelia looked at the pair in shock, but Harry nodded at her, agreeing with Hermione.

"So, what now? Will you cast the spell then show us how to do it, Harry?" asked Sylvia.

Harry shared a glance with Hermione, then turned to the chief healer. "How is your occlumency?"

Sylvia looked at Harry as if he'd grown a third arm. "It's there. I'm no master of the art, but I have basic shields. Every healer develops them so we can understand how they affect the mind."

"Excellent. I'll let Hermione show you how it's done," Harry replied, then he stood and limped badly over to a chair next to Arthur.

Both Healers watched Harry with identical frowns as he walked. Melinda followed him and knelt next to his leg, while Hermione walked over to Sylvia to teach her the spell.

Melinda rolled up Harry's pants leg and frowned at the sight. The calf was purple from bruising and the muscle was cramped into a hard knot. "I don't like the look of this. I'll be back with a pain relief potion and something to relax the muscle tension."

Harry nodded absently. He was used to ignoring the pain. His attention was fixed on Hermione, who was transferring the knowledge of the spell to Sylvia, via communing. When Hermione finally stepped back, Sylvia smiled. The spell had several modes and multiple applications, and it was easy enough that a modestly powerful witch or wizard could perform it.

"Hermione probably gave you all the information, Sylvia, but tomorrow morning I'll send over a house elf with copies of what I have from my family grimoire," Harry offered.

Sylvia nodded absently. "It is pretty easy once you understand it, but it would be nice to have written documentation so it can be taught to the other healers. Tell me, does your grimoire contain other healing spells?"

"Ask Hermione. She's read it pretty thoroughly. I read it for the family information, but she went through all the spells," he replied, then his attention was drawn to Melinda, who had re-entered the room holding several potion vials.

Sylvia turned to Hermione with an arched eyebrow.

"There are a couple, if I recall correctly, including what looks like a spell to restart a heart," Hermione said. "The problem is, that spell seems to be very similar to the Cruciatus."

Sylvia nodded. "Yes, that was its original intent when it was first developed, but we found it too powerful and too dangerous."

"I can have the relevant sections copied out for you to look at if you want," Hermione offered. By tradition, only family members were allowed to handle a grimoire. Normally, a family grimoire contained spells that only the family knew. But the Potters had a long tradition of sharing spells, especially those involving healing.

"Please," Sylvia replied, then she stepped up to Ginny's bed.

Ginny had been watching silently for a while without commenting. She appeared to be overwhelmed by what had happened today.

Sylvia smiled at her. "Let's give you a leg to walk on, shall we?"

"Will it be that ugly silver thing?" Ginny asked.

Sylvia frowned. "Mrs. Longbottom, if we don't do this spell before your leg heals, we won't be able to do it at all. The leg I'm going to give you will be better than anything we could have done for you before Harry's involvement in your case. It will feel and work like a real leg. The only thing that will be different is that you'll never have to shave that leg again. As to its appearance, you are a witch aren't you? Can't you spell it to look real?"

"But it won't be real," she protested.

"No, it won't. But don't you think your husband wants you alive, on two legs, even if one of them is made from magic? He needs you so badly that just the thought of you being dead was enough to nearly kill him."

Ginny's eyes widened and she turned to Neville. "Nev?" she said in a whisper.

Neville opened his eyes and smiled at her. He nodded as his eyes slipped closed again.

Ginny's expression grew determined. "Alright, do it," she told the healer.

Sylvia smiled and closed the curtains around the bed to give them some privacy.

Melinda stood over Harry for a moment, then motioned to Hermione to join them. "If I had an open bed, you'd be in one right now, Harry," she said in annoyance. "You're exhausted, your magical core is depleted and your leg is a mess!"



She handed Hermione two vials. "These are single dose dreamless sleep potions, good for at least eight hours. I want you to get him home, then both of you are to take these."

Hermione took the two vials gratefully from Melinda. "Don't worry. Once we get home, we'll go straight to bed."

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### **Padfoot Manor (1930 hours, April 10th)...**

Harry and Hermione arrived back in the grand foyer, having been away for just over a day. Harry leaned against Hermione and she had one arm around him, giving him support. Dan and Emma waited for them to arrive. Luna had returned earlier and warned the others that they'd be coming home. Remus and Tonks had returned to the manor nearly an hour ago and had given them many of the details of their day.

Emma gasped out a startled oath and rushed to embrace Hermione, while Dan grabbed Harry, keeping him steady.

The Grangers tried to steer the pair into the sitting room, but Hermione stopped them.

"I know you two want to talk, but if we're going to do this, could we do it from our bedroom?" she asked.

Emma's expression softened and she looked keenly at her daughter and son-in-law. Both appeared to be exhausted. Making up her mind, she turned to Dan. "Dan, help Harry up to their bedroom. I'll get the elves to prepare a light dinner for all of us."

Not long afterwards, the Potters found themselves dining with the Grangers, who were doing their best to keep the conversation light.

"And then Susan tried to convince us she wasn't in labor, despite her water breaking," Emma said with a slight chuckle.

Harry peered at her for a moment, trying to wrap his head around the idea that a new person was now living in the manor.

"We'll go see Susan and the baby tomorrow," Hermione said softly. She, too, was interested and wanted to meet little Siomha, but the day's toll was weighing heavily on her.

"Is Neville going to be alright? And Ginny?" asked Emma finally.

"I hope so," Harry replied. "I think Neville will be fine. Ginny I'm not so sure about yet. She's going to need a lot of help, I think... I don't know. I'm too tired to think right now."

Dan and Emma exchanged a look then they both stood. "I think you two should head off to bed," Dan suggested.

Hermione pulled two potion vials out of a pocket. "Yes, Healer McKinney gave us those same orders."

Satisfied, Dan and Emma excused themselves from the room. Harry and Hermione quickly shed their clothes and made their way to the bed.

"I wanted to make love with you, but I'm too tired," Hermione said grumpily.

"Tomorrow, love. Right now, I want to take one of those doses and sleep with you in my arms," Harry replied. "Tomorrow we can spend all day making love, if you want."

She smiled at him. "Well, we both know we can't do that, but perhaps when we wake up?"

He nodded and crawled under the blanket. Then he plucked his dose from her hand and downed it in a single go. "They've got to make these things taste better," he murmured.

Hermione drank her own and snuggled into his shoulder. "Uh huh."

Their breathing deepened and the room fell silent.

With a small pop, two elves appeared. They looked fondly at their humans, then picked up the clothing they had dropped on the floor. Winky placed all the clothes in a basket and disappeared.

Dobby pulled the blankets up around Harry and Hermione and banked the fire. He gestured and the candles went out, except the one Harry insisted be left burning. With one last glance around, he nodded in satisfaction and popped away.

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### **Authors Notes:**

"Watcha doing?" asked Alyx.

"I'm waiting for my donuts to arrive," Bob replied, staring at the mail box.

"You can't eat donuts anymore!" she shouted at him.

"Oh bugger!"

"Here, have a rice cake," she offered sweetly.

Bob glared at her and she burst into flames. Then Hermione stepped into the room wearing a thong and carrying a box of chocolate crème filled donuts.

Suddenly he blinked as his head smashed into his monitor. He looked up to see Alyx standing over him. "You're day dreaming again!"

"Oh bugger!" he muttered. "I might as well get the authors notes done then."

This completes the battle arc of the story. Some parts were incredibly difficult for us to write, others were pretty easy. For those interested in knowing, the final battle alone, consumed just over fifty thousand words.

Kelvin: Yes an outhouse is an outdoor toilet. The camp was named by the Americans because of (a) how the camp looked, and (b) we Americans enjoy potty humor.

Badge-Dude: Short chapter? Really, nice to know you think so. As to the Iron Wand Tong and the Blood Jihad, they were part of the Death Eater forces under Voldemort. We didn't see any reason to treat them separately.

Srikanth: BUT!!!! WE!!!! LOVE!!!! EXCLAMATIONS!!!!

Chem Prof: We have faith in you producing a riveting final battle. Work to your strengths, have Hermione throw acid or something at him. (Just kidding!) And for those who don't know, we recommend Chem Prof's story, Hermione's Plan over on Fanfiction.net. It's worth checking out.

<http://www.fanfiction.net/s/3290886/1/>

Heart\_bloodline: You're welcome.

Quizer: If you recall, Voldemort wanted to make Harry suffer. But his Cruciatius curse was too bloody powerful, it would have put Harry beyond any suffering and straight into insanity. That's why he used a weakened version of the curse. It was still incredibly painful for poor Harry. But it wouldn't drive him loony in the first second like it did to Mulciber's wife.

Teganii: I don't understand it either. But here's what you can do. Don't buy book seven. Instead, print out Sunrise and Sunset and hand it to your kids. Tell them it's a different vision of the same character and probably more fun than what JKR had in mind anyway.

Apr911: **Yes, we are considering other projects after this. Plus we have a couple shorts we'll be able to post, like Potter's Revenge.** I highlight this so that others, who have asked the same question will see it and stop worrying.

MarinePotterFan: You of all people should understand that defending from a fortified position is something preferred. Yes, we used walls in both Sunrise and Spiritus Crystalus, but that's because from a defensive standpoint, walls make sense and castles are supposed to have walls.

Tim: What the real Prince Charles says he intends to do and what ours does are two different things. Our King Charles doesn't have ears that can be used as aircraft wings either. We did know that, but Charles announced that long after our timeframe of 1996-1997.

For those that thought Susan's labor went too fast we have only this to say... NANA NANA BOO BOO... no, seriously. She started labor the night before, after dinner and didn't know it. My first wife had three hours hard labor before the birth of my first son. Labor takes what labor takes and not every woman goes through forty two years of labor while walking uphill in a snowstorm, bare footed and wearing only a thong.

A lot of people have pointed out that we have thing about injuries to the legs. Yeah, we sort of screwed up with Ginny's injury, but to be honest I didn't want to kill her. I also needed her injury in the leg to emphasize a point that people keep throwing back at us. Why can't we heal Harry's leg? Hopefully this chapter puts that question to bed once and for all time.

Freakyfinger: You will not see Fawkes return to this story. He left Dumbledore and Harry's aura is too gray for it to be acceptable to Fawkes. Besides, Harry having a phoenix is too cliché at this point. No, no Fawkes for Harry. Sorry. Maybe we can give him a Snorkack pup?

Fanofdrows: Not being Swedish we'll have to take your word for it. Frankly we're becoming leery of using other languages for spells anymore. We've had people correct our French, (Pardon our French), our German, Swedish and someone named Markus Aurelius threatened to invade if we didn't fix our Latin. I'd try Klingon next, but I'd hate to upset them! Now as to Hermione's Swedish, well she put that spell together on the fly and she couldn't tell a Swedish Meatball from the Swedish Chef, so I think we'll let her slide this once. BORK BORK BORK!

Shadowtrey: Yes, the Dark Wanker is truly dead. As to what hit Harry? Keep reading.

*Bobmin*  
*FanficAuthors.net*

# Sunrise Over Britain

## Chapter 32 - Taking Stock

Standard Disclaimer:

Remus whined and Bob used the broom to push him onto the stage. The curtains parted and he looked around wildly as the lights came up.

Remus paled and started to sweat under the hot lights. He stared at the audience and trembled in fear.

“Do something you silly fur face!” shouted Harry with a grin.

“Harry!” chided Hermione, her hand down his pants. “Be nice to wolfie, or I'll yank on it!”

Harry gulped nervously and clapped his hands. “YAY REMUS!”

“I'm not sure why I'm here,” Remus started.

From the audience a very small garment flew onto the stage. He walked over and bent down, picking it up. Attached to the garment a note.

He held up the blue, iridescent speedo and blanched. Opening the note he read. “Put it on and tell the audience that Bob and Alyx make no claim to any rights to the Potterverse. Wear it and we'll play spank the schoolgirl tonight.”

He blushed and looked out to see Tonks bouncing in her seat howling and whistling.

Alyx whirled on Bob and glared at him. “Is this the best you can do?”

“Well, we've killed off all the bad guys, now the only people left to torment are good guys,” Bob whined, then a light bulb lit up over his head.

“Hey, do you think I could figure out a way of keeping Voldemort alive? Maybe I can invent something called a Whore-cruX which he can hide pieces of himself, you know dozens of evil women each carrying a piece of him...”

“Whore-cruX?” exclaimed Alyx. “That's the stupidest idea I ever heard! You do that and we'll be swamped with requests for sequels and that ain't gonna happen.”

Bob shook his head. “Yeah, you're right, it is a dumb idea.”

“Maybe for the next disclaimer we can use Harry,” Alyx whispered. “I never liked that whiny little bugger anyway.”

Bob blinked at her. “You don't like Harry?” he sputtered.

“Not really, I'm more of a Snape fan,” she replied, buffing her nails.

Bob sunk his head into his hands. “Give me strength!” he moaned.

“She doesn't like me?” Harry asked looking hurt.

“I still like you Harry,” Hermione told him. “Who cares what she thinks, she's not in the story!”

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## Sunrise Over Britain

### Chapter 32

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#### Padfoot Manor, Harry and Hermione's bedroom (April 11th)...

Hermione pulled up the covers around her and tried to go back to sleep, but something was bothering her and she couldn't quite put her finger on it. When it finally dawned on her, she opened her eyes and frowned. Harry had shut down the link to the barest minimum.

Rolling over to face him, she saw that he lay quietly next to her. His eyes were open and by the grimace on his face he was clearly in pain.

“Harry?”

“Hi,” he gasped.

“What's wrong?” she asked.

“Seems that Neville hit me harder with that bludgeon than I thought. My back is killing me,” he whispered.

Hermione carefully got out of bed and threw on her robe. “How long have you been up?”

“A couple hours. I was fine until about four this morning.”

She frowned. "Why didn't you wake me? Or summon Dobby to get Narcissa?"

"I tried waking you, but you were still under the sleeping potion. It's just a bad bruise. Besides, Dobby would have panicked and woken up the whole house," he replied.

Hermione nodded, knowing he was right about Dobby. The elf was not someone to call when Harry was in trouble. He'd wake up the whole world to help Harry.

She walked around to his side of the bed and gently helped him sit up. Harry bit his lip to keep from crying out and he tried to reduce their bond even more.

"Stop that," she snapped at him. "I know you're in pain. You can't hide it by shutting off our connection."

He nodded and leaned his head forward, placing it between her breasts. She lifted up the back of his shirt and sucked in her breath, seeing the large purple bruise that covered half his back.

"Dobby!" she called.

Dobby appeared with a pop. He looked up at Hermione and Harry with concern in his eyes.

"Dobby, please ask Narcissa to come to our room with something for a large bruise," Hermione said softly. Dobby's eyes grew wide and Hermione's expression softened. "Don't worry, Dobby, Harry will be fine."

Dobby nodded and vanished.

"He's going to wake up the whole house," Harry muttered.

"Hush, you," she said as she gently caressed his shoulders, trying to ease the tension.

From the other side of the manor she could hear a loud boom and the sound of shouting. Looking up, she gnawed on her lip for a moment.

"Perhaps you were right," she murmured. "He is waking up the house."

Harry chuckled, then groaned against her. She leaned down and kissed the top of his head. She knew that the bruise wasn't life threatening, but the size of it alarmed her. It had to be very painful.

The door to the room opened and Narcissa rushed in, carrying a large bag of potions. Between her and Hermione, they were able to get the t-shirt off Harry so Narcissa could put a salve on his back.

"I had been expecting this, to be honest. Melinda told me last night you would probably wake up in a lot of pain," Narcissa said in an annoyed tone. "I just didn't expect you to send that lunatic elf to wake me up. Who taught him the concussive spell?"

"I didn't send him to you," Harry said through gritted teeth. "She did."

Hermione glared at Harry. "Well? What do you expect? You're hurting!"

"I don't care who sent him! Next time just tell him to wake people up quietly. Thank Merlin I put a silencing charm on Susan's room last night. I thought it would be to protect everyone else from Siomha's cries, but no, that charm probably kept her from waking up."

Harry hissed as the cold salve was spread over his back, then he sighed when the pain receded.

"In an hour I want you to take a hot soak, Harry, as hot as you can handle. Stay in the water for at least an hour, then get out, put on your shorts and a robe. I have to check your leg," Narcissa said.

Harry nodded and, feeling better, he put his robe on and walked over to the table where Winky was setting up breakfast.

Narcissa watched him carefully as he walked away.

Hermione looked at her, her expression worried. "What is it?"

Narcissa shrugged. "It's nothing, really. I just want to make sure he doesn't overdo it today. He put a lot of stress on that leg yesterday."

Hermione nodded in agreement. "I don't think we'll be doing much of anything today. Caleb told him yesterday that everyone should take a few days to catch their breaths. The only thing I know he's going to want to do today is visit with Susan and the others."

Narcissa nodded thoughtfully. "Alright, but he's not to be training or running around, and keep the stairs to a minimum for at least the next few days."

Hermione glanced over to where Harry sat, eating breakfast. "I'll see he doesn't overdo it. Would you like to join us for breakfast?"

Narcissa shook her head. "No, thank you. Now that I'm up, I should check on Draco and Susan. We haven't identified the curse that hit Dray, so his healing has been slowed. He's in a lot of pain, but Luna's helping him. Susan should be fine, but it was a rough delivery."

"We'll be by to see both Susan and Draco later. I know Harry and I are both eager to meet the newest member of our family," Hermione said, then her voice dropped to a conspiratorial whisper. "I think Harry is afraid I might want a baby soon. I tried to tell him not for a few more years, but you know how men are."

Narcissa's eyes glinted with amusement. "Yes, but I suspect you two will be among the last to start a family. Luna already told Dray she's willing to wait another year or two and Ginny will need time to recover." Packing her potion bag, she stood up. "I'll be back around ten to look in on Harry. Until then, stay in the manor. Visit with Draco or Susan, but I want you both to take it easy, especially him."

Hermione nodded and walked with Narcissa to the door. Closing it behind the older woman, she turned around and went to join Harry for breakfast. If she had anything to say about it, no one would be doing much of anything today.

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### **Padfoot Manor, Susan and Terry's bedroom...**

Susan rolled on the bed and stopped breathing for a moment. She heard humming! Opening one eye, she peeked from under the blankets. Terry sat on a chair next to the bassinet they were using for Siomha. He held her in her arms and was humming to her.

She smiled and watched as he quietly sang a little song to his daughter.

*The lion and the unicorn were fighting for the crown  
The lion beat the unicorn all around the town.  
Some gave them white bread, and some gave them brown;  
Some gave them plum cake and drummed them out of town.*

"Terry," she said sleepily. "That's gruesome."

He looked up at Susan and grinned. "I know. My grandmum used to sing it to me when I was little. It wasn't until I went to school that I learned what it means. Besides, Sus, all nursery rhymes are gruesome if you examine their true meaning."

Siomha fussed in his arms and he glanced down at her, frowning.

"I don't think she likes me very much," he murmured. "I've been trying to keep her quiet so you can sleep, but she doesn't seem interested in my singing or my rhymes."

Susan laughed. "She's hungry and unless you can do something about it, I'd suggest giving her to me. I should have fed her more than an hour ago."

Terry stood and held Siomha out in front of him so she could see him. "You are the lucky one, my little pretty. You're getting to dine in my playground and I'm only allowed to watch until further notice."

Susan laughed and took her daughter from him. "Prat," she said fondly, looking up at her husband. She undid the buttons on her pajama top and placed the baby to her breast.

He returned to his chair. "Well, it's true, isn't it?"

"It's not as bad as you make it out to be. Besides, we'll make do. Has Auntie been by yet? I don't recall seeing her last night," Susan asked.

Terry leaned back in the chair watching his wife and daughter for a moment. "No, but don't be too hard on the old bird. There was an awful lot happening yesterday. I expect she'll be around today. What about you? How soon can you get out of bed?"

"Anytime I want," Susan said, scowling at him. "I had a baby, I'm not a cripple, thank you very much. Besides, the pain potions help a lot now that the labor is done."

Terry leaned forward and played with his cane for a moment. "Susan, about that. I spoke to Narcissa about your labor. I'm very sorry I wasn't able to be there for you. Though, in a way, I'm grateful I missed it. I would have panicked had I been here," he paused and looked up at her. "Did the healers say anything about your ability to have more children?"

"Danni said I shouldn't have any problems. Siomha's birth was difficult, but the healers will be prepared for that, next time. This time caught everyone off guard," she replied softly, watching him. "Why? Would it matter to you if I couldn't have more children?"

Terry looked at her in astonishment. "Of course it wouldn't! Merlin, Susan, you nearly died!" he said, then he turned away, choked up.

"Terry, look at me."

He turned, not bothering to wipe the tears from his eyes. She held out a hand to him and he moved to sit beside her. Taking her hand, he turned it over and kissed her palm.

"What nearly happened doesn't matter, Terry. I'm still here and we're together as a family. That's what's important. In the future, when we decide to add to our family, we'll make sure there is a healer handy. That's all it means," she said, then she released his hand and patted his side of the bed. "Come lay next to us."

Moving to his side of the bed, he climbed in and watched his daughter nurse. He was in awe of her and, like most fathers, felt she was the most beautiful child to ever be born.

"Where did you sleep last night?" Susan asked.

"I caught a few hours on the day bed in Harry's study. I didn't get back from Operations until nearly two. I think I had too much coffee, I couldn't sleep

very well. Anyway, when I came in here about an hour ago, Siomha was waking. That's when I picked her up."

Susan nodded. Her in-laws had stayed with her for most of the evening until she dropped off to sleep, thanks to a potion from Narcissa. "Tonight, Mr. Boot, you're sleeping by my side where you belong," she told him firmly.

Terry eyed her. "Are you sure?"

She reached over and ruffled his hair. "Yes, I'm sure. We'll be sleeping, not making love. Besides, I don't sleep well when you're not beside me. I miss being able to cuddle with you."

Terry yawned and nodded. She smiled and ran her fingers through his hair. "Sleep, Terry. You haven't had nearly enough."

Terry closed his eyes and started to drift. He smiled when he heard Susan murmuring to their daughter.

"Daddy's sleeping," she told Siomha in a whisper.

*Daddy, he thought. I like that.*

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### **Padfoot Manor, Harry and Hermione's bathroom (April 11th)...**

"Harry?"

He floated in the large tub, relaxing for the first time in nearly two days. "Hmmm?"

"Harry, open your eyes. I want to talk to you," Hermione said from the edge of the large tub.

He opened one eye and looked at her. She sat on a bench near the tub. "Why don't you join me?"

She grinned, then shook her head. "Because Narcissa will be back shortly to give you a checkup and I don't think she'd be interested in seeing the two of us thrashing about in the tub. Save that thought for later and I promise I'll make your toes curl."

He grinned ruefully. "I could have lived without that picture. I like Narcissa, but I prefer not to have an audience," he said, wagging his eyebrows at her. "And just kissing you makes my toes curl."

His voice had dropped several registers and she shivered at the effect it had on her.

"So what was it you wanted to talk about?"

"After your fight with him, something happened. I felt that you were in intense pain. I felt the pain, too, but it was different from that curse he put on you. He was dead at that point. How? How did he curse you like that after he was dead?"

Harry stood up in the tub and walked over to the edge near where Hermione sat. He leaned against the side of the tub using his elbows to keep himself on the edge, his legs dangling in the water behind him. It gave her a wonderful view of his bum.

"You need to understand, Hermione. Voldemort's body wasn't real. It was a magical construct, a shell made to give his soul and his magic a place to reside. Eocho and I talked about this many times, about how his body wasn't real. Remember, I was there when he was reborn.

He reached out with one hand and ran his fingers gently against her ankle. "You and I, each of us, have a body that's powered by our soul. It is the singular thing that makes you so beautiful," he said with a grin. "Your soul. It's pure in a way that Voldemort couldn't understand or ever be."

Hermione blushed.

"His soul had become dark and twisted. He had managed to corrupt something nearly impossible to corrupt. Even if I hadn't destroyed his original body when he attacked me and my parents, his soul was killing him. He needed a new body capable of holding what he had become, so he created one. For all his power, the one thing he couldn't do was create a form powered by his soul. So he created a body that was powered by..." He paused and looked up at her expectantly.

She blinked and thought about it for a moment. "His magic?"

He nodded. "Ten points to Gryffindor. Yes, his magic. Everyone on the walls saw me physically attack him and many probably think I strangled him. And to be truthful, at one point I did strangle him. I was so angry, so enraged at all the pain he caused me. But that wasn't what killed him."

Hermione stared at him. "What? But I thought..."

