

Healing Harry

Authors Note: Healing Harry is the result of plot bunny that wouldn't go away. This is a short piece covering only a few days time, and years. Yes, it's a Harry/Ginny story, it's also a departure from our normal "Ron is an idiot" stories. Like all of our stories, this is written as if book six was never written. I hate that book (not that I've read it all).

This is a one shot and there are NO PLANS for a sequel. No SEQUEL. Got that? Good. Don't forget it. Oh, and we don't own this. It all belongs to JFK! What? It doesn't? Oh, right. It all belongs to JKR.

Healing Harry.

Grimmauld Place...

When Remus walked into the kitchen at Grimmauld Place and sat down heavily on one of the chairs, Molly looked up from the stove and smiled at him. Filling a cup with tea, she placed it in front of him and squeezed his shoulder. There were large bags under his bloodshot eyes, a condition a lot of the Order had developed over the past few days...ever since Harry's fight with Voldemort.

"Any luck?" she asked, sitting down next to him.

Remus ran a tired hand through his graying hair. "No, not really. I'm beginning to think we've lost him for good, Molly. He was badly hurt in the battle and he would have contacted us by now if he were able."

"You must have hope, Remus. We'll find him. None of us will stop looking," she said firmly.

The fireplace flared to life and Arthur's head appeared. "Molly! Are you there? We think we've found him!" he said excitedly.

Before Molly or Remus