"So did everyone else. Voldemort was so busy fighting me and had been unable to attack me mentally for so long that he had pretty much given up that avenue of attack. I caught him off guard. He was surprised and his mental shields were in a weakened state."

When he stood up and climbed out of the tub, she reached for a towel.

Taking the towel from her, he unfolded it. "I forced my way through his shields. No, I destroyed his shields. My attack was sudden and unexpected and totally brutal in its intensity. In his surprise, instead of trying to fight me mentally, he resorted to instinct and tried to fight me physically. But his magical body wasn't made for that sort of combat."

Hermione watched him carefully as he described the fight. His eyes seemed to be focused on something she couldn't see.

"I didn't stop there, though. I tore through his mind, digging and burrowing deep into it. I didn't stop to absorb memories or steal knowledge. I had only one purpose in mind, to destroy him utterly."

He wrapped the towel around his waist and sat down next to her.

"I passed his conscious mind. I could have stopped at that point because his mind was nearly gone, but I didn't. I tore through his primal mind. I destroyed his autonomic reflexes, like breathing and all the other little things that keep us alive, things we take for granted."

"He was dying at that point, but it wasn't enough for me. I had to kill him where it mattered the most. I tore deeper into his mind until I reached the core of his magic. I ripped it apart, Hermione. I severed the connections between his magic and his body, separated the connections between his soul and his magic."

He looked down at his hands and realized that he had clenched them while he spoke. Taking a deep breath, he forced himself to relax.

"Finally, I crawled off him. He was dead, his soul gone on to what ever hell it was consigned to. I was on my hands and knees, barely able to think about crawling away when my own shields collapsed for a brief instant. His power... it flooded up the link between us in one gigantic pulse. His link between us was the only way out for his magic, so it took it."

Hermione stared at him in shock. "You've gained his power?"

Harry closed his eyes and nodded. He knew that the vast bulk of Voldemort's power had been gained by killing wizards and witches. Thinking about the power boost he had gained from Voldemort's death made his skin crawl with disgust.

"I didn't get all of it, but enough. Too much, if you ask me. Ironic isn't it? Killing him resulted in making me even stronger than I was. And for what purpose? What do I need the power for now? I don't want to fight anymore."

He leaned back against the wall with his eyes closed.

She turned to face him. "Hey, you didn't know this was going to happen. So, you're more powerful, big deal. You're still that scrawny little eleven year old I met on the train all those years ago and you still need me around to keep you out of trouble," she said teasingly. When he didn't react, she poked him in the side, causing his eyes to jerk open.

Shaking his head, he laughed and pulled her into a wet hug. She thought it was worth getting a little wet if she distracted him from thinking himself into a depressed state.

She wrapped her arms around his damp body. "We'll work it out together."

He leaned down and kissed the top of her head. "Together," he agreed. "*My heart*," he sent to her, widening the bond and accepting the comfort and love she offered.

She snuggled closer to him while her mind pondered the ramifications of another power boost. Like Harry, she couldn't really see any reason for it. It couldn't be changed, however, so they'd just have to accept it.

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## Office of the Minister of Magic, Haven...

"Ms. Twonk is here to see you, Minister," David said from the doorway.

"Thank you. Please send her in."

Amelia stood and waited behind her desk while David ushered in a middle aged woman. The two women shook hands.

"Thank you for seeing me on such short notice, Minister."

"I think I should be the one thanking you, Ms. Twonk. After all, your notice came at a most welcome time. Please, sit down," Amelia said, gesturing to one of the chairs.

"Please, call me Anastasia."

Nodding, Amelia sat down. "As I was saying, winning the war is only part of what we need to do. Our country has been ravaged and rebuilding will be a long and arduous process. When we received notice of your group of nearly a thousand volunteers we were extremely pleased, but also a little concerned. A thousand wizards and witches could be construed by some to be an army."

Anastasia blinked and looked at Amelia dumbfounded, then her lips twitched with amusement. "I suppose you could see it like that," she said. Grinning outright, she leaned forward. "Minister, do you know what I did before the war?"

Amelia shook her head. "No, that's one of the reasons why I asked you to come here today. We had no idea who was leading this large group of volunteers. And, quite frankly, if your group is going to be effective in helping reconstruct our country, the government needs to know who its leaders are and be able to work with them."

Anastasia nodded understandingly. "I was a school teacher, Minister. I taught first through third grades and I liked to putter about in my garden."



Hopefully, my son and husband are still somewhere in Britain, because they aren't in Haven or America.

"I first organized our group to help fix up the camp the American's put us in. I bless them every day, but that place was as cold and impersonal as you could get. Our group consists of reporters, teachers, shop keepers, brewers, conjurers, enchanters, cab drivers, healers, midwives, seamstresses and so on.

"We're not an army. We're just a group of people who want to come home, maybe find our families. We want to start putting our lives back together and that means fixing the problems at home."

"Tell me, Anastasia," Amelia said, her eyes glittering, "would you be willing to accept a role in the Ministry? There's a lot of work to be done and I'd prefer that we work together to accomplish it."

Anastasia frowned. "I didn't organize our group in order to get myself a government job, Minister," she said stiffly.

"Perhaps you didn't, Ms. Twonk, but there it is, nonetheless. We need your group and we need someone in charge of it. Someone that your people will trust and take orders from."

The Minister stared at her until she looked away and nodded. She didn't want anything special, but her people depended on her. She'd take the job, if only for them.

"Excellent," Amelia said with a smile. "Now then, our efforts are going to be centered around four principle areas: Hogwarts, which, except for the warding, will be rebuilt primarily by house elves, Hogsmeade, Diagon Alley and the old Ministry of Magic building."

"The Diagon Alley reconstruction will be a joint effort between the Goblins and the Ministry. With the damage done to Hogsmeade, we're looking to rebuild from the ground up and greatly expand it. We're thinking of something on the order of Haven, which is the third largest wizarding town in Ireland."

Amelia stopped and jabbed a finger at Anastasia. "You're going to need to change your thinking. Before, you worked on one project at a time. Now you need to reconsider how things happen. While you oversee the cleaning up of Hogsmeade, you'll also be planning the new layout, approving the designs for the wards around Diagon Alley, and overseeing the construction of a new Ministry facility next to Hogwarts. In short, Anastasia, you need to think bigger than before. Your people will be scattered to every corner of the country, working on projects, and sometimes even helping the muggles rebuild."

Standing, Amelia walked over to the tea service near the window and filled two cups. Taking one to her visitor, she smiled encouragingly at the shell-shocked expression on the woman's face.

Anastasia shook her head ruefully and took the offered cup. "I never realized how big a job it would be. But we're itching to get to work."

"Good," Amelia replied with a smile, "because we're going to work people very hard. We'll house and feed them, pay them what we can, but it won't be anywhere near what they could have earned on their own before the war." Walking back to her desk, she sat down and sipped her tea.

Anastasia nodded. She knew things couldn't be the same as they'd been before the war, but they had a chance to make things better. "I'm your girl, Minister," she said firmly, raising her cup in salute. "Just tell us where to start and we'll get to work."

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### **Padfoot Manor, Susan and Terry's bedroom...**

"She's adorable!" gushed Hermione.

Susan preened and held up Siomha so Hermione could get a better look, while Terry and Harry exchanged amused grins.

Harry stood behind his wife and peered over her shoulder. She glanced back at him, smiling broadly. "Well, Harry? What do you think?"

"She's awful small," he offered dubiously. Including Siomha, he could count his experience with infants on one hand and still have four fingers left over.

Hermione laughed. "Of course she's small. It's not as if they come out full grown, you know."

Susan stood and offered Siomha to Hermione.

Alarmed, Harry took a step backwards and put his hands behind his back. He didn't want to be in a position where he might drop her. She may be small, but he knew she was important.

Susan put on a dressing gown, then moved to the couch to sit.

Hermione cradled the infant and grinned at him. "She's not going to bite you," she teased.

"I know. She doesn't have teeth yet," he said seriously.

Terry laughed and sat down next to Susan.

"So, Harry, I hear Narcissa gave you a clean bill of health," Terry said.

Harry sat down and nodded. "She did, but only after she poked and prodded and complained about my body. I mean, really! Next time, I'll leave the Dark Lord fighting to someone else if I'm just going to be abused for it afterwards."

Hermione looked up from cooing at the infant. "Some abuse," she said with a snort. "She's only like that because she was worried about you."

"I know," he complained. "But all things considering, I walked away from that fight in a lot better shape than I thought I would. The others got hurt a lot worse than I did. All I did was strain my leg again and get a few bruises."

"Those bruises kept you from getting out of bed this morning," Hermione reminded him darkly.

"Yeah, but Neville gave me those bruises," he replied. Not wanting to continue the conversation, he turned to Terry. "So, how does it feel, Dad?"

Terry grinned. "It's different. I can't say I've done much Dad stuff yet, though."

Susan laughed. "Don't let him fool you. I woke up this morning to find him holding the baby and singing this God awful nursery rhyme."

"You don't look like the nursery rhyme type, Terry," Harry said with a smirk.

Terry looked down and blushed at being caught out and Susan laughed again. "She's barely a day old and already she has her daddy wrapped around her little finger."

Siomha opened her eyes and yawned, then she started to fuss in Hermione's arms.

Susan looked up when Siomha let out a loud cry. "She's probably hungry. Give her here, Hermione. She won't be satisfied until she'd eaten" she said as she opened her robe and started to unbutton her pajama top.

Harry made a strangling sound and turned around abruptly in his chair. It didn't bother Terry at all because he had discussed this previously with Susan. She was going to nurse their baby and she wasn't going to hide to do it.

Hermione eyed Harry with amusement. "What's the matter, Harry?" she asked teasingly. "Don't you know that all witches nurse their babies?"

"Well... yes... I mean... That is... You... Umm... Maybe I should go see how Draco is doing," he finally blurted out, still looking at the wall. Not waiting for a reply, he apparated from the room.

Hermione stared at the empty chair for a moment in shock. "*Harry?*"

"Yes?"

"*Are you alright?*"

"Yes, I'm fine," he replied. "*I just didn't think I should be sitting there, staring at Susan's bits, you know?*"

She turned to the others, her eyes dancing. "He didn't want to be accused of looking at your bits, he says."

Susan and Terry laughed.

"Well, I imagine he'd rather look at your bits, Hermione," Susan said teasingly. "But that's how we ended up with little Siomha."

Hermione nodded. "I understand. But I think I better go find my husband and calm him down. He'll get used to it, but it'll take him a few days, I think."

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## Haven Hospital...

Order was slowly returning to the hospital. It was still seriously overcrowded and the number of volunteers had quadrupled the size of the staff. Feeding them and the patients had become the full time job of one hundred Haven house elves.

Tents had been set up behind the main building where dozens of brewers were busy making nearly every conceivable healing potion.

In a room that contained only two patients, a young woman wept at what was, to her, a life altering blow. Ginny Longbottom had been seriously injured when one section of the wall around Hogwarts Castle collapsed. She had lost a leg in that collapse and had not yet come to grips with her loss. To make matters worse, her husband had been injured even worse than she had and now rested only a few feet away, in a deep healing sleep.

Neville's injuries were bad, but easily healed. The greatest threat to his life came from the idea that Ginny had died in battle. Neville had given up his fight to live until Harry intervened, bringing him back and forcing the pair in a bond of magic.

She could feel him there, in her mind. It was like a tickle hovering around the edges of her consciousness. She knew that he could feel her, although she wasn't sure how she knew. Ever since yesterday, the link that Harry had created pulsed and strengthened. Neville had woke up for just a few brief seconds yesterday, then he had slipped back into a deep sleep, one which didn't seem to alarm the healers.

She tried to hide from him what she was feeling, but the longer she tried, the stronger the pull became on her. The bond was preventing her from hiding what she felt. She had always viewed the bonds the others had with no small amount of envy. Now she was discovering the reality was far different than what she had expected.

Melinda had been in earlier to explain to her that she had sent Arthur and her family home with dreamless sleep potions to help them sleep. That, at least, explained why she had woken up in the room alone with Neville.

She shivered and felt grotesque. Healer August had attached the magical leg to her last night and, almost instantly, the pain she felt and the sensation of something missing had vanished. But she couldn't bear to look at the silver appendage.

"Ginny?"

Ginny started and looked over at Neville. Tears were falling freely from his eyes. Without thinking, she gestured, pulling his bed close enough that she could reach out to him.

"Would you turn me away and think I'm monster if I had lost my leg?" he whispered. While it was still growing, her anguish and its cause was available to him, via their bond.

He reached out with a weak, trembling hand and touched her cheek. "Would you stop loving me?"

She sucked in her breath and shook her head.

"Then don't ever think I would turn you away. Without you, I'm nothing," he whispered. "You're still the beautiful girl I married. If you don't believe my words, then feel what I feel. Reach out and feel it, Gin."

She slid sideways on the beds, sliding onto his. He reached out and pulled her to him as best he could, but he felt as weak as a newborn kitten.

Resting in his arms, she closed her eyes and tentatively touched the connection that existed between them. She had always been a bit jealous of the bonding between the Potters and the Blacks. Now that she and Neville had one of their own, they needed to learn how to use it.

She could feel the stirring of magic enveloping them both. Since their connection was different, it didn't feel the same as the bond she'd experienced between Harry and Hermione yesterday. She couldn't feel his thoughts, or at least she didn't know how yet. But she did feel him. She felt his magic reach out and caress her, wrapping her in a gentle embrace of love and comfort.

The biggest difference that she could feel between this link and the other she experienced was that it was trying to use the medium of magic to communicate. Not quite sure why, she silently cast legilimency, but rather than aiming it at Neville, she aimed at herself.

Suddenly the bond blossomed and she gasped at what she felt.

All around her, she felt Neville, his aura extended and covered hers completely. Hers did the same for him. She could feel his emotions, his anguish over her pain, his awe at her beauty and the desire he felt for her that extended well beyond just raw lust. She seemed to realize that they were complimentary in nature. He provided stability and calmness, she provided spontaneity and excitement. Between them was perfect balance.

She broke down in his arms, feeling his deep rooted need for her. The bond had only amplified and solidified that need. She saw just how close he had come to death, giving up when he thought she was gone. He cradled her against him as best as he could, murmuring comforting words that were no longer necessary. She could feel their love, alive and growing. It was strong and would be very fruitful when the time was right.

"Do you see, Gin?" he asked when she calmed.

She nodded against his shoulder.

"Good," he whispered. "Quite a pair we make, right?"

She sniffled a few times and smiled at him. "The best."

She snuggled closer in his arms and within a few minutes they were both asleep.

Five minutes later, Arthur, Constance and the twins entered the room and came to an abrupt halt. Neville and Ginny lay together, asleep. She lay with her head on his shoulder and his hand was entwined in her long hair. Both looked peaceful. That wasn't what held them all fast, however.

The cold, sterile hospital room was covered in cherry blossom petals.

No one knew how it had happened. As only Neville and the Weasley family knew that cherry blossoms were Ginny's favorite flower, the redheads all smiled at the young man on the bed.

"You have a remarkable grandson, Constance," Arthur murmured quietly. "Let's leave them be for now."

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### **Padfoot Manor, Draco and Luna's room...**

Hermione caught up to Harry in Draco's room. He sat on the floor by the edge of Draco's bed and he was holding up a catalog so that they both could see the brooms listed there. Draco was improving, but it would still be a another day before he could get out of bed.

"So, here you are," Hermione said.

"I told you I was coming here," he replied archly.

Well, Susan says Siomha's dinner should be about six if you want to check out her bits again," she said impishly.

Harry colored and decided to ignore her, opting instead to show Draco the page detailing the American Barnstormer broom.

Hermione moved over and sat next to Harry on the floor, smiling at Draco. "How are you feeling?"

"Better today. Mum came by and left a new pain potion for me, but I need less of it today. I'm glad you stopped by, though. Luna left a little while ago, and laying here alone gets pretty boring," he replied, then he looked at Harry. "I heard you killed him."

Harry nodded and Hermione slid her hand over to cover his. "Yeah. It wasn't anything like I expected it would be. We heard about Lucius."

"He was a pig!" Draco said in disgust. "He threatened Luna."

"Yeah, but you protected her. That's what counts."

Draco's eyes darted to the door, then back to Harry. "I wanted to thank you. You know I wasn't happy when you insisted we learn how to use those muggle guns, and how Luna hated them... In the end, I didn't have a wand. I killed him with my gun." His eyes became haunted. "It's different with a gun, more personal. It's almost like you're doing it with your bare hands."

Harry leaned back against the wall and closed his eyes for a moment. "I know," he murmured. Opening his eyes a few moments later, he looked at the blond. "You know, Draco, with Lucius gone, you could claim the Malfoy line and bring it back to where it belongs. I'm not pushing you out of the Blacks, you'll forever be part of the family. But you might want to think on it."

Draco shook his head. "No way, Harry. I'm finally used to being a Black and that's what I'll stay. Besides, the Malfoy's deserve to die out. The Malfoy line has too many bad connotations to it. No, let the Malfoy's die with Lucius."

Harry nodded. He wasn't about to force the issue, but he'd wanted Draco to consider it. As a Black, he'd always be a member of the family, but never a family head in his own right like he could be with the Malfoy line.

"Where did Luna go, Draco?" asked Hermione.

"She wanted to go visit Hagrid and tell him what her Angels did. Honestly, sometimes I think she thinks of them as her children," Draco said. "I guess I don't mind too much, but sometimes it's hard to get her to focus on what's important."

"She tries real hard to do that for you," Harry said. "I've known her for a while now and she's more focused for you than for anyone else. Even more than for her own father."

Draco sighed and pushed the hair out of his eyes. "Yeah, I know. I guess I'm just in a rotten mood today."

Harry nodded knowingly. "Yeah, acting too much like a Gryffindor will do that to you."

Draco winced. "She told you, didn't she?"

"She didn't have to," he replied with a laugh. "You fought to protect your wife and got hurt in the process. Had you been Slytherin about it, you would have snuck up and knifed him in the back or something."

"A knife is too traditional, Harry. I would have sent Fuzz to take care of them," Draco replied haughtily.

Harry chuckled for a moment, then looked up, perplexed. There was a shimmering in one corner of the room. It slowly grew stronger, then coalesced into Luna. His eyes narrowed and he looked at her. "I see someone has learned how to travel," he commented.

"Oh, don't worry about it, Harry. I was in a rush. It's nearly time for Dray's potion," Luna told him as she walked over to the dresser and took a potion bottle from the drawer.

"I thought that was a difficult spell to learn," Hermione exclaimed, turning to Harry and glaring at him.

"Don't look at me. I didn't teach it to her," Harry protested.

"But if she can learn it, why can't I?" Hermione grumped, then she turned to Luna. "Who taught you the spell?"

"Oh, I found a book in the library here. Then the master helped me with the meditations needed," she replied airily. She was mixing a dose of potion for Draco and not really paying attention to any of them. Fuzz had climbed down off her shoulder and was watching her from the floor. She didn't like the smell of the potion.

Harry moved out of the way so Luna could get to Draco. Standing, he walked over to a couch and sat down, where Hermione joined him a moment later.

Dobby appeared and handed Harry a note.

"It seems Neville and Ginny will be sent home tomorrow morning," he said after reading the note. "I hope Ginny is alright. She was pretty upset about what happened to her."

Luna nodded, then she lifted the sheet covering Draco's back and folded it back. She banished his bandages and replaced them with clean ones. Finally, she turned to Harry and Hermione, sitting on the floor next to Draco like Harry had. "I think it will take her a bit, but she'll be fine. Neville was

the one that scared me. He was so lost when he thought she was gone," she said softly.

"I can see where Neville's coming from," Draco replied. He looked at Luna and reached out with one hand. She took it in her own and rubbed her cheek against it. "The past year has changed all of us, but the biggest change is in our relationships. Neville didn't even have a bond and he was lost without Ginny."

"He had a bond," Harry said. "He had a bond stronger than any magic I know of. He loves her. It's a strange emotion and one I don't think I'll ever understand entirely. My Mum died because of it and I'd gladly give up my own life to keep Hermione safe."

Hermione leaned against Harry and kept silent. It wasn't often that he talked so openly of his feelings, especially in front of others.

"Killing Voldemort was an important step in my life, but falling in love with Hermione was an even greater step. I'm certain Neville feels exactly the same way. So much so, in fact, that Ginny became his reason for existing, he lived for her. And when he thought she was gone..." He stopped speaking. There was no need to go on, really. Those in the room understood perfectly.

"Well, their new bond will make sure that won't happen again," Luna said with a laugh. "Once they learn to control it, anyway."

"Control it?" asked Hermione. "Our bond was just there. The only control we had over our bond was in how much we wanted to share. I can narrow it down to the point where I can barely feel Harry, or widen it so that he can feel my emotions and thoughts."

Luna looked at Harry. "Are you going to tell them, or just let them find out for themselves?"

Harry looked sheepish. "Well, about their bond. It's different than ours. You two have a bond that's largely powered by Luna's unique magic. What Hermione and I have is kind of a super-telepathy."

Hermione crossed her arms and looked at him pointedly. "I think we all figured that out by now, Harry."

He winced and plowed on. "Neville and Ginny's bond was created by magic and will be fueled by their combined power. That means it will be a little more obvious in nature."

Hermione scowled. "Obvious, how?"

"Oh, really, Hermione. It should be clear enough to you. Strong emotions, connected by the magic of a powerful witch and wizard? He's talking about wild spontaneous magic. Until they learn to control it, we can assume that every time one or the other is feeling particularly loving, there may be a burst of wild magic," Luna said, then she giggled. "I think it's sweet. Neville's never been particularly demonstrative."

"That isn't just Neville. It's a flaw of most males," Hermione said, smirking at her husband.

"Oh, is that so?" asked Harry.

Hermione started to reply when Harry gestured. Suddenly she was sitting on his lap and he was kissing her as deeply as he could. She fought him for a moment before surrendering to his kiss.

Nearly a minute later, he eased his grip. Hermione's eyelids were closed and she shivered a little in his arms. He laughed and kissed her cheek.

"Not demonstrative, eh?" he said teasingly.

She opened her eyes and realized he had upstaged her in front of their friends. "*I will so get you for that, Potter!*" she sent him.

"You have me already, love. We're forever, remember?"

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## Haven School of Witchcraft and Wizardry...

"Come!"

Minerva looked up from the pile of books on her desk. Filius and Emma Granger had compiled a long list of rituals and wards that would need to be put back on Hogwarts before it could be made suitable as a school again.

The door to her office opened and to Minerva's surprise, the Minister stepped into the room.

"Amelia," she said standing up. "This is a surprise!"

Amelia smiled and took one of the seats in front of Minerva's desk. "Yes, I suppose it is. But I figured I'd head you off and come to you before you come to me."

"Oh?" Minerva said. Honestly, she had no idea what Amelia was talking about. To cover her confusion, she quickly conjured some tea and offered Amelia a cup.

Amelia accepted the cup and waited until the Headmistress was seated behind her desk again.

"Minerva, we both know that you're itching to get back to Hogwarts now that we've retaken it. However, I'm going to ask you to hold off for a while, a week or two at the most. I'd like you to hear a couple of ideas that Harry and Hermione passed to me. I thought they were good ideas, so I

mentioned them to Brogan Mallory.”

“The Irish Minister for Magic?” Minerva exclaimed.

Amelia paused and smiled. “Quite. In fact, he was very interested in my proposal.”

Minerva leaned back in her chair and looked at the Minister with a stern expression. “Alright, Amelia, stop building up to it and just come out and say it.”

Amelia smiled into her cup and took a sip. “Alright, to the point then. The Irish have looked over the results of the midterm tests from Haven and they are some of the highest they have ever recorded for any school.

“Mind you, we're all extraordinarily proud of that accomplishment and you have every right to be pleased with it. But the Irish recognize that with the retaking of Hogwarts, they risk losing what may be one of the best schools ever to be built on Irish soil.

“Now, Harry and Hermione suggested that we consolidate Hogwarts and Haven into two schools under a single Headmistress. The students would move back and forth between the two schools using portals donated by the Potter's. Harry suggested that each school have a single, supervising professor, and you remain on as Headmistress to both schools.

“Hermione suggested letting the students move back and forth between the schools so they may take advantage of the unique opportunities offered by both locations. The other reason why I ask you to hold off returning to Hogwarts is that, in the near term, we, that is the Ministry, will be using it as a base of operations to help with the recovery effort.”

She looked seriously at the Headmistress, a touch of sorrow in her eyes. “I'm afraid a part of the castle grounds will forever be Ministry property, Minerva. The Brotherhood Brigade will be housed on the far side of the school grounds, but still within the wards. We're also building a cemetery to commemorate those that we lost in the fight.”

Minerva played with her cup, trying to order her thoughts. Amelia's proposal sounded insane! *When I catch Harry and Hermione I'm giving them both detention*, she thought to herself. *What were they thinking?*

Amelia smiled, seeing Minerva's expression change so radically in such a short timespan. “It's not that bad, Minerva. Your head teachers will do a lot of the work for you. You will oversee their efforts. Brogan doesn't want to lose what you've brought to his country, and Harry is thinking about setting up an educational foundation that would open schools under your leadership in several other countries.”

She suddenly jumped forward in her chair. “He's what?” she exclaimed.

“It makes sense, Minerva,” Amelia said calmly. “Right now each school teaches their students differently. Beauxbatons specializes in charms, Hogwarts in Magical Animal Care and Transfiguration. Durmstrang is a Dark Arts academy. What we are proposing is a standard curriculum. Each school will still have it's own brand of unique specialties, of course. However, on top of that, each school will have the same basic quality foundation.”

When Minerva looked at her doubtfully, Amelia just shook her head. “Harry said you'd be uncomfortable with the idea. He was hesitant to even bring it to me. Look, Minerva, think on the idea for a while. This isn't going to happen overnight. We'll be lucky if Hogwarts can even open in September. I've toured the school and the interior is a wreck. It's going to be one of our priorities to restore the school to it's former glory, but that won't happen overnight, even with a thousand wizards helping.

“Talk to Harry and Hermione. Personally, I think this is Hermione's idea, but it was Harry that broached it with me. I swear those two are going to be a political force to reckon with if they decide to stay in politics.”

She sat back then and watched Minerva.

The tough Headmistress leaned back on her chair and considered what she had been told. Clearly she needed to talk to her two ex-Gryffindors and see what kind of madness they had in mind. Finally, she nodded at the Minister. “Alright. But do you think it would be possible for me to return to the castle sometime in the next week? I should meet with the ghosts and reassure them that the school will be coming back. Their aid, from what I understand, was most valuable. We owe them that much, at least.”

Amelia leaned back in her chair. *Got her!* she crowed to herself. “I don't see a problem with that. Perhaps we could make it a tour with some others that have been wanting to see the castle and review what happened.”

Minerva nodded and gave her a tight smile. Amelia had known it was going to be a very difficult sell to convince Minerva to go for this idea, but when Harry mentioned a standard for schools world wide, under Minerva's direction, she jumped on it as a way of keeping her from becoming too Irish.

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### **Padfoot Manor, Susan and Terry's bedroom...**

“Where is she?”

Susan looked up and beamed at her aunt. She had just finished feeding the baby and was rocking her gently, trying to get a burp out of her.

“Right here, Auntie. Finally come to see your new grand niece?” she asked teasingly.

"Oh, Sus, I've wanted to come here all day. I wanted to be here yesterday for you. You know that," Amelia replied.

Susan nodded. "I know, but it turned out for the best. We won the war and brought a new member into the family. Aunt Amelia, meet Siomha Amelia Jennifer Boot," she said, holding up the baby.

Amelia stepped forward eagerly. "Oh, she's beautiful, Susan. I'm so pleased to meet her at last."

She took the baby into her arms and looked down at the little bundle. Siomha yawned and burped, which for her, was the sum total of her accomplishments so far.

"She's got your chin," Amelia said, teasing Susan.

"As long as she doesn't snore like her Daddy!"

Amelia looked around. "Where is Terry?"

"I made him take a nap earlier. Then, after Harry and Hermione visited for a while, he went over to the Operations Center to check on a few things. The poor thing was so tired. He was afraid to sleep in the bed with me so he kipped out on a day bed in Harry's study and didn't get more than a few hours sleep. I woke up this morning to find him singing to the baby, trying to keep her quiet so I could sleep a little longer."

Amelia sat on the couch next to Susan's bed and rocked the baby slightly. "I know Terry doesn't think so, but his work was invaluable. I think Caleb would have been lost without him there to keep track of all the little details."

"I know, Auntie, but he doesn't always see it that way. Compared to what Harry or Neville did..."

Amelia huffed. "Proud, stubborn men!" she exclaimed, shaking her head. "Susan, what Terry did was every bit as important. In some ways, even more so. And now he's got the most important job of all; being a father to your child. It's up to you to let him know he's appreciated, and needed, just like it's his job to show you the same thing."

She cuddled with the baby for a moment, smiling down at her. "He'll come around, Sus, he's not stupid. In the meantime, you and all of Harry's Brotherhood are up for Orders of Merlin and a few other awards."

"Me?" exclaimed Susan. "All I did was act as a glorified secretary and grouch about being unable to reach my feet to tie my shoes!"

"All of you," Amelia repeated sternly. She was proud of all of them. They had come so far and done so much. "Each of you had a special role that you played in this war."

The child in her arms cooed and Amelia smiled down at her for a moment. When she looked up at her niece again, her gaze was piercing. "This precious child," she said seriously, "is more important than anything else. She is our future. She represents all that is good in our world and she's a commitment to going forward."

Susan smiled weakly and nodded. She never could win an argument with her aunt.

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### **Padfoot Manor, Harry and Hermione's bedroom...**

Hermione sat in front of her mirror attempting, for what seemed like the millionth time, to tame her hair. It seemed as though both she and Harry were doomed to have unmanageable hair.

Thinking of Harry, her eyes softened. She'd managed to keep him in the manor all day. Today had been filled with a lot of quiet conversations, as people seemed to need to reach out and touch everyone. It was almost as if they needed reassurance that they had made it through the battle.

She smiled, spotting Harry come out of the bathroom. He wore just his boxers and a robe. He threw her a lopsided grin, then walked over to stand behind her. He took her brush from her hands and started brushing her hair. She sighed and leaned back against him. She loved when he did this.

"I've been thinking," he said.

"Hmmm?" His hand on her hair and the rhythm of the brush made her drowsy.

"I'm going to run an idea by you, then you tell me if you think it's cheating or not."

She opened her eyes and looked at him in the mirror. "Alright."

"You know how I can read a book really fast and remember it verbatim? Well, I was thinking, if I read a book and then communed with you, couldn't I pass the entire contents of the book to you?"

She stopped his brushing and turned in her chair to look at him. "You could, but why would you want to?"

Harry gestured and a chair slid across the room. When it stopped, he sat down facing her. "I think it would take me only a day to read all the seventh year texts, then I could pass them to you. A week for all seven years of textbooks. After that, we could pass them to the others, then work on the practicals so that we can take our NEWTS."

She stared at him in shock. "You want to take your NEWTS?"

He nodded. "I know it sounds silly. I mean, we never have to work a day in our lives if we don't want to, but not every one of us is in that boat. Terry and Susan for example. The Bones family does alright, but other than their house and their vault, who knows what's left of their income? Neville's well off, so he and Ginny are set. And I set Draco up with a nice starting fund, but I can't see any of us living without some form of work."

"I want us to be as normal as possible, Hermione. I want our kids to grow up normally and for them to be proud that their parents didn't coast through life. I thought we could learn the books, then pass the information to the others. It's early April. If we can do this, then all of us could help each other take our NEWTS with the school in late May."

Hermione stared at him, trying to weigh what he was saying. She had thought that he might press her to start a family if they survived Voldemort, but this was the last thing she had expected.

"Alright," she said slowly, folding her hands in her lap. "Why don't you tell me the rest of your grand plan?"

Harry shrugged and mumbled something incomprehensible.

"What was that?"

"I said I don't have a grand plan, Hermione," he snapped, then he dropped his eyes again. "I was hoping that you might have some ideas. Voldemort has been this huge obstacle in my life and now that he's gone, I'm not really sure what to do."

She shook her head. "What about what you told Ginny?"

"About wanting to see the world?" he asked.

She nodded.

"I do, but see what? I don't know, I thought you might have some ideas. There are a few places I'd like to visit and spend a few days exploring, but how much of that can you do before the place becomes routine? I want to do more than just sightsee, I want to learn. Sheik Alim said he knew someone that would like to take on an apprentice enchanter for a year or two. It's an idea, but I was hoping you'd have a few, too," he said hesitantly.

"You surprise me. I had halfway expected you to want to start a family," she murmured.

Harry stared at her for a moment, then he frowned. "Do you want to start a family?"

"No, not yet. I don't know if we're ready. I don't know if *I'm* ready."

He looked relieved. "Good. I want to have a family someday, but not today. I barely know how to be a proper husband. What do I know about being a father? Vernon is my only example and all I know is that what he did is what I should not do."

She frowned at the mention of Vernon.

"I want us to have a family someday, love. I can think of nothing nicer than seeing a little bushy haired green eyed girl running around the house. But I think we need time for ourselves, first. Is that selfish of me? I want you all to myself and I'm not ready to share you with anyone, even if it is someone we create together."

She shook her head. She would have given him children if he had wanted, but she was pleased and proud of his response. It was very mature and took both their feelings into account. "You really don't know what you want to do?"

"Other than getting our NEWTS, no. I know I have the Brigade to deal with still and I'm not sure what I can do about that, but I'm tired, Hermione. I don't want to be the Boy-Who-Lived anymore. I just want to be Harry, husband of the smartest witch since Ravenclaw herself. I don't want to lead people anymore."

"Oh, Harry," she whispered. She understood what he was saying, but there was something he was missing, as well. She reached out and brushed one finger against his cheek, her eyes serious. "More than your 'saving people' thing, Harry, you are a leader. It's a part of you. You may not like it, but people will always look to you for leadership and guidance. The war is coming to an end and, like it or not, you are the hero of this war. You don't have to enjoy it, but you better start accepting the fact that people will still look to you. I'd like nothing more than for us to vanish into obscurity like you mentioned to the press, but we both know they won't let us."

She sighed, and took his hands in hers. "I see what you want to do, and if I thought the world would let you, I'd happily stand in front and shield you from it. But the world won't allow it. In a way, I feel sorry for the rest of the world. They don't know you like I do, and that's a real shame."

Harry scowled at her. "So, what would you suggest, then?"

"Use your fame to your advantage, my heart. In the beginning, it will be the rebuilding of Britain. But there is so much more that you can do – that we can do with our lives. I know you're tired. Merlin knows we could both use a long break involving a hot sandy beach and a lot of peace and quiet. But can you honestly expect to sit on the sidelines for the rest of our lives?"

"No, I can't, but I don't want to spend my days chasing down dark wizards like everyone seems to think I should."

Hermione nodded. She not only saw his point, but agreed wholeheartedly with it. "Alright, you want to see the world, so let's do just that. I'll put together a rough outline of a trip plan for us."



Harry grinned at her. "Yes, you'd make a good plan, I'm sure. Just make sure to plan on six of us."

"Six?" she asked, startled. "I thought it would be just us."

"Well, your parents might want to be along for parts of the trip, but more importantly, do you honestly think Dobby and Winky will let us trip around the world alone?" he asked, grinning.

She laughed and shook her head. "No, I hadn't thought about that!"

He stood and pulled her to her feet and into his arms. For several days they had been promising to spend some time together, but circumstances had stepped in to prevent it. But no longer. Neither would allow any more interruptions.

Harry pulled her closer and pressed his lips to hers. He slid one hand up to gently grip her hair, holding her head close while he tasted her. It was a soul searing kiss, demanding and yet gentle. He wanted her and needed her to know exactly how much he wanted her.

When the kiss finally ended, she pressed herself against him, reveling in the feelings of need and desire that coursed through the bond between them. She could feel his arousal pressed against her stomach. She rubbed against him, smiling when he groaned.

"Take me to bed, Harry," she whispered, clinging to him

Without thinking, he cast a featherlight charm. Then, lifting her into his arms, he walked toward the bed.

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### **Hogwarts Castle (April 12th)...**

Amos leaned back against a tree and sighed. He was tired. He'd been up since four in the morning, patrolling the perimeter of the camp.

It was hard to call it a camp. They had moved and set up a bunch of the space compressed outhouses on the other side of what used to be the Hogwarts Quidditch pitch. During the occupation of the castle, the pitch had been converted into a large open air slave pen. It stank. Even with magic helping clean up the area, it still reeked.

Amos and several others from his company had toured the area and become violently sick over it. Even Sergeant James looked green around the gills. Those people still in the pens when the battle was over were immediately moved into healer care in the medical buildings brought over from Haven.

Amos had personally escorted Jennifer and Milly to the medical buildings yesterday evening when they returned from patrol.

Last night around ten, the entire camp turned out, ready and spoiling for a fight. An alarm had sounded that a group of people were approaching from the direction of Hogsmeade. There was a moment of shocked surprise to see that the group, all fifteen people, were from a single family coming into the relief center. Their first customers, as it were.

Amos chuckled. It was funny, in a sad sort of way. They had just fought a major battle and were there to help people. And when people had finally made their way to them, they were too surprised to move! A child in one woman's arms had cried and that had broke the stasis. Healers and medics rushed forward, pulling at people and urging them into one of the buildings. In another area, a field kitchen was fired up and cooks turned out to make hot meals for everyone.

And that had only been the beginning.

Thirty minutes after that first group had arrived, another, smaller group showed up, then another and another. By midnight, the entire camp was illuminated and soldiers were voluntarily vacating their barracks to house the incoming refugees. A steady stream of people were arriving at the castle by foot, and a second stream were arriving via the portals. More and more aid workers had moved into the area, setting up their own camps or adding to the ones already growing around the castle.

Across the road from the American camp stood a group of inflatable hospital buildings and a huge warehouse, over which flew the red and white flag of the International Red Pentagram. They were issuing everyone special tents that came either in family size with room for six, or single units big enough for two people. No one could call those tents luxurious, but they were comfortable, warm and came equipped with a thirty day supply of food before the self stocking shelves refilled. The fare was basic, but filling.

It wasn't planned, but those tents had an added effect. An impromptu refugee camp was springing up around the Red Pentagram area and people were interacting with each other. For the first time in a year, magic was being openly performed without fear of capture, reprisals or death.

Amos had spent the night in his field tent, a single man portable tent that contained a bedroom and small kitchenette and he was thankful for it.

Now, in the light of a new day, he was able to look out from his vantage point and see most of the castle area. It had been transformed overnight into a bustling center. There was a steady stream of people leaving the castle as help arrived from Haven. And house elves! Amos had never seen so many of the creatures before! They weren't as common in America as they were here. There were hundreds of them and they were everywhere, cleaning, fixing and moving supplies from the castle. Elves were even traveling into Hogsmeade and meeting with incoming refugees, helping to carry the sick and wounded.

This morning, out of respect, everyone in camp stopped and watched as a huge British flag was run up a makeshift flagpole atop the Astronomy Tower. Amos was surprised to see even veteran Americans like Sergeant James looking a bit misty eyed.

Most of the people in the camp were thoroughly confused by the flag. It had to be explained to them that their Ministry and the Muggles had worked closely together during the war. It came as a surprise to many that the groups that retook the castle were officially part of the British Army. And if that came as a surprise, the fact that two American divisions were still at Hogwarts shocked them even more. That level of cooperation between the magical communities was unheard of.

The current rumor was that Harry Potter was at the heart of it all, having had himself declared King of the World. Fortunately, few took that seriously.

Amos was off duty now, sitting with his back against a tree and writing in his journal. A small camp stove, brewing a pot of coffee, was nearby. He wanted to get his version of the battle down before the details began to fade. He'd had his taste of combat and found it far different than the idealized vision he once held as a child. He also pressed two notices into his book. The first one was from the American Government, offering a conditional discharge to anyone wishing to aid in the reconstruction. In effect, they would transfer from their units to a Peace Corps unit now forming. The second notice, from the British Ministry, offered citizenship to foreign nationals who opted to stay in Britain after helping rebuild.

They were generous offers, Amos thought, but he wasn't sure what he wanted. It took a special type of man to turn the military into a career. After yesterday, he wasn't sure he wanted that. He was happy to have been able to help, but it was something he hoped never to experience again.

"Hello."

Amos looked up and squinted in the morning sun. Then, spotting her, he hastily stood. "Oh, hello. Jennifer, wasn't it?"

She smiled and nodded. "I brought you back your blanket," she said shyly, offering the blanket he'd given her yesterday.

She had been cleaned up and clothed in a pair of combat fatigues that weren't *too* big on her. In any case, they looked a lot better than the rags she was barely wearing yesterday. Her hair was clean and had a pretty sheen to it, he thought.

"Would... would you like to join me? I was just sitting... relaxing and making coffee," he stammered, not sure why he made the offer.

She nodded and took a seat next to his, leaning against the tree.

"So the healers released you already?"

"I was one of the lucky ones. They kept Milly and they set up several wards for women who are pregnant after their experience," she said, her expression darkening. Seeing the question in his eyes, she shook her head. "My protection lasted. I wasn't in the pens long enough for it to wear off. What about you?"

When he looked at her stupidly, she grinned and clarified her question. "The healers told me you and your group were part of Lord Potter's army that defeated Voldemort. Are you alright?"

He leaned his head back against the tree and sighed heavily. "I suppose the nightmares will go away, eventually. It wasn't anything like I imagined it would be, you know what I mean? Before yesterday, I thought it was wonderfully glorious and heroic, but it's really ugly and cruel. There's nothing glamorous about war. I've watched men disembowel each other and then cry for their mother's as they lay dying on the field. I've seen acromantulas dragging Death Eaters off the field and listened to them shriek in terror," he said, then his voice dropped to a whisper. "I saw a man think he could control two women because he was a bully and had a wand when they didn't. And it angered me enough to kill in cold blood."

Amos closed his eyes and dropped his head. His actions yesterday bothered him greatly. Jennifer placed a hand on his arm and he looked at her in confusion.

"You saved my life. Milly's too. We'll always be in your debt for that," she said quietly.

He smiled weakly at her. "I'm glad it worked out alright. I just don't like what it made me do."

"So, what will you do now?" she asked.

"I suppose I'll go wherever the 806th sends me. I thought about the offers to stay and help rebuild," he replied, pointing towards the notices still sticking out of his journal. He hadn't gotten around to shrinking them yet. "How about you? Don't you have any family you can go to?"

She shook her head and looked down at her feet. When she looked at him again, her face was flushed. "I hope you stay. I'd feel safer with you around."

He blinked in surprise. "Really?" he asked, smiling shyly.

She nodded, returning his smile. She wasn't sure why she'd said that. Everything inside her screamed to be wary of men, but there was something comforting about this strange man with the funny accent. He had killed for her, and she could see that it had hurt him terribly to do so. In a way, his battle changed him as much as her time in the slave pens had changed her. She felt drawn to Amos. It was as if he still held on to something that she felt she'd lost.

"Would you like to go get something to eat?" he asked. "There's a field kitchen not far from here and they serve all day long."

She bit her lip for a moment, then nodded and stood up.

Climbing to his feet, Amos put his journal in his pocket and led her toward the kitchen. She didn't know just when he'd taken her hand in his. But it was enough that neither wanted to let go.

## Padfoot Manor...

Harry frowned at him. "Are you supposed to be out of bed?" he demanded.

Luna gently eased Draco down so he could sit on the steps and looked at Harry. "Really," she chided. "You know he has to be here."

Harry was about to reply when the front door opened and Arthur and Constance walked in. A moment later, the Longbottoms, followed by Narcissa, walked into the foyer. Both Neville and Ginny seemed to be alright, though they walked stiffly.

"We'll discuss this later," Harry said, then he turned and smiled at the others. Behind Luna and Draco, other members of the Brotherhood arrived, waiting to welcome home the two who had been hurt.

Harry walked to Ginny and hugged her, then turned to Neville. "Welcome home, you two," he said softly.

"Yes, welcome home," echoed Eocho. He had drifted through the wall.

Harry turned to look at their mentor. He seemed less substantial today.

"Do not be angry with Draco, Maglios. I have summoned all today," Eocho said.

Harry looked around seeing his confusion echoed in the faces of his friends.

Eocho floated towards the door, everyone watching him.

"You have gone into battle three times now, and each time emerged victorious over your enemies. This last battle was the greatest, and it marks the end of your war. Your foe lies fallen, defeated, and your homeland freed. But this does not mark the end of your tasks. The Brotherhood stands to protect the weak and prevent the creeping darkness from taking the world.

"My time is now complete. I go to my great reward, knowing that I have helped build the greatest Brotherhood the world has ever seen. You have made me very proud, my children."

"But you can't, Honored Teacher! There is still so much to learn, so much for you to teach us," Harry protested.

Eocho smiled gently. He knew that Harry looked upon him with a great deal of respect and no small amount of love. Even when they'd had their differences, he still respected the old Druid.

"Some things cannot be avoided, Maglios. You will do well and it is time to stand on your own," Eocho said, then he looked to the stairway where Susan stood holding the baby. Her eyes shimmered with tears. She had grown especially close to Eocho in the last few months.

"Gentle daughter, your gift to the Brotherhood has been blessed by the gods themselves. Blessed be, little Siomha," Eocho said in a fading voice.

A pulse of light flashed from Eocho and Siomha cried out, even as the Brotherhood's mentor faded away. Susan started checking her child, frantic to find the cause of her cry.

Harry climbed the stairway and placed a hand on Susan. She looked at him in confusion.

"What you are looking for is on her ankle," he said.

She pulled back the blanket and checked. There, on her daughter's right ankle, was a small tattoo of a Celtic cross.

"How did you know?" Susan asked in a whisper.

He smiled. "She's your legacy, and proof that the Brotherhood will continue beyond what we have started. It was Eocho's parting gift to us all."

"How do you know about that, Harry?" asked Hermione from behind him.

He held up a hand and looked down the stairs to Neville and Ginny. "Are you two up to joining us in the sitting room? I can have the elves bring in some refreshments."

Neville and Ginny exchanged a look and nodded at him.

"Arthur, Mrs. Longbottom and Narcissa, you are welcome to join us," Harry said, motioning for everyone to follow him.

Harry waited until everyone was seated and the elves had served them before he began. He paced in front of the fireplace for a moment, ordering his thoughts.

"For a long time now I've known that Eocho would eventually have to leave us. He was a spirit, but not in the usual sense. He was not a ghost. He had been gradually losing power ever since he was summoned from the sacred stones."

He paused and his eyes grew distant. "Before we left to attack Voldemort he told me he would be invoking the ancient Gods to protect us."

"But," protested Ginny, then she stopped, seeing Harry's expression.

"Such protection isn't without a price, Ginny," Harry said softly. "You would have lost something far more important than your leg had you had their protection. Individually, and as a whole, we paid for that help. Some of us in minor ways, others in ways we can't even begin to understand. Eocho offered up most of his life force, and then gave what remained to us before he faded away.

"Not one of us came away from that fight unchanged. Even Dan and Emma, who stayed here have been changed by the experience.

"Each of us received a small mark when we reformed the Brotherhood. The mark Siomha received is the mark I will give to each new member that joins from here on. It's one of my duties as leader of the Brotherhood. Another will be to pick my successor when the time comes."

"And what was his parting gift to us all?" prompted Remus.

Harry smiled and moved to stand behind the chair Hermione sat on. He placed a hand on her shoulder. "Some of us received some extra knowledge. For example, I now know how to imbue the sacred stones so that there will be a mentor, the next time the Brotherhood needs one. I will teach that to the next Maglios and so on until we wane and fade. Then, that Maglios will imprint his spirit on the stones like Eocho once did. In this way the Brotherhood of Druidic Knights lives on even after we have gone."

"And the rest of us?" Remus prompted.

"He has given of himself to insure that our children have our gifts. All our children, when we decide to start families, will be magical. Siomha is just the first."

"She's magical?" blurted Susan.

"Can't you feel it, Susan?" Harry asked. "Reach for her. She shines like the light of a new born sun!"

"Harry," Hermione said in a chiding tone. "Not all of us can see auras."

"I know, Hermione, but Susan can feel them. She's always has been able to, she just never developed that talent. Reach for her, Susan, feel her like you do when you're feeling the others across the medallion."

"I can sense her from here," Ginny murmured softly. "She has a powerful presence."

"Is Eocho truly gone?" Neville asked.

"He's gone," Harry replied with a sigh. "But he's left his mark on each of us, just as we've left a mark on each other. And, as Sirius once told me, he's never truly gone as long as we remember him."

Harry turned to Ginny and Neville. "Are you two alright?"

Neville picked up Ginny's hand in his own and she smiled at him. "No, but we're getting there."

Harry nodded. "We may have some light duties and certainly some ceremonies to attend this week. But the Brigade is on a thirty day furlough. That means, if you want to vanish for a couple weeks, do so. Just let Remus, myself or Hermione know where you'll be in case we need you."

"So, what do we do tomorrow?" asked Tonks.

"I'm glad you asked that," Hermione said. "My husband here came up with an interesting idea. We all know of his fast reading speed and his ability to retain information."

She waited for everyone to acknowledge the point, then she smiled evilly. "Well, he happened to have this ingenious idea to help us all take our NEWTS and get them out of the way. Even I was amazed by the concept. I must be rubbing off on him."

When Neville started to snicker, Draco's lips twitched. Remus, his eyes dancing, began to laugh outright.

"What?" she asked, puzzled.

"Hermione, do we really need to know you're rubbing Harry off? Wouldn't sex be better?" asked Luna.

Hermione stared at her in horror for a moment. When she finally turned to look at Harry, it was to find him slowly sliding down the wall behind her, holding his sides and trying to laugh quietly. She colored up and glared at him.

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### **Padfoot Manor (April 13th)...**

Harry opened one eye because someone or something was poking him insistently. He spotted Dobby looking very anxious and not happy about having to wake his friend.

"What is it, Dobby?" he said grumpily.

Dobby tugged nervously on one ear. He knew he couldn't yank on it like he wanted to. "Dobby is sorry, Harry Potter sir, but a message from Miss Minister came this morning," he said, holding up a slip of parchment.

Harry sat up and took the note from Dobby. Glancing at it, he sighed, then shrugged. He leaned back and slapped Hermione across the butt. Her

head poked up from under the blankets.

“What?” she grumbled.

“Duty calls, my sweet. Amelia needs us all in uniform today at the Ministry. Apparently, we're all taking a trip back to Hogwarts, along with, and I quote, 'highly placed officials of the muggle government'. Merlin, who writes these messages? I hear Fudge's voice in my head when I read them!”

He slid a pair of boxers on, then threw on his robe. Turning, he watched Hermione climb out of bed and hunt for something to wear.

“*Are you sure we're all needed, Harry?*” she sent him silently. Then, knowing he was watching, she deliberately bent over to pick up her knickers on the floor.

“Witch,” he growled at her naked bum. She wiggled it a little at him before standing up.

She grinned, knowing exactly what she was doing to him. Before Harry, she'd had a low opinion of herself. Harry had forced her to reexamine that opinion. She had discovered a power in herself capable of reducing Harry to a quivering mess and she rather enjoyed that. Of course, that power went both ways. He was capable of teasing her to the point of total distraction, and he still hadn't taught her the little trick he had that could make her orgasm just by manipulating her aura.

Whether it was passionate sex, or just holding each other, soothing away nightmares, she had come to realize they complimented each other, filling needs that they didn't know they had a year ago.

She walked over to her wardrobe. “Dress uniforms?”

Harry turned and glanced at the bed where Dobby was laying out his dress uniform. He sighed. “I guess so. Dobby, will you inform the others that we need to meet at the Ministry main lobby by nine o'clock? If Susan and Terry can't find someone to watch Siomha, maybe we can get an elf to watch her.”

Hermione turned to look at him. “I'm sure Eocho...” She stopped and her expression fell.

Harry walked over to her and took her into his arms. “I know. I don't like thinking he's gone either.”

She wrapped her arms around him, laying her head against his chest. “It just seemed wrong. We all made it through the battle, only to lose him here at home. It's not fair!”

He tightened his grip on her and rested his cheek against the top of her head. Losing Eocho bothered them both. Behind them, Dobby made a noise. Harry glanced up and nodded.

“Sweetheart, we need to eat, then get moving,” he said softly.

She lifted her head and grinned at him. “Thinking with your stomach is a Weasley trait, Mr. Potter,” she teased, as she pulled away from him. Walking to the table, she poured herself a cup of tea.

Harry followed her, laughing to himself. He'd get his revenge later.

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## Government House, Haven...

Harry and Hermione met up with the others on the steps to the lobby of the building. In deference to Dan and Emma, all wore their Brotherhood cloaks and medallions on the outside. Dan and Emma were the only two that weren't officially part of the Brigade.

“I don't know what's going on today, but here are my plans. Ginny, Neville, Draco, as you're all still recovering from injuries, I don't expect you to stick around unless you want to. Susan, the same goes for you, but for different reasons. As to the rest of us, we are the Brotherhood. We'll smile for the camera's and complain about them later, off the record,” Harry told them seriously. With that, he turned and entered the building. A moment later, the rest followed behind him.

The lobby of the building was crowded with people and a stage had been set up to one side. A hush fell over the crowd when Harry and the others entered. People turned and stared, and as Harry started to move towards Amelia, who was standing next to the stage, the crowd parted as if opening a corridor.

“*What's happening?*” Hermione sent him in alarm.

“*I don't know,*” he replied tensely. “*Keep close and keep an eye on the others.*”

Amelia spotted the group making their way to her and she smiled broadly.

Harry walked up to Amelia, still slightly unnerved by the actions of the crowd. “Good morning, Amelia,” he called.

Amelia grinning at them. “I take it you haven't seen the morning papers yet, Harry?”

He frowned. He rarely looked at the paper. “No, I haven't,” he replied. He looked over his shoulder at the others, most of whom shook their heads.

“Just the Washington Post,” muttered Dan, he was frustrated by the fact that his favorite papers were still not operating.

Amelia chuckled. "Well, you best think about hiring a press agent. During the press conference over Voldemort's body, a photo was taken that clearly depicted the medallions worn by yourself and Hermione."

Harry's brow furrowed in confusion. "And?" He hated having to drag information out of people.

"Well, a frightfully intelligent gnome working for the Salem Institute of Advanced Sorcery and Chicanery deciphered the medallions from the photos. Then he went back and found photos of Draco and Luna, as well as Tonks, each wearing a medallion. Nearly every paper in the world is carrying the story about how you have resurrected the ancient Brotherhood of Druidic Knights to battle injustice in the world. Most think that France and Voldemort were just your first targets. Then some muggle born reporter likened your group to Jedi Knights and well it's sort of snowballing from there.

"I don't want to upset you, but word from Singapore is that the leaders of three different criminal gangs have surrendered to authorities this morning, each claiming they didn't want to face the justice of a Druidic Knight," Amelia said, her eyes dancing merrily and her lips twitching with mirth.

Harry suddenly felt an overwhelming urge to hit her with something hard. He groaned and closed his eyes. It didn't help that Hermione was laughing, or that Tonks and Emma joined her a moment later. Dan looked interested and, strangely, Ginny and Neville both looked determined. He made a mental note to speak firmly with each of them later.

Amelia looked at the group. "In a short while we will be meeting with his Royal Highness and the Prime Minister. His Highness asked to meet with you all first privately, then we will accompany them to Hogwarts where we will tour the battlefield. After that, His Majesty and the Prime Minister will be escorted to a place where they will transfer to helicopters for the rest of their trip. As far as the muggle press is concerned, they will be meeting up with the Royal entourage after they have visited what remains of Balmoral castle."

Harry scowled. "Amelia, three of my people are still recovering from injuries. It's not right to expect them to walk all over the place today."

"I'm aware of that, Lord Potter," she replied frostily. "As is the King and Prime Minister. They are welcome to join us, or stay behind, but the King was quite firm in wishing to meet all of the Brotherhood today. While much of our world escapes the notice of muggles, little of it escapes him. He contacted us this morning, specifically requiring your presence."

Harry bristled.

"*Gently, love. We don't know what the King wants, but I'm sure he's not going to hurt anyone,*" Hermione cautioned.

Reluctantly, Harry nodded to Amelia, though his eyes were still cold.

"Good. Now, if you and your group will wait, the King will be arriving via portal. Then he will give a short statement to the press before we travel through the portal to Hogwarts."

Amelia climbed up a small set of stairs onto the stage. She glanced at her watch and smiled broadly, putting on her politician's face.

Harry tuned her out when she started to speak to the crowd of reporters.

"Don't let Auntie get under your skin, Harry. She was a great Auror, but she's an even better politician. She sees things in terms of what would make a good show for the people, while at the same time helping them. I confess I'm not looking forward to trouping all over Hogwarts, even though I've taken my pain relief potion, but I can see what she's trying to do. She wants people to see that the Government is actively working for them. And, unfortunately, that includes us," Susan told him.

He ran a hand through his hair, messing it up even worse than before. Hermione smacked at his hand impatiently and used her wand to rearrange it so it wasn't that bad. "I know Susan," he replied quietly.

Up on stage, the King had been introduced and was giving a short speech. When Harry moved a little further back in his group, Hermione and Susan both looked upset.

"He's not mad at you, Susan. I think he's just getting frustrated," Hermione whispered.

Harry moved behind Ginny and Neville, who were holding hands. He stepped up behind them both, placing a hand on their shoulders. They turned looking at him.

"Are you two alright?" he asked quietly.

Ginny closed her eyes and shook her head. "I keep wanting to be mad, like I want to hit someone or something."

Neville shot Harry a pleading glance. He had been talking with Ginny since he woke up in the hospital, but she had problems coming to terms with the fact that she had lost a leg. Last night, she had changed for bed in the bathroom and put on a full length heavy flannel nightgown, something she hadn't worn since they'd gotten married. As hard as he tried to comfort her, her emotions were still all over the place.

Harry motioned them to a side room and they followed him. He could feel Hermione's curiosity over his bond so he widened it enough that she could listen in if she wanted.

"I've felt how unhappy you two have been since the fight, and I know it's only been a short time, but Ginny, you aren't giving yourself any time to heal. You're so convinced you're a freak of some kind that you won't even let Neville help. Now, I have to ask this.

In four months time, our hand-fastings become permanent. But more to the point, I can sever your bond if you want. In a few more days, doing so would hurt, or perhaps even kill both of you. Is that what you want?"

Ginny glared at him. Neville took a step backwards and looked at the two nervously.

"How could you say such a cruel thing?" she hissed at him.

"Then why in the name of all that's holy are you shutting out the one person who wants to help you the most?" Harry demanded angrily, then he thrust out a finger, pointing at Neville. "You're not only hurting yourself, you're hurting him!"

Ginny took a step back and her eyes darted between Harry and Neville, looking stricken.

"Neville," Harry said between clenched teeth.

"Yes?" came the nervous reply. Ginny had managed to get Harry angry, and no one wanted to be around him when he was angry.

"Clear your mind, then start working on your shields. However, this time, reach out and feel the connection between you and Ginny. If you build your shields to include the link, you'll act as a sink for some of her emotions," Harry said, then he looked at Ginny and wagged a finger under her nose.

"You, let him in!" he snapped.

Ginny squeaked and nodded. Harry could already see Neville widening the bond between them as his shields extended out to her. It wasn't a perfect solution, but it would allow him to help calm her. It would also force the bond to mature faster, allowing them to pass more information between them. The bond had played a pivotal role in saving Neville's life. Now Harry was forcing the both of them to use it to save their relationship.

*"Merlin protect me from obstinate redheads!"* he snarled over his bond to Hermione.

He felt her calming presence touching him and some of his anger bled away.

He watched for a moment longer while Neville and Ginny stood motionless, eyes closed as they both worked on their bond together. Neville finally opened his eyes and smiled.

"Good. Now that that is done with, can we go back and get this over with?" Harry asked. All he wanted to do was go home and maybe hide for the next fifty years.

Ginny and Neville exchanged a single glance, then she moved closer to Harry. "I hope Hermione will forgive me this once. I know Neville will," she murmured, then she pulled Harry down and kissed him, hard.

Harry blinked and tried to kiss her back without putting his hands in any inappropriate places. It didn't help that he could feel Hermione's initial outrage, followed by her amusement. He had forgotten to narrow their link, so she managed to experience that kiss for herself, through him.

*"One, I didn't initiate that, and two, you better remember I'm still yours and yours only,"* he sent to her.

*"I don't know whether I should make you sleep on the couch tonight, or take you to bed and make sure you remember who you belong to,"* she replied in a tone laced with amusement. *"You better get out there. The King is wrapping up and Amelia's looking like she's going to give birth to a Snorkack since she can't see you. I think they want you to say something."*

Harry exited the small side room, walking back to where Hermione stood. She smiled mischievously at him. *"You know, you didn't kiss her all that well. I hope you haven't forgotten."*

He rolled his eyes at her and suppressed a growl. *"Wait until I get you alone,"* he replied, then he turned his attention to the stage. The King had taken a seat and Amelia stood in front of the podium now.

One of Amelia's aides was frantically waving for Harry to join the Minister on stage.. With a scowl, he winced and climbed the stairs, listening to what Amelia was saying.

"No, Lord Potter's group doesn't have any official standing within the Ministry yet. As a private citizen, he is free to do what he needs to do."

Spotting Harry, several reporters started shouting questions at him. Amelia turned and moved away from the podium, motioning for Harry to take her place.

"Lord Potter! Would you explain your group?"

*"We couldn't remain secret forever, Harry,"* Hermione sent him.

Harry turned and motioned for his friends to come up onto the stage.

"The Brotherhood is an ancient organization dedicated to upholding the law. This is the first time in over a thousand years that the Brotherhood has been reconstituted. As to why we reformed the group, it was felt that it would help us with the war. And it did. We are not, however, a replacement for the Aurors of your nation."

"Lord Potter's group will be receiving official Ministry approval," Amelia said from behind him.

Harry glanced at her, noting her smug look. She was up to something again.

"And what will your group do?" shouted another reporter.

Harry paused, considering his answer.

"Didn't you hear him the first time?" Luna asked in exasperation, stepping forward. "We will bring justice to those who have been denied it. And we'll try to make sure the White Footed Peter Peckers never gain footholds in your brains. Although it may be too late for some of you," she said, scowling down at the press.

Silence descended on the room as the blond's bizarre comment registered. A pair of yellow eyes blinked from her shoulder and a faint whirring sound was heard.

Harry grinned. It was, in his opinion, the best way to end a press conference! "No further questions," he said, then turned and kissed Luna on the cheek. She was perfect!

The members of the Brotherhood barely controlled their laughter as they followed Harry off the stage.

Amid the gaggle of reports, Harry could hear Mr. Lovegood confirm that Luna was, indeed, his daughter, and that he'd never been more proud of her.

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## Hogwarts Castle...

Amelia's aide ushered the Brotherhood into a side room with a portal against one wall. A moment later, the King and the Prime Minister entered, escorted by Amelia. They were joined by Minerva and Filius.

Harry turned away from his friends when the King approached. He nodded respectfully to him.

"You've done us all a great service, Harry," the King told him. Then he turned to face the Brotherhood. "We are in your debt and may never be able to adequately repay you. I know that, for now at least, your role must remain a secret from the nation. Know, however, that the nation is grateful, as am I."

"Thank you, your Majesty," Harry replied for all of them.

"I understand several of you were injured. I won't ask that you join us on the tour, but I did ask you all here for a reason," the King said as he walked over and shook Harry's hand. He proceeded to shake everyone's hand before turning to them again. "Things will be hectic in the coming months. Your names, however, will be added to this year's Honor lists. The reasons will be given as unspecified military actions, which is our way of saying you did something secret. The Crown cannot appear to be ungrateful for what you have done for us."

"It's really not..."

"Yes, Harry, it really is, and we won't speak further on the matter. Now, let us visit the scene. I'm sure you are tired of telling the tale, but one more time for your King surely won't hurt too badly," he said with a smile.

Harry nodded. There was no real arguing with the man. He had discovered that when he was talked into putting on his uniform.

Their arrival at Hogwarts was unlike anything he had ever seen. His group were some of the last of the tour to pass through the portal. He was, therefore, surprised to find that they hadn't exited into the Great Hall as he'd expected, but in the Chamber of Secrets. It was strange that they could enter the room using portkeys or the portals and still preserve the *Fidelius* charm. It was something he'd have to look into.

The room was still a disaster. The expansion of the room to fit both the Brotherhood Brigade and the Raiders hadn't been corrected, so the room appeared enormous and very dimly lit. Everyone huddled together anxiously in the dank.

"*Lights!*" Harry commanded in parseltongue.

When the torches flared to life, the ghosts became visible. There was over a hundred of them floating throughout the Chamber. Somehow they knew to gather. Peeves floated nearby, humming a dirty little ditty about an old man and a farmer's daughter that Harry was sure was going to give both Amelia and Minerva heart attacks.

The King gasped, seeing all the ghosts.

"*I thought only wizards could see ghosts and spirits?*" he asked Hermione.

"*You're right, but the King and the Prime Minister are wearing enchanted rings, allowing them to see the magic around them. Amelia asked about creating them several weeks ago so that muggles could see things in our world,*" she replied.

"*Oh. Look, the Baron's going to Minerva. I wonder what's happening?*"

The Bloody Baron broke away from the pack of ghosts, approaching Minerva slowly. Minerva's eyes misted up seeing Penelope and several other former students among the spirits gathered. The Baron stopped in front of Minerva and bowed low and grandly.

"Welcome home, my lady," intoned the Baron.



Minerva curtsied, her robes swaying gently as she rose. "It is good to be home, Baron." She looked up at the other ghosts. "I must beg your patience for a while longer. Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry will return, this I promise on my life and my magic. But for now, our people need to use the castle to aid in undoing what the Dark Lord has wrought."

The Baron bowed to Minerva. "Now that the war is over, we can be patient. If Lord Potter would recharge the stone? There are many more of us now and that has increased the drain on the it."

"Recharge the stone?" asked the Prime Minister.

Minerva nodded. "Ordinarily, the castle's ghosts would obtain some of their magic from Hogwarts. And Hogwarts, being so magical, would provide them with the anchor they need to remain in this world. Unfortunately, when the Dark Lord assumed control, the magic here changed. It became dark and twisted and has been slowly draining away.

"Harry, Lord Potter, provided the ghosts with another way of anchoring themselves. But it's only a temporary solution. Soon, myself and certain teachers will return here to begin a difficult ritual that will cleanse and revitalize the school," she explained, then she looked at Harry expectantly.

He walked over to the power crystal. Hermione stood next to him, shaking her head. What he was about to do wasn't supposed to be possible!

Harry looked at her for a moment. "You might want to step back. I've never recharged this thing with other's present. I'm not sure what will happen."

Hermione moved back to stand next to Minerva, while Harry raised his staff over his head. The emerald at the tip began to pulsate with a bright green light. Unlike the green of the killing curse, this was a pure, clean color. A low humming sound filled the room and the ghosts gathered around Harry and the crystal. A thick rope of power snapped out from the emerald and arced like lightening for a second, then it fixed on the crystal on the table.

The room shifted and dust rained down from the ceiling. Each ghost began to glow as they absorbed energy from the crystal.

Luna left Draco's side and stepped up to stand next to Harry. Tonks moved to stand on his other side. Both women reached out and touched him at the same time. There was a vast pulse of light and a sharp snapping sound. The table which Harry had laid the power crystal on imploded, vanishing in the blink of an eye. The crystal hovered at waist height, pulsing brightly, continuing to soak up power from Harry and the two witches.

The crystal began to spin and throw off rays of rainbow colored light. Then, slowly, the crystal sank to the floor. Sparks flew up from the point of contact and the ground around the crystal softened. When the crystal finally came to rest, it was embedded in the floor of the Chamber and the beam of energy from Harry's staff was cut off.

Harry pitched to his knees, exhausted. Tonks and Luna, still by his side, each gasped as they tried to catch their breath.

"What a rush!" Tonks exclaimed, grinning wildly.

"I haven't felt that tired since Draco found that orgasm multiplier spell," Luna murmured loud enough for everyone to hear.

Draco blushed furiously and promised himself he'd speak to his wife, yet again, about appropriate comments in mixed company. It had never worked in the past, but he still had hope that it would sink in some day.

"Just once I'd like something to go as I originally planned it," Harry muttered. "But no! Big bad castle full of ghosts can't wait to cleanse the magic. They have to make me do it without any warning. I swear, I'm giving up magic and taking up something simple, like potato farming in Idaho."

Hermione, Draco and Remus rushed forward to help them.

Harry tried to stand, but his leg gave out from under him. "Oh, bugger," he exclaimed between gritted teeth. Ginny stepped forward, pulled a potion bottle from her kit and handed it to him. Once she'd received her certification as a field medic, she'd rarely gone anywhere without a small kit of potions.

Harry looked up at Minerva. "I think Hogwarts didn't want to wait."

Minerva smiled broadly. "No, indeed she didn't. You've saved us months worth of work, Harry. The cleansing ritual was going to be a difficult task. Now all we have to do is repair the castle and fix the wards."

Harry leaned back against Hermione and closed his eyes for a moment. He listened as Hermione and Minerva discussed the wards and the best approach to layering them.

"Is there something wrong with Harry's leg?" asked a voice laced with concern.

Amelia turned to look at the King. She had drawn away from the group while they waited for the potion to help him.

"It's an old injury from his last year at Hogwarts. Normally, he's fine, but this is the second time it's bothered him after a major operation that I know of. He was laid up for three days after the attack in December," she replied quietly.

The King frowned. "There's nothing to be done about it?"

Amelia shook her head. "No. From what I've been told, it falls into one of those gray areas where neither medicine, ours or yours, can do much about it."

The two fell silent, watching as Harry push himself to his feet and lean against his staff for support. He smiled at the King and Amelia and nodded, indicating he was ready to continue.

Over the next four hours, Amelia watched as Harry and the others led the King and Prime Minister on a tour of the castle and battlefield. Ginny and Hermione stayed close to Harry and nearly every chance he got, he sat down or leaned against something, anything to take the weight off his leg.

Everyone was surprised by the sheer size of the camp that had sprung up around the castle. Word that Harry Potter was touring the camp brought people out in droves. After a few minutes conversation with Harry and Hermione, Amelia waved them off, letting them return home using their Brotherhood medallions.

The King understood. He told Harry that he would make time in the next month or so to meet with him again. In the meantime, he said, he wanted Harry and his people to take an extended leave.

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### **Padfoot Manor...**

Harry stood unsteadily and thought for a moment. Everyone was climbing to their feet. He grinned and narrowed his bond with Hermione to the barest minimum. She whipped her head around to stare at him.

He went to stand by the door, preventing anyone from leaving. A moment later, Dobby appeared and Harry bent over and whispered something in his ear. Dobby grinned and vanished, while Harry conjured a long golden cord. He muttered an incantation over it and it pulsed with a blue light for a moment.

“Brace yourselves, everyone. Harry’s up to something,” Hermione called out.

He grinned at her and passed the cord around so that everyone was holding onto it.

He did a quick check, then the portkey activated.

Several hours later, Harry walked out onto the balcony overlooking the bay, a chilled fruit drink in his hand. The sun was just dipping below the horizon and the sky was streaked with reds and yellows. Hermione stepped out a moment later and hugged him from behind, then she took the glass from his hand and sipped from it.

She had been as surprised as everyone else when they arrived at the Potter vacation home. They’d spend many nights of their honeymoon in the house and she was pleased by his choice.

Susan had panicked, of course. Then Winky had appeared, cradling Siomma in her arms as if there were nothing more precious to her. Smiling at the sight, Susan had calmed quickly and was ready to enjoy the vacation.

Below, Harry could see Ginny and Neville walking on the beach. She wore a bikini top and a floral wrap skirt to hide her leg. He frowned at that, but knew she was still coming to grips with it. Neville would help her.

“Is everyone settled in?” Hermione asked.

“Yes, for a couple hours now. It took a bit for the elves to catch up with our luggage, and I suspect Amelia is going to be annoyed by the note I had Dobby give her. But I am just following his Majesty’s command,” he replied, leaning back into her embrace.

“I don’t think he had us dropping off the face of the Earth in mind, Harry,” she said, laughingly.

“Alright, so the note I left Amelia was a bit vague, but what I told her is true enough. A house elf can find us, if there’s need. Besides, Anafi isn’t off the face of the Earth, it’s just...remote,” he replied with a grin, then he looked out over the clear blue waters of the bay and sighed contentedly.

“This is far enough away that we can all relax, love. While you slept, I walked around. You wouldn’t have believed the sounds coming from the bedroom used by your parents. They sounded like a pair of giggling kids in there. And a little while ago, I would have sworn I saw Remus trying to show Tonks how to do a hula. The only thing they seemed to have right was the costume, although why he was wearing a grass skirt is beyond my understanding.”

She tightened her grip on him and slid one hand into his pants. “Prat. You know exactly why I was sleeping. You exhausted me.”

He turned in her arms and kissed the top of her head. Her hand never stopped its gentle caress.

He held her, delighting in what she was doing, and firmly convinced that this was exactly what the Brotherhood needed right now. A week or two in Anafi would give them all time to heal and learn to enjoy life again.

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### **Authors Notes:**

Yes, it’s that time again. Another chapter has come to a close and it’s time for us to address the questions, comments and complaints left in reviews. Okay, so we mostly just answer questions. There’s not much we can say about comments (although some are creative enough that we simply can’t resist replying) and complaints are generally scoffed at and snickered about. (Evil cackle)

Pronunciation: People have asked how do you say Eocho or Siomma...

Eocho – E O KO, Hard E, Hard O, Ko as in Kobe.

Siomha – She va (It's Irish, don't expect it to be spelt as it sounds.)

Bob – Ba b although sometimes it seems that Alyx thinks it sounds like God. As in “oh god, don't stop!” I don't get it.

France is taking care of itself. Granted, they're being watched closely by the international community, but the French are busy rooting out what they can of the secret government and trying to clean up their country's politics.

And I see we're back on the issue of Harry's leg. (Rolls eyes). No, he won't be getting a wonderful new leg like Ginny's. Why? Because he'd have to cut off the one he has to get the job done and, pain relieving potions aside, he's not willing to do it. He managed to kill Voldemort with a bad leg, so what's the problem here? What's so wrong with a hero who has a disability?

Harry won't be using a wheelchair or any other aid, for two reasons. One, his staff works perfectly well in most cases and he doesn't need anything else. Two, can you image trying to portkey or use the floo with a wheelchair? Granted, the thought can be either giggle-worthy at the havoc he could cause or horrific when you think about the damage he could do with an out-of-control wheelchair, but really, it's just not worth it.

So, to put this to bed...and you all better listen up! Harry WILL NOT be getting a new leg, a wheelchair, crutches or anything else. He has a minor disability, and there's not a damn thing wrong with that!

Okay, rant over. Next question please!

We don't think there's anything wrong with Ginny's reaction to her injury. She hasn't come to grips with the loss of her leg as yet, so the replacement isn't seen as a benefit, but as an ugly, unnatural thing. It will take time, but with help from her husband and her friends, she'll get there.

We've decided to never use a foreign language in any of our stories ever again. We've managed to foul up Swedish, French and German. We're sure we've managed to screw up the (Irish) Gaelic as well, but since no one has called us on it, we're hoping it either hasn't been detected, or those who speak the language were kind enough to just shake their heads and let it pass. If that's the case, we thank you! This is what we get for using online translators! From now on, all spells will be done in Klingon. You've been warned!

No, there will be very little, if any smut in our stories for a couple of reasons. First, we don't write smut. Well, Bob could probably write smut, but I'd just pull it out when I edited the chapter. Now, I'm not a prude. Smut has its place. It just doesn't have a place in our stories. Second, and more importantly, we have no wish to cause any trouble for Tim, the site owner. Tossing in smut involving underage/barely of age children is a bad, bad thing, folks. So let's just leave it to the “fade to black” moments, hmm?

We're surprised so many people thought the last chapter was the end of the story. We still have a bit more to do yet, folks. We're thinking one more chapter. If something pops up during the writing of it, we may have two more chapters, but the last chapter would be very short. When the story is marked complete, then it will be done.

Yes, William and Harry are still alive. They went on tour with the rest of the Royal family. We know that Charles has decided to call himself George when he becomes King. However, following the timeline of the Potterverse, Charles hadn't made that announcement yet, so we stuck him with his own name for not coming out with it sooner. Had we called him “King George” instead, you can be sure we'd be pummeled by canon-nazi's, insisting we'd screwed up the timeline. Sometimes, we just can't win. (Grins)

As for what accents we hear when we're writing the characters, we don't hear Oxford-educated, South England accents. We hear the dulcet tones of Kevin Costner in Robin Hood. Kidding! We're kidding! To tell you the truth, I don't hear any accents...just a little voice in my head that tells me not to listen to the voices in my head. (Grins manically) Bob, however, hears his own voice. Yes, that's right, ladies and gentlemen. Harry Potter speaks with a New York accent!

Equal rights for all creatures has already been taken care of by the King. It's giving Amelia headaches, but she really has no choice but to comply, something that makes both Harry and Hermione very happy!

Musings: If you continue to say things like that about yourself, you will leave me (Alyx) no choice but to smack you upside the head several times with a fish! Don't make me do it! (Glares threateningly!)

That's about it, folks. We're almost at the end of our tale and have very much enjoyed writing it. We're glad we were able to provide you with a few hours of entertainment while we were at it.

To everyone who reviewed, and continues to review, thank you! Reading your thoughts and feelings on the story as it's progressed has been enormous fun and very helpful with improving our skills.

For those who haven't reviewed, here's something to think about the next time you find a fic you like. The author has put a lot of him/herself into the story you're reading. Why not leave him or her a review, letting the author know you appreciate the effort?

~Alyx and Bob~

*Bobmin*  
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# Sunrise Over Britain

## Chapter 33 - Of Endings and Beginnings

### Standard Disclaimer:

Ron Weasley walked onto the stage, followed by Albus Dumbledore, Severus Snape and Lord Voldemort.

"We're dead because of this story!" Ron growled. "And I never had the chance to get laid!"

"Oh, do be quiet, Weasley," snarled Snape. "Your pubescent fantasies notwithstanding, I do think we should have been treated better." He pushed back his hair and stuck his nose in the air. "After all, I have been confused for that famous muggle. What's his name again? Alan Alda?"

Dumbledore chuckled. "I do believe you mean Alan Rickman, my dear boy. Would you like a lemon drop?"

"Quiet! The three of you are enough to make me want to give up my plans to take over the world and take up girl scout hunting instead!" exclaimed Voldemort.

"I always knew you were a pervert," muttered Ron.

Voldemort leered at Ron, who blanched and ducked behind Dumbledore.

Dumbledore smiled benignly, then cast a charm, making the back of robe to turn transparent. "Like what you see, Ronny? Would you like some candy?"

Ron turned green and made retching noise.

Alyx stormed onto the stage. "STOP THIS RIGHT NOW!" she bellowed.

Bob looked up from the word processor. "What now? Can't you see I'm busily crafting the next 'Gone with the Wind'? 'Blowing Potter', I call it."

Alyx turned away from him for a moment to silently pray for someone to bring her husband's sanity back, then she pulled out her Frying Pan of Infinite Attacks. "ARRGHH!!" As battle cries went, she knew it needed work but was pressed for time.

Bob slid bonelessly to the floor, unconscious.

The other four eyed Alyx and her lethal kitchenware warily.

"You four were supposed to tell people how this story is fan fiction, that we make no claim to any rights and that it all belongs to JK Rowling. What were you thinking?" she asked angrily.

"Well," Dumbledore said, pointing at the others. "Ron wanted to get laid, Snape thinks he's Alan Alda and Voldemort wants to take over the world. But you seem like a very nice girl. Would you like a lemon drop? And maybe to sit on my lap and call me Daddy?"

"ARRGHH!!" Alyx cried once more and the Frying Pan of Infinite Attacks flashed in anger. Dumbledore slid to the floor, unconscious.

"Daddy that, you old pervert!" Alyx exclaimed, then she stormed off the stage, muttering to herself.

Bob lifted his head. "Next time I'm writing one disclaimer and just repeat it for each chapter," he grumbled, holding his head.

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### Sunrise Over Britain

#### Chapter 33

#### Anafi Island, Greece (April 20th)...

Hermione sat on a chair on the balcony overlooking the bay and sipped her tea. It was very late and the moon hung low in the sky, casting alternating light and shadows on the water. The past week had been eventful on a very personal level.

*Harry was right, she thought. We needed the time here to relax and take stock of what happened.*

Harry slept in their bed a few feet away. She still felt a glow from their love making.

Over the course of the week, at one time or another, each of them had broken down, but the others had been there to help. Some were quite public, like Ginny and Tonks who had both resorted to yelling and throwing crockery before subsiding into exhausted weeping. Others were more private, like Harry and Hermione, who waited for the privacy of their bedroom and the comforting arms of their loves before they broke down.

It had also been a week of surprises and jokes, some of which came from the past.

Shaking her head, Hermione smiled to herself, thinking of their second night in Anafi.

*The cry woke everyone.*

*Harry and Hermione threw on their robes, certain that something was terribly wrong. They rushed from their bedroom only to find most of the Brotherhood joining them in the hall. There, they milled around until Susan and Terry came out of their room.*

*"Susan, what's wrong with the baby?" asked Harry worriedly. He was already trying to figure out the quickest way of getting a healer to the island.*

*Susan smiled. "There's nothing wrong with her. I don't know whose baby is crying, but it's not mine."*

*Harry scowled and motioned for everyone to be silent. He cocked his head several times, trying to see if he could determine where the sound was coming from. He was becoming very concerned and the longer he listened, the more sure he felt that there was a baby nearby in need of help.*

*"Nothing. It's the same from every direction," he muttered.*

*"Maybe the elves can help," Hermione offered. She was nearly as worried as he was.*

*Harry nodded. "Sippi, Tippi," he called.*

*With a pair of dull pops, the ancient elves appeared, looking very tired.*

*Harry knelt down on one knee to face them. "Somewhere near the house is a baby. We need to find it and make sure it's alright. Can you help us?" he asked.*

*Sippi and Tippi exchanged a glance, then Sippi stepped forward. "Is no baby, Master Harry. That is spell from Master James."*

*Harry sat down heavily on the floor. "A spell my father made? Why does it sound like a baby crying?"*

*"Master James wanted to invite his friends and their ladies to visit and use this house. He knew how lonely we got with no one here, so he wanted more people to visit. But he left the house charmed to sound alarm when someone became pregnant," Tippi replied.*

*Harry looked up at his friends. Almost every woman took a step back, and then rushed for their wands. Susan didn't move and Hermione wandlessly cast the detection charm on herself, which came up negative.*

*One by one the women returned to the group. Ginny looked a little disappointed, and Luna looked extremely focused, but she shook her head. One by one the men breathed a sigh of relief, or disappointment, it was impossible to tell.*

*One woman was still missing from the group.*

*Dan looked around nervously and Hermione gapped.*

*"Daddy!" she said, sounding shocked.*

*"Dan!" came a shriek from a bedroom.*

*"Oh, lord!" he muttered, then bolted for the bedroom he shared with his wife.*

*"Really, Hermione, it's not like they stop having sex after you were born," commented Luna. "I don't know about the rest of you ladies, but if I have my way, I'll be a hundred and forty and wrinkled like a prune before I give up riding my dragon."*

*Draco groaned, turned and purposely banged his head against the wall. The others tried to stifle their mirth.*

*Harry turned back to the house elves. "Can you turn off the alarm? Or reset it?" he asked.*

*Sippi nodded and snapped her fingers. The crying stopped immediately.*

*She finished her tea and climbed out of the chair. The day would be starting in a few hours and she needed to get a bit more sleep. She climbed into bed and settled herself just as Harry rolled over, catching her with one arm and drawing up behind her. She snuggled back into him, knowing his action was automatic.*

*She drifted off to sleep still thinking about the fact that she would soon have a sibling.*

*Harry awoke a few hours later to an empty bed. He climbed out and stretched, then rubbed his eyes. Except for one bad night, these past few days had been exceptionally healing for him. He didn't like to think about that particular night, only because it was triggered by a nightmare, leading him to believe that future nightmares could do the same thing.*

*Hermione had held him, and using their bond, helped him work his way through it. But for a brief moment, he had teetered on the brink of utter despair.*

*Dressing casually in shorts and a t-shirt, he went in search of breakfast, and his wife.*

*He found her in the main dining room and was shocked to see her wearing a t-shirt that read, 'My Husband invaded Britain and all I got was this*

lousy t-shirt.'

She looked up and smirked at him. His t-shirt read, 'Unemployed Dark Lord Slayer. Will slay for food!' and she nearly rolled her eyes, but figured it might be a tad hypocritical.

He sat down next to her and grinned. "Nice shirt, but if we want to be technical, I didn't really invade Britain. I just stormed Hogwarts," he said, then looked around at the empty room. "Where is everybody?"

Hermione calmly buttered a roll. "Oh, they'll be here shortly," she said, then picked up her wand and waved it, causing a bell like tone to ring throughout the house.

A few moments later, Emma walked in, grinning at Harry and wearing a t-shirt that read, 'I'm pregnant...'

Dan followed on her heels, wearing a shirt that read, '...And I'm surprised!'

"Oh, you've got to be kidding me," Harry protested.

Hermione laughed. "We've been putting up with your shirts for two years. Now it's our turn."

Tonks and Remus entered next. Tonks' shirt said, 'Don't follow in my footsteps. I walk into walls.'

Remus' shirt was an echo of Tonks'. His read, 'Official Guide Wolf for the positionally challenged.'

Luna walked in wearing a shirt that read, 'Save the whales! Trade them for valuable prizes!' and Harry nearly choked. She stopped and smiled at him before sitting down.

Harry was sorely tempted to bang his head against the table.

A moment later Draco walked in wearing a shirt that read, 'Honk if you love Slytherin'. He looked down at the bright yellow garment covered with black lettering and turned to Luna. "It would work better if this wasn't in Hufflepuff colors. And what does it mean to Honk?"

"Yes, Draco, I know. And don't worry about it," she replied calmly.

Neville stepped in wearing a shirt that read, 'One man's weed is another man's potion ingredient.'

Ginny followed wearing a shirt that read, 'Official Dark Lord Slayer Ego Deflater.'

Susan walked in next wearing a shirt that said, 'I'm the Mummy'. She was followed by Terry, whose shirt read, 'I'm the Daddy'. Then Susan held up the baby, who wore a t-shirt reading, 'I'm in charge'.

Harry groaned at the group. "Who's bright idea was this?"

"Yours, in a way, Harry. We just felt that it was such a good idea, we all wanted to do it," replied Ginny smugly.

"Right. And I'm in the line of succession for the throne," Harry replied dryly.

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### **Padfoot Manor, One Week Later (April 24th)...**

"Two weeks!" Amelia said tightly. "Two weeks you and your people have been out of contact."

Harry stared at her for a moment, his expression dark. "Yes, Amelia, we took two weeks off to rest and recuperate. There isn't a person among us who didn't break down sometime during those two weeks. We have been training for the war for nearly two years. Now that it's over, most of us, believe it or not, want to take a moment to breathe and take stock of the price we've paid."

"Seriously, Amelia," Hermione interjected, "you knew how to reach us if it was an emergency. Besides, the King himself told us to take the time off."

"You're not going to make me feel guilty over this. I left a message saying we'd be back and how to contact us," Harry said, gesturing with his arm, taking in all his friends.

They were tightly packed behind Harry with various expressions on their faces. Susan and Terry looked ashamed, while most, like Ginny, Harry and Hermione, looked irate about being called to task for taking their trip. They had just arrived back at the manor and hadn't even made it to their rooms when the Minister caught up with them.

"Look, Amelia, I've told you this before, but I'll repeat it. I'm not going to spend my life in the public eye. As soon as I can, I hope to leave the British Army and take a few years off to see the world with my wife. The Brotherhood isn't disbanding, but we all have dreams we want to follow. For me, that doesn't include being poster boy for the Ministry."

Amelia turned red. She was about to speak when Remus stepped between her and Harry.

"Both of you calm down. Amelia, Harry isn't talking about dropping everything in your lap today, but you need to see this from his perspective. Ginny and Neville were badly injured. Draco was hurt, as well. Susan and Terry, myself, even Harry... all of us have had to pay a high price victory and we're tired."

Remus took a breath and glanced around before turning back to Amelia. "I think I can safely say that none of us will shirk our duties. We all know rebuilding will take time and we'll do our part. But Harry recognized that we needed to get away for a while. That's all it was. A two week vacation so we could remember why we fought in the first place."

He looked fondly at Tonks, who had also become pregnant over the holiday. "We needed to be reminded that we're only human."

"Amelia," Harry said softly, his tone apologetic. "I can promise you we'll all be back on the job first thing tomorrow morning."

Amelia sighed and nodded, the anger draining out of her. "I'm sorry, Harry. The last two weeks have been hellish. We have nearly a hundred captured Death Eaters and we don't know what to do with them."

Susan stepped forward. She held the baby cradled in her arm. "I think Aunt needs to be reminded of what we're all fighting for," she said, as she handed Siomha to Amelia.

Amelia's hard expression softened immediately.

"I know you can't do it now, Amelia, but you need to take a break also. Find time somewhere in your schedule. You're welcome to use my vacation home. Some time in the sun by the sea would do you a world of good," Harry told her over Susan's shoulder.

Amelia glanced up from the baby and nodded.

He turned to the others and gestured. They scattered to their rooms to unpack. It was a good two weeks, but now it was time to get back to work.

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### **Hogwarts Refugee Camp (April 28th)...**

Harry wore his cloak with the hood up as he walked through the tent city that had sprung up around the castle. Hermione and the others had kicked him from the castle as they oversaw the Brigade moving into Camp Hogwarts, the facility just on the outskirts of the school grounds.

He grinned to himself. Because he'd stuck his nose into everyone else's business, he had been told by Hermione to take a walk while his company commanders got everything under control. The American units were being redeployed, and for a brief time, the Brigade would return to its Auror roots by providing police services until Amelia could get the Department of Magical Law Enforcement up and running properly.

The refugee camp around the Red Pentagon field office had grown to the size of a small city. Nearly fifteen thousand wizards, witches and squibs were now living in tents, effectively filling the space between Hogwarts and Hogsmeade.

It was where the Brigade would be doing most of its policing. Despite the end of the war, human problems still existed. Husbands and wives fought, people stole - in other words, people were returning to normal - and the Brigade was needed to watch over them until Amelia could field new Aurors.

Every morning, Ministry supervisors would set up their recruitment tables in the refugee camp, taking any able bodied person capable of working. They'd earn a galleon a day, plus meals. If they had a family to feed, they would receive extra money and food based on the number of people they were responsible for.

The Muggle Government had reoccupied the parliament building in London and from their they were coordinating reconstruction efforts. Department M was continually slipping in magical help at the insistence of both Amelia and Harry. As a result of such help, several metropolitan hospitals were returned to service much sooner than expected and London had reliable power, even if they only had it for twelve hours a day.

The people seemed to take things in stride once the initial shock and celebrations were over. The BBC was back on the air, broadcasting from several locations, providing information about medical and rescue services. They also spent ten minutes every hour running a show called "Who's where?" in an attempt to reunite families and friends. Generally, people grumbled, but even the most vocal of critics could see that progress was being made.

Aid rushed into Britain from around the world. London's Heathrow Airport was turned into a huge relief and distribution center, with aircraft landing every five minutes.

Harry walked through the camp, his mind grappling with the magnitude of the problem. Suddenly it seemed like the last two years of war preparation had been a sham. All that work and when it finally came down to the end, it wasn't really the end, but the beginning of a whole new set of problems. Problems that were even more important than Voldemort and it was so overwhelming. For the first time in his life, he felt like running.

The morning staff meeting with Ministry representatives had covered topics like food distribution, crowd control and waste disposal. Sylvia August was terribly concerned that overcrowding in the camp, coupled with poor waste management, would lead to disease. What did he know about sewerage?

Harry paused in his musings and looked around. Nearby, a young woman with a wicked scar and a limp was nursing a small infant. Both looked like they hadn't eaten in weeks, although Harry knew better. Food was quite plentiful in the camp. The pair looked as though they'd been through hell, but they were recovering.

A young man crawled out of the tent and walked over to the woman, who smiled up at him. When he grinned and caressed her hair lovingly, Harry blinked and pushed back his hood.

"Stan? Stan Shunpike?"



"Wot?" asked the young man, looking around guardedly. Then he spotted Harry. "Blimey! Maggie, look! It's Harry Potter!"

Harry walked toward him his hand outstretched. "I'm glad to see you made it through the war, Stan."

Stan shook his hand nervously, while Maggie watched Harry with an awestruck expression.

"We wuz lucky, Mr. Potter. Ern... Ernie didn't make it, bless 'is soul. He tried to use the bus to escape, but the Death Eaters caught him," Stan replied.

Harry sighed. "I think we've all lost friends." He looked down at the baby, then back to Stan. "Do you have everything you need?"

Stan bobbed his head. "We're alright for now. Things have been getting better. Little Ceci has been to a healer, who cured her cough, and Maggie is fixed up well enough."

Harry nodded. Stan and Maggie were both squibs, but the infant already had a powerfully bright aura. He smiled at the pair. "Good enough, then. If you need anything, Stan, you come to the Brigade Headquarters over in the Ministry camp and ask for me. Alright?"

Stan bobbed his head again. Maggie stood and handed him the baby. Then she limped over to Harry and kissed his cheek. "My husband is a proud man, Mr. Potter, but we both thank you for everything you've done."

Harry swallowed noisily and smiled down at the woman. Then he turned and walked back toward the camp.

"Did ya see, Maggie? Harry Potter himself is looking out for us! Cor!"

Harry blushed, hearing Stan's comment.

"*Hermione?*" he sent.

"*What?*" came the irritable reply. "*Are you sticking your nose in places it doesn't belong again?*"

He winced. "*I'm sorry about that,*" he replied contritely. "*Howmuch does a Hogwarts education cost?*"

Their bond widened and he could feel the confusion his question had caused her. "*What? Why do you need to know?*"

"*I ran into an old friend in the camp. Do you remember Stan Shunpike, the squib that worked on the Knight Bus? I ran into him and his wife in the camp, along with a baby girl who's going to be a powerful witch. They looked pretty banged up, but are doing alright.*"

"*And?*"

He could tell by her tone that she was no longer irritated at him.

"*Well, I thought I'd open a educational trust for the baby. You knowhowhard squibs have it, getting work in our world is nearly impossible for them. Would say, twenty thousand galleons, be enough?*"

"*Damn you, Harry Potter! Howam I supposed to stay angry with you when you keep doing things like this? Get your tight butt back here so I can hug you properly!*"

"*I'm on my way,*" he replied with a grin, then he apparated to her.

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## Hogwarts Castle (April 29th)...

Harry walked into the Great Hall and nodded in approval. The room had been scrubbed until it shone. The Ministry was putting every body they could find to work, even if it was just to push a broom. It seemed strange that the Ministry was relying on muggle methods, but that was what they were doing. Hermione explained to Harry that they didn't want people using magic, since not everyone had the same level of capabilities, even for simple stuff like cleaning spells.

Harry nodded to Arthur Weasley, who sat at the long table. David, Amelia's aide, sat in one corner, taking notes. Chuck Stanton, representing the allied nations, sat next to Arthur.

Harry grabbed the chair on the other side of Arthur and sat down. He absently noted Hermione enter the room and stand in the back among the growing crowd.

Arthur stood. "May I have your attention please?" he asked loudly.

The crowd slowly fell silent and all eyes turned to him.

"Thank you," Arthur said with a touch of nervousness. "The issue of dealing with the prisoners has been tricky. The allied nations argued long and hard over how we should approach it before we came up with a solution which we feel is suitable.

"In essence, the captured Death Eaters will be tried before a military tribunal, consisting of Colonel Potter as the ranking military officer stationed at Hogwarts. Brigadier General Charles Stanton, as the ranking allied officer, will be the tribunal president. The other officer will be Major Howard of

the Canadian 5th Shamans.

"In the event that the tribunal feels it necessary to turn a prisoner over to civilian authorities, we have prevailed upon Chief Justice Okobe Umtumba of the Council of Avalon to preside over a civilian trial."

The doors opened once more and Justice Umtumba entered the Great Hall. The crowd parted instinctively, allowing him to pass. Harry's face light up, seeing his friend. He had not expected to see him here.

When Harry stood, Chuck glanced at him in surprise, then climbed to his feet. A second later, Major Howard joined them.

Umtumba stopped in front of the table with Arthur and the others and nodded in greeting. "Gentleman, I recognize your authority in all matters military. Should you need advice concerning issues of law, I am at your disposal."

"We are honored by your presence and your faith in us," Chuck Stanton replied.

Hermione was watching the four converse when she felt a hand on her shoulder. She turned to see Draco grinning broadly at her.

"Do you want to see something interesting?" he asked, his eyes dancing wildly.

"Sure. What is it?" she replied.

"Come with me."

Hermione followed Draco out of the Great Hall and towards Myrtle's bathroom on the second floor. Inside, she could hear the sound of shouting.

"Come out here right now," shouted Myrtle. "Come out or I'll get the Baron! He put me in charge of you!"

Hermione blinked in surprise and moved to stand next to Luna. "What's going on?" she whispered.

"Someone's getting their comeuppance," Luna said smugly.

Myrtle ignored the humans, choosing instead to hover near the stall next to hers. "You can't stay in there forever," she screeched. "Come out!"

A head appeared through the door. "Damn you, child! Leave me be!"

"No! You're mine! The Baron said I can keep you," Myrtle shouted.

Hermione took a step back in shock and her hands flew up to her mouth. "Lucius Malfoy?" she gasped.

Lucius' head turned. Spotting her, he sneered. "Filthy mudblood," he said. Then, seeing Draco and Luna, his expression darkened. "I nearly killed you both. I was so close! You're nothing but a damn weakling, Draco, and your mother is...Ahhhhh!"

His angry rant had been cut off by Myrtle, who had reached out and grabbed Lucius by the ear, twisting it viciously. "Manners! You are going to be respectful and mindful of your manners if you're going to be mine for eternity!"

"Is it possible for ghost to turn even paler?" Luna asked curious, looking at Lucius.

"It seems so," Draco drawled, amused.

Hermione stepped back until her shoulders brushed the wall and bit her lip hard, trying not to laugh.

Myrtle moved closer to Lucius. "You will be nice to them. Hermione is my friend. I let her have my Harry, after all. And Draco's a very nice boy. I could have had him if I wanted. Now, be a good boyfriend and behave yourself!"

Lucius twisted free from Myrtle's grasp and vanished. Myrtle groaned loudly and vanished in chase.

Hermione slid down the wall she was leaning up against, holding her sides as her laughter bounced off the walls of the bathroom. "A ghost?" she finally stammered between giggles.

"It does take some getting used to," Draco replied. His lips twisted for a moment. "Oh Gods, my mother is going to love this." He finally gave in and his laughter quickly joined Hermione's.

Luna watched them both for a moment, thinking. If she asked nicely, she was sure her father would let her borrow one of his cameras. It would be nice to get a picture of Narcissa's face when Draco told her what had become of her ex-husband.

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### **Commander's Quarters, Hogwarts Military Station (May 5th)...**

Hermione was worried about Harry. The last two weeks had been hard on everyone, but the infighting and bickering that Harry was putting up with in regard to the tribunal had been tearing him apart. The problem could be summed up in one word: execution. Most of the captured Death Eaters would be sentenced to death for their crimes, but in Britain, the muggle world had outlawed capital punishment years earlier.

The King had ordered the Ministry to move more in line with the muggles, and that was causing a lot of problems. Then, to top it off, the Ministry no longer had a means of executing prisoners. The Dementors were gone, and the veil was locked under tons of hardened lava. As it was, it was

estimated that recovering the old Ministry building would take several years.

Amelia had decided it would be easier to build a new facility next to the old one, then turn the old building over to the historians to recover at their leisure.

Hermione had appealed to Amelia to start releasing the Brotherhood from their duties. She hadn't spoken to Harry about it, but she had cited Harry's leg injury as a major reason why he should not be allowed to continue as commander of the Brigade. Amelia had been non-committal, but she had at least listened.

Harry stepped into their bedroom and peeled off his tie before all but collapsing in a chair.

*"You look tired,"* Hermione sent him.

*"Tired doesn't begin to describe it. Talk, talk, talk, all day long. Merlin! I never knew talking could be so exhausting."*

*"Did you make any progress today?"*

He looked at her and smiled softly. *"I think so. Or, I should say, I think we might have come up with something that will work, if we can convince the muggle governments to go along with it."*

Hermione took off her robe, revealing a very skimpy, sheer negligee. Once she had his full attention, she walked over and sat on his lap. *"Well, don't keep me in suspense. Tell me what you've thought up."*

He wrapped both arms around her and buried his face in her neck, breathing deeply. It was something she loved and it always sent shivers up and down her back.

*"Witch,"* he said fondly. *"How do you expect me to talk business with you sitting in my lap, wiggling your butt and looking the way you do?"*

*"Patience, Harry,"* she said primly. He knew she was deliberately teasing him, but two could play that game.

He gently pushed her off his lap and stood up. Then, taking her hand, he led her into the bathroom. Normally, the bath would have been a copy of every other bathroom they had set up for couples in the Brigade camp, but Hermione decided the commander should be allowed a little leeway in what his or her bath was like. Harry didn't mind. He wholeheartedly approved of the fact that Hermione like to share baths with him.

She had sunk the tub into the floor and, rather than spigots to add water, one side of the pool sized tub had a continual rain storm dropping water at a constant rate. The water temperature and various additives could be changed by adjusting the cloud above that end of the pool.

Harry stripped down and slid into the pool. Then he looked up at Hermione, who stood undecided.

*"Well? If you want to listen, you'll have to get wet,"* he said with a grin.

She laughed, catching his double meaning, then slipped out of her negligee and climbed in.

Harry leaned back his head and sighed for a moment. Hermione knew he was organizing his thoughts before he spoke.

*"You would be surprised how many countries have ways of executing prisoners and just how gruesome some of them are,"* he said softly. She had to strain over the sound of the falling rain to hear him. He opened his eyes and looked at her. *"When the allied nations realized we were without a method, they began to step forward with ideas and it ended up becoming a diplomatic nightmare. Poor Chuck didn't know what to do. He's in charge of a military tribunal, not a conference on capital punishment."*

He paused and reached down in the water to knead his calf.

*"When I left the court tonight they were taking a serious look at the idea I had, but I could tell a number of the allied nations weren't happy with it. They aren't happy with anything that leaves the prisoners alive."*

*"Alive?"* she blurted. She knew he had been working on his own solution, but had not expected him to suggest anything that would let Death Eaters live.

*"Yeah. I suggested we bind their magic, then do a total memory wipe before handing them over to the muggle authorities as normal prisoners. Believe me, it's better than what Argentina wanted us to do. They were in favor of a public flogging, followed by a private hanging."*

Hermione pushed his hands away from his leg and took up the job of massaging his calf. She stopped for a moment and shivered. *"That's barbaric,"* she muttered.

*"People are angry,"* he explained. *"The real numbers are starting to come in and they aren't good. Amelia thinks we lost nearly a third of wizarding Britain - that's over twenty thousand people - and the muggles are looking at numbers that far exceed our own. Everyone wants to make an example out of these prisoners so that no one will join the next dark lord that comes along."*

*"I can understand that, Harry, but we've won. There's no need to sink to such brutal behavior. I'm surprised you suggested what you did, but it's the best idea I've heard yet. And it leaves them alive, even if they are powerless."*

He smiled at her. *"I thought you'd approve. How are things otherwise?"*

"Well, Minerva has roughly half of the school elves working at the castle. You've probably seen them."

"Seen them? You can't walk ten feet without tripping over them. They're running around, scrubbing and shining, putting up portraits and making lists of things that don't work anymore. I think she's determined to have the castle ready to receive students by September," he replied, then he stretched out a little more. Her massage had moved from his calf to other spots.

"Did you know she's roped Flitwick into putting a team together to see if they can salvage the Express and get it working again?"

He pulled her into his lap and she clutched at him while his hands worked their own miracles on her body. It was a game they played, one she'd never been able to win. Mutely, she shook her head. He was capable of holding a normal conversation and still love her to distraction.

"That," she gasped, "sounds interesting... oh..."

He grinned against her neck, then he lifted her easily in his arms and out of the tub. A simple gestureless charm and they were both dry when he laid her on the bed. She grinned and held out her arms for him, laughing when he fell into her embrace.

There would be time for talking later.

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### Hogsmeade Station (May 20th)...

Professor Flitwick climbed up onto the ladder until he was high enough for everyone to see him. The station was packed with at least eight hundred people, all waiting in silence.

Flitwick cast the sonorus charm on himself and looked around, beaming at the anxious faces.

Harry stood not far from Hermione and he couldn't help but laugh, seeing the surprise on Flitwick's face. Two days ago the small professor had circulated a sheet in the camps asking for volunteers to help him fix the Hogwarts Express. The response to his flyer had been overwhelming.

"Can everyone hear me?" Flitwick squeaked loudly.

"Hear you, yes! See you? No!" shouted Remus, to the amusement of the crowd.

Flitwick nodded, then flicked his wand at Remus, who quickly stopped laughing when he found himself hanging upside down from the edge of the station roof. The crowd laughed even louder and Tonks sat down heavily on the ground, giggling at her now sputtering husband.

"Now that I have your attention," Flitwick continued merrily, "listen up. We have several tasks ahead of us, so we're going to break into groups. The first group will extract the engine and coal car from the wreckage and move it to the clearing behind the station. They will assemble over by what remains of the engine.

"The second group is the fabrication team. They will be looking for small parts and items. Some of them will be repairing the items, others will be working on fixing the engine itself. The second group will set up in the clearing behind the station.

"Finally, we have the track group, who will be cleaning up the remainder of the mess and working to fix the tracks. You know who you are. You'll start about two miles south of us and work north. We have several miles of badly damaged track that needs to be checked, cleaned and repaired."

He paused and grinned widely at the crowd. "Let's get to work!"

As the crowd broke up, Harry walked over to Hagrid and Flitwick. He and Hermione had volunteered to help extract the engine from the wreckage.

The Express had been demolished in a train collision when Voldemort had taken over. The engineer had moved the train onto the main track from its protected siding, where it was slammed into by commuter rail train.

"Most of the two trains are in pieces. We need to figure out what belonged to the commuter train and what belonged to the Express," Flitwick was saying. "Fortunately, the commuter train was made mostly from aluminum. The Express is much heavier iron."

"Well, let's get to it then," Hagrid said. "We ain't got all day." Turning away, he led the large group over to a huge pile of twisted metal.

Flitwick ran to keep up with everyone. In front of the pile, he stopped and turned. "We'll start by levitating those top pieces," he said, pointing to several huge chunks of metal on top of the pile. "Remember, it's Wingardium Leviosa. And don't forget the swish and flick!"

Harry looked at Hermione and they both broke into laughter. The last time Flitwick told them that, they ended up destroying a bathroom while fighting a troll. It was the start of a lifetime relationship, although they didn't know it at the time.

Harry pulled his staff from its holster and expanded it to full size. Pointing, he raised it slightly and one of the commuter rail trucks lifted high into the air.

"Oh, my goodness!" exclaimed Flitwick. "Excellent work, Mr. Potter! Marvelous!"

Harry, distracted by the little Professor, let his control on the spell slip slightly.

"Harry!" screamed Hermione.

He turned and looked around wildly. The heavy truck was rapidly shrinking as it rose into the air.

"We don't want to put things into orbit, Harry!" Hermione exclaimed.

He blushed and brought the train truck back down to a reasonable height. "Sorry," he muttered. Around him, the crowd laughed, then turned to lift the pieces apart from the wreckage.

Even with the use of magic it was hard work. Flitwick ran from one place to another, helping people figure out what part went into what pile.

Several hours later, Harry found himself leaning up against the base of a tree, staring at several large piles of metal. Hagrid walked over and put a large tub filled with ice and drinks on the ground before sitting down next to it.

"I don't know how they hope to put the Express back together," Harry said dubiously, eyeing the large piles of twisted metal.

"They're going to try," Hagrid said with a shrug. "The Headmistress an' Professor Flitwick have a bet goin' on. She doesn't think he can do it so she's arrangin' fer portkeys to be made to send to the students... Not tha' they'll be a lot o' 'em this year."

Harry reached into the tub and pulled out two bottles. He opened them, then nudged Hermione, who was dozing against his shoulder. She blinked and accepted the bottle of butterbeer gratefully.

"Yehr parents would've been very proud o' yeh. I know most o' the Hogwarts Professors are. They are constantly usin' yeh two as examples," Hagrid said with a grin, then he nodded to the people milling about. House elves were delivering food and drink to the workers. "Yeh did good work out there. I know Professor Flitwick is pleased. He didn't think we'd get this much done today."

"It beats sitting around listening to the representatives from wherever tell us what they think we should do with those prisoners. I was relieved when Chuck Stanton asked for a week's recess to confer with Washington," Harry replied.

Hagrid chuckled and shook his head.

"As it stands, they'll need to find a substitute for me come June first. Our NEWTS are starting then."

"That'll be too late to graduate with your class," Hagrid said in a low rumble.

"We know, but we'll have taken them, Hagrid," Hermione replied. "I'm sure we'll work up a private little celebration, even if we don't attend the graduating ceremony."

"I'd rather attend that ceremony than all the others they keep trying to get me to attend. Fortunately, work here keeps me to busy," Harry said smugly.

Hermione chuckled. He had been dodging Amelia's attempts to turn him into some sort of international hero by refusing to get involved in planning a multinational award ceremony. Hermione knew Harry wouldn't be able to avoid it forever, but he was going to put it off as long as he could.

"You can't run forever, Harry. Amelia has already spoken to Caleb about awarding unit citations at the end of next month," Hermione said.

Harry frowned, knowing that he couldn't avoid that. The people who fought for him came first.

"So, what will you be doing, Hagrid?" asked Hermione.

The large man grinned at her. "I'm goin' back to my old job. I'll rebuild my house an' spend half my time at Haven an' half here at Hogwarts. The Irish were kind enough to award me an official Mastery in Magic Animals fer my work with the Angels."

Harry grinned. "That's brilliant, Hagrid!"

Hagrid nodded. "Surprised me right down to me boots! And now I can do what I wanted. With Professor McGonagall's permission, I'm offerin' two different Care classes this next year. The regular one, an' one fer exotic animals. Yehr friend, Luna, is supposed to be helpin' me in tha' one. She's workin' on her own Mastery."

Harry leaned back in the warm spring sun, pleased for his friend. Hagrid always seemed to be a bit of a problem, but he was finally getting the recognition and praise he deserved.

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## Haven School, Graduation Day (June 1st)...

"There you are!"

Millicent turned toward the voice and watched as Deneb walked over. She'd been sitting on a secluded bench in the garden for nearly an hour. The graduation ceremony was over and students were milling around with their families, but she'd felt the need to be alone. Her family had done their duty by showing up, but had left almost immediately after the ceremony ended. They'd expected her to remain neutral during the war, but had found out about her work at the school and had made their displeasure clear.

"I've been looking all over for you. What are you doing out here?" Deneb asked as he sat down beside her.

"Thinking," she said with a shrug.

"About?"

"A lot of things, but mostly this." She passed him a letter she'd been holding in her hand.

He scanned the letter quickly and smiled. Reaching into the pocket of his robe, he drew out a letter and held it up. "I got the same offer."

Taking her letter back, she folded it and shoved it into her pocket.

He frowned when she didn't speak. "What's wrong? I thought you'd be happy about this. I am. So were my parents. I bet yours will be too."

"You'd lose that bet," she growled.

"I doubt that. I saw your parents at graduation. They looked pleased."

"You saw their public face, Deneb. Privately, my parents are furious with my involvement in the war. They know about this job offer and have already told me that I'll be disowned if I take it."

"What? Disowned? Millicent, what's going on?"

"My parents may have remained neutral during the war, but they're Slytherins through and through. Many of their friends and business associates were Death Eaters and they're far from pleased by the outcome of this war.

"My actions in the war were a slap in the face to them, but they were willing to chalk it up to inexperience on my part and a lack of familial education on theirs. They were in the middle of telling me that they'd graciously forgive my actions and accept me back if I rededicated myself to the family when an elf popped in to deliver the letter. I'd barely finished reading it when my father snatched it out of my hands and read it. He then informed me that if I took the job, I'd be disowned, publicly."

Deneb scowled. "Wouldn't it be a bit difficult to put a polite, public face on something like that?"

"My father will think of something. He always does. And here's a bet you can take to the bank. Whatever reason he comes up with will be designed to cause me the most pain and embarrassment possible."

"So, the tough Millicent Bulstrode is going to cave in and be a good little girl, is that it?" Deneb asked scathingly.

"You don't understand, Thorntree. You weren't raised in a Slytherin household," she told him quietly.

"Oh, please," a quiet voice said from behind them. "What's next, Bulstrode? Tears?"

Jumping to their feet, Deneb and Millicent spun around, wands drawn, and watched as Draco Black stepped out from the shadows of the garden.

"How long have you been listening?" Deneb asked as he put his wand away.

"Long enough," Draco said, walking over to join them.

"You were spying on us!" Millicent accused, her wand still pointed at him.

He shrugged, held up a hand and disarmed her with a muttered word. "It's not very politic of you to point your wand at your future boss," he told her as he handed it back to her.

"You're assuming I'll take the job. And what's this about you being my boss?" she asked, tucking her wand away.

"Of course you'll take the job. You're a lot of things, Millicent, but stupid isn't one of them. As for being your boss, the Ministry has appointed me Head of Operations."

"You're leading the department?" Deneb asked curiously.

"No. They feel I'm too young for that, which suits me perfectly. You couldn't pay me enough for that job. They've tapped Jonathan Collingsworth for the position. He's been in politics for years and is used to the machinations of the Ministry."

Deneb frowned. "My parents know a Robin Collingsworth. Any relation?"

"They're brothers," Draco confirmed.

Millicent shook her head. "Why a new department, anyway?"

"That's partially your fault, I'm afraid. Well, yours and Deneb's," Draco told her with a sly grin. "Minerva told Amelia just how well you two performed during the war. That led the Minister to the idea that perhaps separating the police force from the intelligence gathering force might be a good idea, and the Ministry of Magical Intelligence was formed. When the political maneuvering started to try to limit the actions of the new department, the King stepped in and put the squeeze on the opposition."

"It must be nice to have friends in high placed," Deneb said, grinning.

"No doubt," Draco said, rolling his eyes. "So, how about it, Millicent? Are you going to be one of the gainfully employed? Or do I put your name on the list of people to watch?"

She shook her head. "Piss off, Black. You're not going to intimidate me into accepting the offer."

Sighing, Draco sat down on the bench and watched her carefully. "What, exactly, is the problem here?"

When she turned away, Deneb scowled at her. "Her father told her if she accepts the job, he'll disown her."

"And?"

"You know how important family is in our world, Draco," Millicent muttered as she turned back to face him. "How long do you think I'll keep any job, let alone one with the Ministry, after my father is through with me?"

Cocking an eyebrow, Draco shook his head and stared at her for a moment. "You really are out of the loop, aren't you? Things don't work that way anymore, Bulstrode. It's ability that counts now, not family connections. The King has ordered the magical government to more closely pattern itself after the muggle government and in the muggle world, ability will take you far."

"Even without family?" she asked doubtfully.

"For Merlin's sake, Millicent, you have family. You have me!" Deneb told her angrily.

If Draco was surprised by the outburst, he didn't show it. Remaining silent, he watched the pair before him with interest.

Reaching out, she brushed her fingers across his cheek gently. "That's sweet, Deneb, but..."

"No," he snapped, reaching up to take her hand. Pulling her close, he stared down at her. "Don't you get it? I've worked too hard to bring you into my life and to earn your trust. I love you and I know damn well that you love me, too, so don't bother denying it."

Her eyes widened and she stared at him silently for several moments. "I love you," she finally blurted out. "Gods, I never let myself admit it, but I do love you. But what about your family?"

"They'll welcome you with open arms," he told her, then brushed a light kiss across her lips.

"This is all very touching, I suppose," Draco drawled, "but there's something else you should keep in mind, Bulstrode."

Turning in Deneb's arms, she scowled at him. "And what's that, Black?"

"Do you honestly think Harry would let you face anything alone? Even if Deneb weren't with you, Harry would be." Seeing the shock in her eyes, he grinned cockily and buffed the nails of his hand against his robe. "Then there's the little matter of the life debt Neville Longbottom owes you. He'd never allow anything to happen to you if it was in his power to stop it. As Ginny is his wife, that would bring in the Weasley family. Your parents have never met the twins, so they'd never understand the utter chaos their lives would quickly become until it was too late."

Seeing she hadn't considered that, either, he shook his head. "Minerva would stand beside you and Deneb against anyone who'd dare threaten you. So would Remus and Tonks. Then there's me. I may no longer be a Malfoy, but the Black family isn't without influence."

Standing, he smiled gently. "If your parents want a fight, they'll get it. I think you'll find that they back down very quickly, once they realize just whose standing beside you."

"Draco, I..." She trailed off, not knowing what to say.

His eyes shone with understanding. "It's a lesson that took me awhile to learn, Millicent, but one I learned well. With people like Minerva and the Brotherhood behind you, you're never alone."

Nodding once to Deneb, he turned and walked away. "Oh, and I'll expect your letters of acceptance within the week," he called before disappearing back into the school.

Deneb's arms tightened around Millicent and he leaned down slightly. "Well, what do you think?"

She scowled. "I never did like the name Bulstrode. I'll be glad to get rid of it."

Laughing, he hugged her quickly, then released her. "Come on. I want to introduce you to my parents!" Grabbing her hand, he dragged her back toward the school.

"Oh, gods. Your parents? Deneb, maybe we should wait."

"Stop worrying. They'll love you!" he exclaimed.

"Why do I doubt that?" she muttered.

"Because you're a pessimist and a cynic by nature, of course," was the cheerful reply.

She rolled her eyes, but allowed herself to be led back into the school.

A few minutes later, the door to Minerva's office opened and Draco walked in.

"So, did you hear everything?" he asked.

Nodding, Harry stood up, stretched and flicked his hand at Draco to dispel the eavesdropping charm. "Yes. I'm glad she's alright."

"Why didn't you speak to her?" Draco asked, waiting for Harry by the door.

"I figured you'd get through to her easier," he said as he walked out of the room. "Do you think she'll take the job?"

Closing the door, Draco turned and walked beside Harry. "She'll take it. Deneb will talk her around if she's still having doubts. I've a question for you though, and not about Millicent."

"What is it?"

"Did the Weasley twins have anything to do with the naming of the new department?"

Harry looked at the blond, puzzled. "No, why?"

Draco rolled his eyes. "Oh, come on, Potter! The Ministry of Magical Intelligence? MoMI?"

Harry blinked, then grinned. "It does sound like something the twins would come up with."

"Merlin, why couldn't they have stuck with 'Department', like everything else at the Ministry?" Draco grumbled.

"I don't know. Look, I need to find Minerva and let her know that Millicent's okay. I'll see you back at the manor."

Nodding, Draco walked toward the exit, still muttering to himself.

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### **Padfoot Manor (June 7th)...**

It was a subdued Brotherhood that arrived in the foyer at Padfoot. They had just completed their final examination, Defense Against the Dark Arts, and were done with the testing phase of the NEWTS.

"Someone tell me again why we thought this was a good idea?" grumbled Neville. "I didn't feel this tired after the battle."

His comment caused them all to agree. To the group, "the battle" was now a phrase they used to describe what would be forever burned into their memories.

Dan and Emma, who hadn't taken the exams, bustled into the foyer and started pushing them towards the large dining room.

"Come on, you lot. I know you're tired, but food and drink will help wake you up," Emma said cheerily.

Harry wanted to kill her.

Moved into the dining room, Ginny snagged the first empty seat and placed her head down on the table. "I never want to do that again," she murmured.

Harry collapsed into his own chair, wincing in pain. The practical portion of the exam had been a duel between himself and multiple opponents. It was the only way the examiners could figure to test him. No one wanted to duel with him, so they tapped some of the Ministry's training people and set him against four of the best duelists the Ministry had. They were the same people who'd helped train him in the first place, and they knew his weaknesses.

He had to fend off several attacks that took advantage of his injury, and he hadn't been completely successful.

Harry glanced over at Terry and they exchanged a sympathetic look. Terry's injury hurt his mobility, but didn't really cause him much pain. On the other hand, his leg could suddenly go numb on him with little warning.

Elves bustled around the table, filling plates and glasses. The wonderful smells drifting around the table was enough to wake them enough to eat.

"So, you're done testing now?" asked Dan.

Hermione roused herself enough to nod. She had been staring at her drink, exhausted. "Yes. We should know the results in a week or so."

The doors to the room burst open and Remus and Tonks stepped in, pushing a cart with a large cake on it. The cake, they all saw, was shaped like a newt. A series of candles shot sparks from the their tips and made a screeching noise that caused Fuzz to whirr loudly and vanish from Luna's shoulder.

A second later, a pair of yellow eyes blinked and looked down at the ruckus from one of the overhead gas lamps. The Snorkack glared distrustfully at the sugary confection and whirred warningly.

Harry looked at the smiling Tonk, all bouncy and full of energy, and thought about killing her, too. But the thought of having to expend energy to complete the task made him sigh tiredly.

"Congratulations on taking your NEWTS!" Tonks cried loudly.



*Then again*, Harry thought, glaring at her. *The world might just thank me.*

"Someone tell me again why this was a good idea?" Draco said from the other end of the table.

"So you could be good adults and lead productive lives," Remus said smugly.

As a group they turned to glare at the werewolf. He would never know how close he came to dying that day.

Luna turned back to the table and rested her head on one hand. With a tired sigh, she raised the other hand and held it, palm up. Seconds later, a small green man with a horn protruding from his forehead appeared, standing on her palm. He blinked in shocked surprise and turned to stare at Luna incredulously.

"Yes, I can summon you, so it's time you grew up and started acting like you take your job seriously," she told him.

He huffed at her and made a few crude gestures.

Luna frowned at him. "You know, that isn't nice. He's my protector and mate. Besides, you're too tiny, no matter what enchantment you use. Now, go back and tell Gaia that her Angels are doing very well. Thank her for me, for all of us, actually," Luna said sternly.

The little man looked at her uncertainly. He wasn't used to her being so commanding. Finally, he sighed and nodded, then vanished after farting hard enough to send him airborne for a second.

"What the devil was that?" exclaimed Hermione, rousing from her stupor.

"Oh, him? That's Gaia's messenger," replied Luna airily. "I meant to call him earlier, but I forgot with all the studying we've been doing."

Luna then stood and turned to Draco. "I'm going upstairs to take a bath. If you don't spend too much time down here, you might get lucky tonight."

Then she turned and left the room, leaving Draco staring at her retreating back, and the rest of the Brotherhood snickering in their seats.

Draco shook his head ruefully. Turning to face the others, he opened his mouth to apologize but Harry waved him to silence.

"Don't say anything, Draco. She's Luna, that's all that needs to be said. Besides, no matter how outrageous she can sometimes be, you wouldn't change her for all the galleons in the world and we all know it," Harry said.

"Of course I wouldn't," he replied haughtily. "She's even more Slytherin than I am." Standing, he nodded arrogantly to the others and followed his wife from the room.

Harry stood unsteadily and leaned against his staff. "I think Luna has the right of it. I'm off to go soak before this leg pulls up totally lame tonight."

"Do you want me to come with you?" Hermione asked.

"Finish your meal and relax for a bit. I'll probably still be soaking when you're done. If I run into any trouble, I'll send Dobby to fetch you," he replied.

"Those must be some tests," Dan said, watching Harry hobble from the room.

"Horribly exhausting," mumbled Neville, then he grinned and nudged Hermione.

She turned, then choked back a laugh. Ginny was dozing and her nose was about to drop into her soup.

Shaking his head in amusement, Neville stood and picked up Ginny. She blinked sleepily, then snuggled closer to him. "G'Night all," he said quietly.

"I think you were right," Remus said to Tonks. "We should have waited until tomorrow to celebrate the end of their NEWTS."

Tonks nodded, eying Terry, Hermione and Susan. "How are you three holding up?"

"I'm just glad it's over," Susan replied. "But I'm not exhausted like the rest. I thought I'd never take them after the baby came along, but Harry's idea of passing the information via communing worked like a charm."

Terry shrugged. "I'm fine, although if you ask me too many questions my head might explode," he said with a grin.

"I'm a little tired. This test wasn't as bad as my ancient runes test. And Harry's tired, but I think he's more sore than anything else. He was the last one to run the practical and they tested him against four opponents," she said with a grimace. "I know his leg has got to be hurting after that."

"He'll call if he needs help dear," Emma said complacently. Hermione looked at her mother and wondered if she'd be this calm when she became pregnant. Emma was nearly a month and a half along and other than exhibiting an extreme calm, seemed to be unaffected by her pregnancy.

She hoped she would inherit her mother's reactions. Her father's reactions ran to instant panic whenever Emma so much as sneezed.

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## **Padfoot Manor (June 21st)...**

Harry bolted from his bed hearing Hermione scream. He stood for a moment, confused. He'd returned from Hogwarts very late last night after a

Impromptu conference and was confused by his surroundings until he remembered he was spending the night at Padfoot.

Blinking rapidly, he summoned his staff and hurried to the door. Just outside he collided with Hermione, who was coming in. Both crashed to the floor.

Hermione looked at her nearly naked husband in shock. His hands were glowing with magic and his staff was pulsating. It made for an interesting sight, considering he wore nothing but boxers.

"What are you doing?" she asked.

Harry's magic dropped back to normal and he rolled over and sat up. "You screamed," he said accusingly.

"Oh, that."

Hermione looked suitably ashamed, but Harry wasn't buying it.

"Yes, that," he replied dryly. "Woke me out of a sound sleep."

Hermione looked down for a moment, then she remembered why she had screamed. "Our NEWTS are here!" she blurted.

He sighed and shook his head. "Love, you know you passed everything. In fact, you probably got outstandings on every exam."

Harry climbed to his feet and offered her a hand up. She latched on and let him pull her to her feet. She followed when he turned and reentered the bedroom.

"Aren't you the least bit curious what your scores are?" she asked. She found his lack of reaction disappointing.

"Right now the only thing that interests me is sleep."

Hermione frowned. He didn't sound tired, he sounded depressed.

"*Harry, my heart, what's bothering you?*" she sent softly. She widened the bond between them and sent him all the feelings of love and support she could.

He sat on the edge of the bed and leaned against the bedpost. "This week has been awful. You know about the debate they're having on how to execute the captured Death Eaters?"

She nodded.

"Some bright chap in the American delegation came up with the idea of reviewing the ideas by seeing the actual executions in a pensieve. Since Wednesday we've been viewing executions. It's awful, Hermione. What some of our allies do to their condemned prisoners is barbaric..."

He trailed off and looked at her. Seeing his expression, she came to a decision. She would be talking to Amelia as soon as possible. She placed the NEWT scores on the night table and sat next to him, wrapping her arms around him.

"Why isn't the Ministry doing this? Why isn't Caleb doing this? Or Arthur? Or Amelia?" she demanded.

Harry snorted in disgust. "Caleb's over in Canada right now. He's making a tour of the allied capitals, thanking them. And Arthur hasn't returned from his honeymoon with Melinda."

"So they expect you to help with the reconstruction and formulate the Ministry's capital punishment policy?"

He nodded unhappily.

She pulled him further onto the bed and pushed him down. "Why don't you get a few more hours sleep? I'll wake you in a few hours and we'll do breakfast and look at our results together."

He smiled and reached up to caress her face for a moment, then he closed his eyes. Hermione stayed with him long enough to make sure he was asleep, then she rolled out of bed and quickly got dressed.

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### **Ministry of Magic, Haven, Office of the Ministry...**

"Minister, Lady Potter is here. She asks to speak with you."

Amelia looked up in surprise. She hadn't been expecting anyone this morning, let alone Hermione. "Alright. Send her in, David, and bring in some tea."

David nodded and opened the door further. Amelia could hear him say something, then Hermione stepped into the office.

Amelia looked at the young woman and instantly knew this wasn't a social visit.

"Hermione, how nice of you to visit. How can I help you today?"

"You can start by wearing yourself off of my husband," Hermione snapped angrily as she sat down in front of Amelia's desk. "It's not his place to decide the capital punishment policy for this government. If anything, it's yours! Do you know that group has spent the last three days reviewing piecemeal memories of executions from other countries?"

"I beg your pardon," Amelia said frostily.

Hermione shook her head. "You know I'm right. It's not his job to do this. He's fought the war, he's done his part and he's helping with the reconstruction. But it's not his place to figure out what to do with your condemned prisoners, especially when he already gave you a good solution for it."

"His solution was unacceptable! The people want to see these people pay for their crimes."

Hermione opened her mouth, but then stopped herself when the door to the office opened and David entered, carrying tea for both of them. She waited patiently while the drinks were served. Once David left the room, she placed her cup on the desk and looked at Amelia.

"He's making himself sick over this, Amelia, and if you're not willing to start letting go, I'll take this little disagreement of ours public. Right now he's home in bed, exhausted and heart sick over having been forced to watch dozens of executions!"

"Why should it bother him?" Amelia snapped. She knew it was a crappy job and she had complained about it in front of Harry, knowing full well he'd reluctantly volunteer to help her. "He's killed hundreds."

Hermione went rigid and her expression darkened. "Yes, he has killed Amelia, and afterwards I've held him while he cried. He's killed to defend himself and others. But there's no defense involved in an execution. It's state sanctioned murder!"

"You really don't see the damage you're doing, do you, Amelia? How will you feel if he finally decides one day that all these emotions that are causing him so much pain aren't worth it and he does away with them? Do you want someone as powerful as he is running around without any regard for human life? He's clinging to his humanity and you're tearing it away from him piece by piece. And why? Because you're too lazy to do your job when it can easily be passed on to someone else!"

Amelia's eyes widened and her monocle fell into her lap. She stared at Hermione in shock. "I didn't... it wasn't..."

Hermione shook her head. "It's time to give us some space. That's all. It's time for us to be what we are, a young married couple trying to find our place in the world," she said, then she shrugged. "I don't see us being uninvolved forever, but we need time for ourselves."

Hermione stood and headed for the door. She paused in front of it and turned to look at the older woman. "Don't let this escalate into a fight between us, Minister. I'll do everything to protect my husband, including financing the people who will be opposing you in the coming elections and taking this public. Don't force me to remove you from office. Harry considers you a friend and I really don't want to change that."

Amelia nodded weakly from her chair. Satisfied, Hermione turned and slipped from the room. She practically ran to get out of the outer offices and once she found herself a quiet corner, she shivered at the thought of what she had just done. Narcissa's lessons had paid off.

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### **Padfoot Manor, (Several Hours Later)...**

After a bit of shopping, Hermione returned to the manor. She was removing her cloak when Winky appeared with a small pop.

"Missy didn't tell Winky you would be going shopping today," she admonished.

Hermione sighed to herself. She was really regretting telling Winky she could behave any way she wanted to. "I just needed to go out on an unexpected errand, then I picked up a few things while out," she replied.

Winky sniffed. "Well Mumsy and Miss Narcissa would like to see you in the sitting room," she said, taking Hermione's cloak and packages.

"Thank you, Winky, I'll go right in. Could you bring us some tea, please?"

Winky nodded. "Don't you be long with Mumsy and Miss Narcissa. The Master needs you. Him dreaming bad dreams again."

Hermione frowned and reached across their bond. Instantly she was assaulted with a cacophony of sounds and faces of people.

She pulled out of Harry's dream with a sharp intake of breath and a shiver. She reached again, only this time at a lower level, below his dream. She had touched many of his dreams, both before and after his fight with Voldemort, and she was always struck by the fact that in his dreams, he was always a small child being chased by monsters.

Some people had nightmares about going to work and discovering they were naked, or forgetting their speech, or of falling. Harry had to dream of monsters, of men in black robes and white masks. She knew exactly what to do. She reached out and touched him, sending him all her feelings of love and support. She could feel his initial shock and surprise, had been expecting it, actually, as it was always the same. He was shocked to discover that he wasn't alone, then, as always, he latched onto her for a moment, as if needing to be reassured he wasn't alone. Finally, she could sense him releasing her and drifting away. She had a quick glimpse of Harry as a child, chasing a butterfly through a backyard garden and smiled.

She breathed a sigh of relief and relaxed their bond just enough. He could still feel her and she would know if he got into trouble. Then, squaring her shoulders, she went in to speak with her mother and Narcissa.

Emma looked up and smiled when she entered the room. "Hermione, just the girl we wanted to see. Come in, dear, and sit down. Narcissa has a

question for you.”

Hermione took a seat opposite Narcissa. A moment later, Winky popped in and served tea and a platter of biscuits.

“What is it?” Hermione asked once Winky left.

Narcissa looked at the young woman with an unreadable expression for a brief moment. “Did you really threaten Amelia Bones, saying you'd finance her opposition's campaign?”

“How?” Hermione gasped.

Narcissa smiled thinly. “Amelia fire called a short while ago while you were still in town. She accused me of teaching you strong arm politics.”

Hermione straightened in her chair and lifted her head defiantly. “Yes, I did threaten her. Why? Is she going back on her word?”

Narcissa took a drink of tea, then placed her cup on the table. “No. She wanted you to know she'd keep her promise. If it isn't too much trouble, may we know why you took it upon yourself to set yourself up as her enemy? She's a powerful politician with formidable allies.”

“She wasn't doing her job. She somehow burdened Harry with the job of setting the Ministry policy for the captured Death Eaters, and that means the Ministry's policy for all future capital crimes. He told me he's spent the last three days reviewing execution methods used by other countries using a pensieve. It's making him sick.”

The edges of Narcissa's mouth twitched several times.

“Is he alright?” Emma asked worriedly.

Hermione turned to look at her mother. “He's upstairs sleeping now. He didn't get in until late. When I spoke to him this morning he reminded me a little of what he was like after he was sick two summers ago. He'll help in the reconstruction, but Amelia has to stop throwing him the bloody work no one else is willing to do.”

“Excellently done,” Narcissa said, smiling with approval. “Amelia needed to learn where her limits were and she needed to learn that you put family even above the government. Amelia isn't really angry at you, she's too much of a politician for that. Harry, for all his abilities, is still somewhat naive when it comes to dealing with her type. I suspect that Amelia spoke about how she had no one to help her with that unsavory task and he realized she was asking him in a round about way so he told her he'd handle it.”

Narcissa paused, watching her for a moment. “I'm pleased to see you stand up for what's yours,” she said finally. “As Lady Potter, you, my dear, are a very powerful woman. Keep that in mind in your dealings with politicians, even Amelia. And don't be afraid to step on her toes if she threatens the welfare of the family again.”

Hermione stayed and talked with her mother and Narcissa for a while longer before leaving them to go check on Harry. To her relief, she found him sleeping peacefully. She looked at the still sealed NEWT results and decided they could wait. Quickly undressing, she climbed into bed to join Harry for a nap.

She had just pulled up the covers around her when Harry rolled and snuggled up behind her. He slid one hand up under her shirt to rest against her belly. She smiled and snuggled back against him. Within minutes, she was sleeping soundly.

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### **St. Mary's Church, not far from Haven (July 1st)...**

Harry sat wearing his best muggle suit. Next to him sat Hermione, wearing a very elegant dress that screamed of class. Harry hadn't seen the dress until this morning and his reaction had been exactly what Hermione had hoped for. He'd sat on the edge of their bed and stared for a moment as she put on her jewelry. Then he'd stood, walked up behind her and helped her fasten her necklace before bending over and kissing her neck.

“You're beautiful,” he murmured. That caused her to blush over a significant portion of her body, but pleased her no end.

Behind them in the church sat other members of the Brotherhood. They were all on the grooms side, but they could have easily sat on the brides side, as well.

Harry glanced up to look at Arthur Weasley, standing tall and proud in his muggle tuxedo. He loved the outfit, but had been more intrigued by the limo that Harry had arranged for. Harry had decided that the brides parents had enough reasons to save their money, so he jumped at the chance to help the wedding happen.

Arthur spotted Harry grinning and he smiled back.

Arthur Weasley had always been a fairly laid back individual, Harry thought, but now he was more laid back than ever. Arthur had married Melinda McKinney in the middle of June and had only recently returned from his honeymoon.

Harry glanced around the church, noting the amount of security, not that he thought it would help much. The security was for Amelia and Brogan Mallory, who had been invited. Harry didn't think it was necessary. At least sixty percent of the audience today had been trained in combat by the Ministry. Anyone attacking the church would need an army.

Brogan Mallory, the Irish Minister for Magic, had offered the services of his brother, an Irish Catholic priest, to officiate the service. That had allowed many more guests from the magical world to attend the service than had been originally anticipated, since the priest was obviously aware of the

wizarding world.

Harry glanced over at Hermione and grinned. She was wiping her eyes with a handkerchief and service hadn't even begun!

*"You know, we can still have a church wedding if you want,"* he sent to her silently.

She looked up at him and smiled. *"Thanks, but I've got what I want already. A fancy church wedding would have been nice, but in another month our handfasting becomes permanent. Besides, Tonks suggested that, instead of getting married in a church service, we should do what she and Remus plan on doing. In a few years, they'll renew their vows in a church service."*

*"The year ending can't happen soon enough, if you ask me,"* he replied.

She grinned at his smug tone. *"And what are you so smug about?"*

His grin widened and he sent her an image that left her momentarily breathless. She was shocked and pleased by what he had sent. It was a simple image, but powerfully expressive. It was of them together, in bed, just holding each other and whispering and laughing in the dark. It was some of their best moments, she thought, and was pleased that Harry seemed to think so also.

She hugged his arm tighter and looked up at the altar. *"Fred and George sure look nervous."*

*"Can you blame them? If I were in their shoes, I'd be nervous too,"* he replied.

She looked back at him and arched an eyebrow. *"You were nervous about marrying me?"*

He shook his head. *"No, not really. I was more nervous about messing something up and disappointing you. But Fred and George aren't nervous about getting married. They're nervous about the possibilities of pranks."*

Hermione looked up at the twins who stood next to Arthur, shuffling their feet and tugging at their collars. *"Oh...OH!"*

She looked around. Remus, Ginny, Neville and Tonks were all staring at the twins with evil looks. Others in the church seemed to think the joke was already being played out, as if the twins getting married was a prank on the twins.

*"And you don't have anything planned?"* she asked.

*"Well, sorta, and Remus or Ginny might have something in mind, too. I know Ginny still thinks she owes them for what they did to Neville on their honeymoon. I like a good prank, but there are times to be serious and times to have fun. Besides, I've got their first night taken care of. It will be a night to remember."*

She turned and stared at him hard. *"What did you do?"*

Harry shrugged. *"I've arranged for them to be interrupted several times, finally climaxing with a small fire that will require the evacuation of the hotel."*

*"You what?"*

Harry winced and shook his head, then he looked at her reproachfully. *"Not so loud. I am sitting right next to you. Look, love, I had to do this. It was the only way I could talk Ginny out of hitting all four with a confundus charm. Can you imagine the havoc that could have caused? They could have gone to bed with the wrong people and not known about it until the morning when the charm wore off. Besides, it's only going to be a very small, very controlled fire."*

Hermione leaned back on the pew and sat silent for a few moments. Harry was starting to get worried when he felt her shake and shudder. With a start, he realized she was laughing!

*"Oh, Harry... you are truly evil!"*

*"Dark Prank Lord Potter,"* he replied haughtily, buffing his nails on his jacket.

She grinned, then turned when the music started. The doors opened and Sven stood with a daughter on each arm. Even Harry had to admit they looked like Nordic Angels. The only thing missing were the wings.

*"Oh, they look so beautiful,"* Hermione said silently. She looked down at her soaked handkerchief in dismay.

Harry smiled and reached into his pocket, pulling out a fresh, dry handkerchief to hand to her. He saw Dan reach into his own pocket and do the same thing with Emma. The two men shared a knowing smile.

The Johansen twins were preceded down the aisle by Robert and Linda, the youngest of the Johansen's adopted children. Linda carried a basket containing flower petals and fairy dust, which she took great joy in throwing around liberally. Robert, on the other hand, looked as though he wanted to be anywhere else but there.

When Robert stopped and stared, Harry groaned. He knew what was coming and from the laughter bubbling up his link from Hermione, he knew she was aware of it as well.

It's Harry Potter!" shouted Harry's number one fan. His cry echoed through the church.

The assembled guests broke out in laughter, except for the section of small children sitting with Olga. As one, they all turned to look at Harry in awe.

He blushed and ducked his head while his friends snickered around him.

Linda tugged on Robert and got him moving again. Sven, a few steps behind with his daughters, could only shake his head in amusement and shrug an apology to Harry.

Harry turned his attention back to the Weasley twins standing up by the altar with their father and their brothers. Both looked like they wanted to bolt, but he knew better. Like any man, Harry knew they wanted to get married, it was the fancy ceremony that made them nervous.

The grooms were dressed in tuxedos, Fred in white, George in black. When picking out their suits, they'd both been intrigued by the option of tails, so that's what they'd ordered. Now, even as nervous as they were, they fiddled with the tails of their tuxedos and Harry shook his head.

*Maybe it's not the tuxedo tails they're fascinated with. Maybe they're just reminding themselves that they'll be getting some tail tonight? That would keep me calm enough to get through a circus like this,* Harry thought to himself. Then he winced and tried to jerk his arm away from Hermione, who had just pinched him.

"I heard that! Pay attention and stop thinking dirty thoughts," she sent him with a glare.

"Yes, dear," he replied meekly, turning his attention back to the service.

"... And if anyone should know why these couples should not be joined in holy matrimony, let them speak now or forever hold their peace."

The crowd of onlookers glanced around, but no one expected anyone to say anything.

"Wait!" shouted a voice.

All eyes turned to the back of the church and a hush fell in the room. A woman laboriously climbed to her feet, obviously in the advanced stages of pregnancy. Tears rolled down her cheeks. She looked up at Fred and George and sobbed into a tissue.

George looked stunned, then he turned and hit Fred, knocking him unconscious.

"Isn't that Amy? Their lab assistant?" Harry murmured to Hermione.

Hermione's head was bouncing between the front and the rear of the church, not sure where to look next.

George stood over the unconscious Fred, his fists clenching. "How could you?" he said in a voice that carried throughout the church.

"GOTCHA!" shouted Amy, then she waved her wand and her belly deflated with a loud, flatulent sound.

"But we all saw her yesterday at the Weasley barbecue. They know she wasn't pregnant!" Hermione exclaimed, still swiveling her head back and forth.

"Shows you what nerves can do to a guy," Harry muttered through tight lips as he tried very hard not to laugh.

George stared at Amy in astonishment, then he looked down at his brother in horror. Inga knelt next to Fred and began to weep.

Harry gave up and sank down on the pew trying to muffle his laughter, but he couldn't hold it for long. Hermione tried to glare him into silence, but her heart wasn't in it. A moment later, she leaned heavily against her husband, her laughter mixing with his.

Ginny and the rest of the Weasleys were trying in vain to stand and be serious. Ginny was the first to fail as she unceremoniously sat on the altar steps in her bridesmaid gown. Charlie tried for a little more decorum by hiding inside a confessional. Unfortunately, the small room only amplified and echoed his mirth.

In less than a minute the entire church, except for the brides and grooms, were laughing. One groom was looking mighty sheepish, while the other was still taking a nap on the floor.

Arthur stepped forward and managed to get his laughter under control enough to work his magic. He pointed his wand at Fred, hitting him with a stream of cold water.

Fred sputtered under the onslaught and bounced to his feet, fists balled up and ready for a fight. Unfortunately, he had no idea what he was fighting and settled for simply glaring around the church, looking for a target. Then Inga hurled herself into his arms and he suddenly found himself holding his weeping bride to be.

The priest stepped around the pair and looked at the assembled congregation. "I think we'll take a ten minute break to give the two couples a moment to collect themselves," he said, which only caused the rest of the church to break out in laughter again.

Harry leaned forward so that he could speak to the person in the pew in front of them. "Now you understand why Arthur suggested a simple and quiet ceremony for you two," he said to the new Mrs. Weasley.

Melinda turned on the pew and smiled at him. "I'm still getting used to it. When that family is together they only know two volume levels, loud and

louder.”

“They’ve always been that way,” Hermione added. “But it’s always been a good place to be. They may be boisterous, but they know how to take care of each other.”

“How are you doing?” Harry asked her.

“Better than I thought I would. I don’t mean there’s anything wrong, but the sheer number of them are intimidating. And I’m not really that great a cook, which I understand Molly was. However, Dilly more than makes up for that. Sometimes I think she’s happier than I am, if that’s possible. She has a large family to love and take care of now.”

“Excuse me,” Arthur interrupted.

Everyone turned to look at him.

“Melinda, can you do anything for a black eye? At least temporarily?” he asked quietly.

She nodded and stood, then turned to Harry and Hermione. “Excuse me. Family emergency,” she said, then she followed Arthur into one of the side rooms.

Harry leaned back chuckling and shaking his head. Hermione turned to look at him. “What are you laughing about?”

He leaned closer to her. “Don’t spread this around, but I know for a fact that the twins are planning to quit Q branch and they’ve recommended that Amy take over as head of the department.”

Hermione leaned against him, shaking her head. She didn’t think anyone would soon forget the Weasley/Johansen wedding.

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### **Padfoot Manor (August 5th)...**

“Come!” Harry called absently. He was reading a report written by one of the field medic’s concerning conditions in several magical communities and wasn’t paying much attention to what was going on around him.

“I’ll be with you in a moment,” he said, still reading.

“Take your time,” said a voice.

Harry’s head jerked up to stare into the grinning faces of his wife, the Minister for Magic and the King.

Harry jumped out of his chair and it fell over behind him in a crash. He barked his knee against the edge of the desk and winced, just managing to stifle a rather rip curse.

Hermione stepped over and pulled the chair upright. “Really, Harry. There’s no need to start abusing the furniture,” she said with a grin.

“I’m sorry. I wasn’t expecting... I mean... I was reading...” Harry paused and mumbled something unintelligible.

“What was that?” asked Hermione, still grinning.

“I said, just shoot me and get it over with,” he grumbled.

The King and Amelia laughed, then sat down in front of Harry’s desk. Hermione took her customary chair near his desk and looked at him. He frowned at her for a moment before it dawned on him that she was waiting for him to sit back down.

He did so as quickly as he could and without breaking anything.

“Colonel, I’ve spoken to Amelia, and to your good wife, as well as several others. I have been reliably informed that while you were needed to fight the war, your injuries really aren’t conducive to a career in the military,” the King said softly.

“But...”

The King held up a hand silencing his protests.

“The 24th regiment will continue as the military arm of your Ministry for Magic. It will also be part of our Ministry of Defense. You will be recorded in it’s ranks as it’s first commander and I am reserving the right to re-activate your commission should the need arise. However, Colonel, you and your companions will be released from service at the end of this year.”

Charles paused and looked at Harry closely for a moment. “Harry, you have done us a service that we can never properly repay, you and all of your companions. But I have spoken with your healer, as well as having been advised by the best physicians we could find. The simple fact is, a soldier in the SAS should be able to run five miles, then run an elaborate obstacle course. You can do that, then spend the next two days barely able to walk.

“We are incredibly grateful, Colonel, and we do intend to show that. You and your Brotherhood have been added to this years honor list, for unspecified military action,” he said with a wry smile. “Our way of saying you did something really good, but we can’t talk about it. The public will

merely assume it had something to do with the war.”

Harry grinned back at the king. He knew all too well about keeping secrets. He had been hoping something like this would happen and a New Year starting date was perfect for his plans.

“What are your plans after you leave the military?” Charles asked.

Harry glanced over at Hermione, nodding to her.

“Well,” Hermione began, “Harry hasn’t traveled very much, so we thought about a world tour, but we’re thinking about taking our time. A friend of ours has invited us to visit him in Egypt. He’s the Deputy Minister of Antiquities and he’s also in charge of the project to rebuild the library at Alexandria. He’s offered me a posting as a librarian, while Harry spends some time working with a master enchanter,” she said.

The king looked to Amelia for an explanation.

She smiled at him. “They’re phenomenal opportunities for someone straight out of school, Sir, and I think they will fit in well with your plans.”

“Plans?” asked Harry worriedly.

The King smiled reassuringly. “Nothing to cause you any worry, Colonel. It’s just that, while your country might not be able to use your services in the military, we can still use your services elsewhere. Your role as an Ambassador without an assigned station will allow you a great deal of flexibility. And while I understand you’re hoping for an extended world tour, possibly taking several years, you’ll still be able to pop back home, or whatever it is you call it, for consultations. The PM has told me that he’ll spread the word that you’re to be considered my personal friend and emissary.”

Harry blinked in shock. A personal emissary of the King? Him?

*“It seems we can’t run away from responsibility entirely,”* Hermione said in a dry mental voice.

*“Indeed. But this is unreal. I can’t turn down the King, Hermione! He’s... well, he’s the King!”*

The King turned to Amelia. “I think I now understand what you meant. It is a useful talent for them to possess.”

Harry blanched and turned white. Even Hermione looked ashamed of herself. They had been caught communicating mentally. Talk about rude!

“Your Majesty, I apologize. I meant no disrespect,” Harry stammered.

The King dismissed his concerns with a wave. “Not at all, Colonel. In fact, I think it’s a marvelous ability to be able to communicate like that. It will be a talent that I think will help you quite a lot in the coming years.”

Harry looked to Hermione for a moment longer then he turned back to the King. “Alright, we’ll do it. We had hoped to maintain a low profile and hopefully slip back out of the public eye, but it’s becoming apparent, even to me, that it was never more than a pipe dream.”

Hermione turned in her chair and leaned over to place her hand on Harry’s. She had come to that realization long before he had, but she knew he’d have to figure it out for himself.

“I’m sorry we have to do this to you and Hermione, but we still need you both,” Amelia said gently. “There is so much work to do, and while you’ll be getting away from that, there are things that you can still help with elsewhere. The war has disrupted everything.”

Harry nodded and turned back to the King. “I’m curious, Sir. How will you be able to keep the wizarding world secret?”

Charles leaned back on his chair and grinned. “We’ve stolen a page from our cousins across the pond. We’ve been funding several fringe groups who will loudly proclaim the existence of magic. Then, in the same breath, they will inform the public in all seriousness that magic is a gift from aliens. The government, of course, will have no official statement on the subject.

“The Yanks have been using this technique for years as a way of hiding their secret aircraft development behind a cloud of UFO believers. It works surprisingly well,” he finished, shaking his head in amusement.

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## Hogwarts (September 1st)...

Minerva McGonagall looked at the crowd filling the much expanded Great Hall and tried to suppress her tears. The summer had been hellacious on everyone who helped out, but they had accomplished the impossible.

Hogwarts was open and receiving its first group of students since the evacuation over a year ago.

The Express had been repaired, although that had been touch and go. They nearly didn’t finish on time. Then they found they had no one to run the machine. Amelia finally found an engineer in Germany who was happy to come run the train, and teach someone how to use it. All he wanted in return was a signed photo with him and Harry Potter.

When Amelia and Minerva carefully presented the request to Harry, his response surprised everyone. He wanted to know if he could ride in the engine and maybe learn how to drive the large machine. Hermione had rolled her eyes and muttered something about men and their toys.

The number of returning students was only a fraction of the school’s normal size - just around two hundred - but it was enough for Minerva to start



with. She had agreed to Amelia's proposal concerning a standardized educational system, but she insisted that she be allowed to be Headmistress at Hogwarts, at least for this critical year.

She smiled broadly at the students. Room had been made for visiting dignitaries like Amelia and Harry's Brotherhood, who'd ridden up from London on the Express. The press stood shoulder to shoulder along the back of the hall.

Harry sat with Hermione off to one side at a table reserved for his group and for some Ministry members. At the Head table with Minerva were a few familiar faces and a few new ones, hired from around the world to fill the gaps. Some of Hogwarts old staff elected to remain at Haven School, rather than return to Hogwarts.

Another change in the structure of the school was apparent by the number of older, adult students. St. Mungos was still being rebuilt, so Sylvia August decided to move the Magical College of Medicine to Hogwarts, where they would provide a permanent magical medical facility for Scotland.

The doors to the rear opened and Pomona Sprout led in the batch of new students, all forty of them. Then she picked up the sorting hat and placed it on the stool. The hat straightened and turned to bow towards Minerva, then it broke into song.

*"Were we ever that small?"* Harry sent to Hermione.

*"We were smaller. But I understand the Headmistress has accepted several ten year olds this year,"* she replied.

*"Really? Why?"*

*"She told me that several families asked that she take them early so they could help in the reconstruction. She agreed because she thought that the children, having lived through such a terrible experience, could benefit from an extra year of schooling. Besides, not all areas have magical schools up and running yet."*

*"Makes sense,"* he replied, then he looked up. *"The sorting is over. It's always over so quickly."* He smiled, feeling her amusement bubbling through their bond.

Minerva stood and a hush fell over the hall. The ghosts of Hogwarts, including one very unhappy Lucius Malfoy, entered the hall and stood silently next to one wall.

"Students, parents, honored guests and representatives of the press, welcome to Hogwarts. We have many to thank for the hard work that enabled us to reopen on time. Hogwarts has a long and proud history, but I dare say even the founders have trouble comparing to the group of students that led the way to giving us back our school and our country."

Minerva smiled fondly down at the table where the Brotherhood sat.

"It seems like it was only yesterday that all of them were first year students, as small as some of you are today. Representing every house of Hogwarts, they have brought honor upon themselves and their houses. Now, I am going to turn the rest of this evening over to Madam Bones, our Minister for Magic."

Minerva sat down and Amelia stood. She walked around the table to face the assembled students and guests.

"Thank you, Headmistress. Like you, I rejoice in the reopening of Hogwarts. This school, in a way, signifies our very society. The past few months have been difficult, but rewarding. Thanks to Gringotts, Diagon Alley is once again open and businesses are returning to fill their place in the alley. No one was more pleased than I when Ollivanders returned to Diagon Alley, or the new joke shop run by the Weasley brothers.

"Around the country, muggle and magical alike are slowly getting things back in order. London has power full time now, as well as telephone service. Parliament has reopened on a temporary basis and the muggles, like us, will hold free elections come the new year. Much has been lost and many will mourn for years to come, but much has also been regained and for that we are thankful.

"One group has led the effort and paid with their blood to get us where we are today. They have lost loved ones, suffered injuries and still they pressed forward."

Amelia turned. "Mr. Potter, would you and your Brotherhood please come up here?"

Harry frowned. He had been doing everything he could to avoid getting into this sort of situation and now it looked like he couldn't escape it.

Hermione latched onto his arm and dragged him reluctantly forward to the great amusement of his friends.

Amelia smiled thinly. She had been struggling to get some sort of award ceremony for Harry for a while, but he kept dodging her efforts. Now he couldn't run.

"Harry, it wouldn't be right for me to say that our society is grateful for your actions because your actions extended far beyond just our world. It gives me great pleasure to tell you that each of you will be awarded with an Order of Merlin, First Class. And come Christmas, in a private ceremony, you will be invested into the Order of the Bath at Buckingham Palace."

Amelia handed out small velvet covered boxes containing their awards, along with the formal citation on glowing parchment. The group arrayed itself behind Amelia, who turned back to the students in the hall.

"When I went to this school, there were five role models; the four founders and Merlin. Now I present to you a dozen more. Following in the tradition

of our worlds finest, I give you the Brotherhood of Druidic Knights,” she exclaimed loudly, then quickly moved to one side.

The applause was thunderous. Students, parents, visitors and even the press stood to signal their appreciation. The light from many flash bulbs began to strobe through the hall.

When Harry blushed and looked at the floor, Hermione slipped her hand into his. *“I’m proud of you, my heart,”* she sent him.

*“I’m proud of all them, love, and mostly thankful that I have you. This wouldn’t have been possible without your love and support,”* he replied.

Then it was Hermione’s turn to blush and look at the floor. When the applause finally died down several minutes later, Amelia stepped in front of the group again. She motioned for them to retake their seats, which they all gratefully did.

“And now, please, let us all enjoy the feast and the fireworks, supplied by Weasley Wizarding Wheezes in honor of the reopening of this institution,” Amelia called.

Minerva clapped her hands and the food appeared on the tables. Above them, in the newly rebuilt Astronomy tower, a pair of red head pyromaniacs lit off the first of a collection of abnormally large rockets.

Hogwarts was open again, and life was returning to normal.

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## Epilogue...

Harry stared up at the dark ceiling of the master bedroom at Padfoot manor and smiled to himself. He and Hermione had not lived in the house for over six years, but they both considered it home, as did most of the Brotherhood.

He and Hermione had traveled, just as they’d always wanted to. After a year, they’d settled in Egypt, where Hermione became a librarian at the Library at Alexandria. Harry studied under Ahmed, a master enchanter, between running political errands for the King, putting out brushfires whenever possible in his capacity as Ambassador at Large. Last year he’d gained his Mastery and had begun to teach others.

In their second year in Egypt, Hermione had given birth to their daughter inside one of Alim’s tents beside the ruins of Karnak two weeks before her due date. She’d been less than pleased when her labor began while visiting the Sheik, but the woman in his family had taken over and helped her through her labor and delivery. She blamed Harry, of course, for tempting her out of the library that day with an offer to see a portion of the temple no muggle had ever seen.

Alim, breaking with custom and tradition, entered the tent several hours after the birth to bless the child. With the child in his arms and her parents beside him, he’d taken her outside. And there, under the setting sun, surrounded by the ancient sands and holy temple of Egypt, and raised her high above his head and asked God to welcome the girl and grant her a long, joyful life filled with love.

When he’d lowered her back into the crook of his arm, he’d smiled down at her. “She’s as beautiful as a water lily,” he exclaimed.

And that’s what the Potters named her: Water Lily. They figured she’d kill them for it when she got older, but if that’s all she had to worry about in life, they would be well pleased.

They’d wanted their daughter to be born at Padfoot, but her early birth had changed that. They were simply thankful that she was healthy. They’d returned to the manor two days later to introduce her to her Brotherhood family.

Susan giving birth to Siomha in the manor had set a precedent, for the most part. In the years after the war, every woman in the Brotherhood had chosen to give birth at Padfoot, though not in the library, thankfully. And for every birth, the Brotherhood returned to celebrate the continuity of life.

Emma Granger had been the first to give birth, post war, presenting her husband with a new daughter named Cassandra. She came into the world looking quietly contemplative.

When Hermione heard what her parents named her new sister, she had rolled her eyes. Her comment of, “What? One seeress in the family isn’t enough for you?” had sent her parents into a fit of laughter.

Tonks had been next and managed to surprise everyone. All the tests Narcissa and Melinda had run before the birth had indicated twins. The two girls were born minutes apart, screaming their displeasure to the world. Melinda had barely caught their brother in time. He came swiftly and quietly, like a wolf sneaking up on prey.

Remus, on hearing he was the proud father of triplets, had fainted. It was something Harry loved to tease him about.

In their third year, the Lupin triplets had managed to surprise them all once again. Their oldest daughter, Andie, and their son, Sirius, had inherited their mother’s metamorph talents.

All three children had spent the day with Harry and Hermione, who were back for the birth of Susan and Terry’s second child, a boy they named John.

That night, when Remus and Tonk were chasing their children around their bedroom, trying to get them changed into pajamas, Sirius had stopped suddenly, morphed into a small version of Harry Potter, and informed his parents that they were not the boss of him.

Seeing their parents slack jawed and frozen in place with shock, Andie had followed her brother’s actions and morphed into Hermione. “Yeah, what

he said!" she exclaimed, her chin thrust forward belligerently.

Since then, the two had taken great pleasure in surprising their parents at every opportunity. Their ability was limited to human form, something that greatly relieved their parents.

Minerva, their youngest daughter, had felt left out for several weeks. Then the girl discovered her own ability, nearly giving her father a heart attack in the process. He was in his office at Padfoot, finishing up some paperwork for the day when the three children barged in, arguing loudly. Sirius had stolen Minerva's doll, but the boy denied it. Andie, unable to take either side, egged them both on.

Exasperated, Remus had pushed away from his desk and stood up, preparing to break up the fight, when Minerva morphed into a wolf pup, growled rather menacingly for one so small, lunged and bit her brother on the leg.

The shrieking, yelling and war cries that followed was enough to bring Tonks sprinting into the room.

Once again the Lupins were frozen in shock as chaos reigned around them. Tonks was the first to shake it off and had shouted for quiet. Remus, shaking his head, had reached down to grab the still growling wolf pup that was his daughter, only to be hit with another surprise.

Minerva, understanding her father's intent, and morphed into a kitten and pelted from the room, screeching like a scalded... well, cat, really.

Tonks had turned to her husband with narrowed eyes and glared. "This is your fault."

"What?" Remus had yelped. "How do you figure that? They've inherited your ability!"

"I don't know how, but I'll figure it out sooner or later," she'd muttered. "You take care of these two. I'll hunt down the cat!"

The proud parents had been happy to share the memories with the other members of the Brotherhood using a pensieve.

Now they were all back at Padfoot once more, waiting for the birth of Neville and Ginny's first child. All children born to the Brotherhood family had been marked with the same Celtic cross as Siohma. It was the first thing each new parent looked for, and something proudly displayed when the child was introduced to the rest of the family. It was Eocho's last gift to them and something to be cherished.

Beside him, Hermione rolled over and threw a leg over his thighs, disrupting his thoughts. He reached up and combed his fingers gently through her hair, then reached down and caressed her stomach lightly. There, beneath his hand, lay their second child. She was three months along and looking forward to the time when her morning sickness eased away.

They'd announced the pregnancy at dinner last night and were surprised when Luna began to cry. Hermione, alarmed, had jumped up and rushed to her side. Luna whispered something to her and Harry had bolted to his feet when his wife began to weep.

"It's okay, Harry," Hermione had said, waving him back to his chair.

Luna had looked up and given him a watery smile. "It's just that I'm pregnant too. Hermione and I will give birth about a week apart!" Then she'd fallen into Hermione's arms and the two celebrated their joy by crying all over each other.

Tonks, Emma, Susan and Ginny had joined them a few moments later, leaving the men to stare at each other in puzzled concern.

Remus had proposed a toast to the couples once the women had calmed themselves. The rest of the night had been spent in laughter and love.

A small popping sound in the bedroom drew Harry's attention and he frowned when he saw the house elf standing at the foot of the bed.

"What is it, Dobby?" he asked quietly.

"I is sorry to be waking you, Master Harry," he said softly, so as not to awaken Hermione.

"You didn't. What's wrong?"

"You asked Dobby to wake you when Miss Ginny goes into labor."

"She's started, then?" Harry asked, gently untangling himself from Hermione.

"Yes, Master Harry."

"Has Narcissa and Melinda been informed?" he asked, reaching for his pants.

"Miss Narcissa is with Miss Ginny now. Dilly is fetching Miss Melinda. House elves is waking the others. We's have tea, coffee and a light breakfast waiting for the family."

"Excellent. Thank you, Dobby. What time is it?"

"Oh four thirty, sir," Dobby said, snapping off a salute with a cheeky grin.

Laughing, Harry shook his head. "I'll wake Hermione and we'll be down soon."

Nodding, Dobby popped away.

Slipping into a t-shirt, Harry then leaned down and kissed Hermione softly on the forehead. "Wake up, sleepyhead."

She mumbled and rolled onto her back.

"Hermione, you need to wake up, love," he tried again.

"Go 'way," she muttered.

"Alright. I'll let you explain to Ginny why you weren't there when her first child was born," he said. Then he stepped back from the bed and waited. It didn't take long.

"What?" she cried, sitting upright. "Her labor started? Why didn't you...Oh!" Her hand flew to her mouth and she all but flew out of bed and into the bathroom.

When the door slammed behind her, Harry sighed and sat down on the bed. Putting on his shoes, he eyed the door worriedly. She didn't like him to witness the vomiting her morning sickness sometimes caused her, but he hated being unable to help her.

The door to the bathroom opened a few minutes later and she came out, shaking her head. "False alarm that time. I'll be glad when this blasted nausea are gone!"

"Did you take the potion Melinda gave you?" he asked as he stood up and walked toward her.

"Yes. It helped."

He wrapped his arms around her and held her for a few minutes. "I wish I could help."

"You do," she told him, rubbing her cheek against his chest. "Why don't you check on Lily while I get dressed?"

He tightened his arms around her for a moment, then released her and walked toward the nursery door. Opening it quietly, he entered the room and approached his daughter's bed quietly, not wanting to wake her.

Gazing down at her, he couldn't help but smile. Her bushy hair came from her mother, though its color was as black as a raven's wing. Her emerald eyes were her father's, but she'd gained her mother's intelligence. At nearly four years of age, she was fluent in English, Arabic and could read Egyptian hieroglyphics as if born to it. And she had been, in a way. Being raised in Egypt, surrounded by the history of an ancient culture, her natural curiosity had been an excellent teaching tool for her parents who had exposed her to everything the Library at Alexandria had to offer.

Watching her sleep, Harry felt his heart flutter. Here, in this house, was everything he'd ever wished for during his lonely years as a child. He had an extended family he could always count on, a wife he loved beyond life, and a child who would never know the heartache of being unloved and unwanted.

He turned slightly when he felt a touch on his arm.

"Are you alright?" Hermione asked quietly.

He glanced at his daughter again, then turned to his wife and wrapped her in his arms. "How could I not be? I have everything I've ever wanted."

**FINIS**

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### **Author's Notes:**

Alyx wiped away a tear and looked at Bob, trying hard to control her emotions. "So, it's all over?" she asked. Her lower lip trembled.

Bob sighed and nodded. "Just this story, love. There will be others."

"B-b-but we worked so hard on this," she cried.

"That we did and it's been fun. Now it's time to turn to other stories and other projects," he said gently.

She nodded unhappily. "Do we really have to say goodbye now?"

"No, not really. We're not saying goodbye, we're saying see you soon in another universe."

She brightened and smiled, hearing that. "So, what now?"

"Now we take a bow," he said, taking her hand.

Alyx and Bob bowed to the audience, then walked off the stage and the curtains closed.

Harry stood and turned to Hermione. "Not a bad run, actually," he said with a grin.

"Yeah and I got the good guy instead of the goofy one this time around," she replied.

"Remember, tomorrow is Monty Python Night," he said, picking up her coat and helping her into it.

She grinned. "And now for something completely different!"

*Bob's note:*

A lot of real world factors came together to contribute to the lateness of this chapter. For one thing, getting motivated to write the final chapter was difficult. It was like we were saying goodbye to an old friend. I apologize for the delay.

When we started the series with Sunset, we never dreamed it would span over a million words. Nor did we expect it to draw the following it did, something which really made it feel like our effort was worth it.

All kidding aside, if you've reviewed our story, we humbly thank you. If you've never reviewed, now's your chance.

Many have asked what we'll be doing after this. Well, not to fear, we still have plot bunnies attacking and we have several story lines in progress, both single and multi-chaptered works, including an as yet unnamed Harry Potter/X-Men cross over that is already over 200+ pages and still going.

*Alyx's note:*

It's strange, really. The end of this series is like saying goodbye to an old friend. It's been hard to let go.

In crafting this chapter, we agonized over how much detail we should go into on the rebuilding process. In the end, we limited ourselves more than we had originally planned. This was done for one very specific reason. The rebuilding process will take years and if we weren't careful, we'd spend another six months to a year pumping out chapter after chapter and that just wouldn't work. It had to end eventually, and this was the natural point to finish the tale.

There won't be a sequel. The Sun series is officially over and it's time for Bob and I to let it go.

We want to thank you all for coming with us on this journey and for all your support and encouragement along the way. Your reviews and comments have been helpful, witty, thought provoking and humbling. We appreciate you more than you'll ever truly know and hope that you'll join us on our next adventure. You'll always be welcome.

**Joint AN:**

A lot of people have asked for Dumbledore's Army and Spiritus Crystalus to be posted here on FFA.net. I'm sorry to say that it's not going to happen. Those stories were our very first works of fiction and it shows. The writing, compared to our other stories, is just not up to the quality of work that people have come to expect from authors like Jeconais, Ishtar, Musings, Viridian and all the other authors on this site. We could spend the time to bring them up to snuff, or work on new material. Personally, we want to forward, not back.

Gardengirl – We'd like to apologize, but we're under a contract to use apostrophes as much as possible. Don't blame us, it's not our fault really!

JSX – Percy was being controlled. Dean wasn't. He was convinced that Voldemort would leave him and his family alive. In other words, he was tricked into supporting him and once in, he couldn't get out.

Particle\_Accelerator – The leader of the Brotherhood passes the knowledge of how to imbue the stones from leader to leader until such time as the Brotherhood begins to die, as it has in the past and will, inevitably, do in the future. It does not mean Harry will put himself into the stones.

As far as ships go in future stories, we like to be flexible. Healing Harry was a H/G ship, and we will write other H/G stories, as well as H/Hr and H/Other.

James Mariner – Not to fear, we will be back with other stories. We have several under development, although we're not totally sure which will see light of day first. We're especially pleased that we've been able to provide you guys with an escape from the daily grind. We both hope that real soon you guys will come home safe and sound.

Biblios – We've tried hard to keep the story clean enough that a older teen could read it. And we appreciate you recommending the story.

Crys – As we closet Klingons say... Heghlu'meH QaQ jajvam (Today is a good day to die.)

Kyle Bisset – The Blackwatch was used to secure the airport in Inverness where the main muggle invasion came from. From there, they worked with the muggles as they swept south. Considering the formidable size of the battle chapter, we were forced to limit their exposure.

BrinkL – Good Fan fiction does exist. We heartily recommend anything written by Jeconais, or for that matter, any of the authors on fanfcauthors.net.

Selma – We're well aware of how difficult potato farming is. After all, we're writing this from Idaho. The point is Harry doesn't know how difficult it can be. It's that whole grass is greener thing.

If someone has printed this monster out, drop us a note letting us know how many pages it is. We're interested in knowing.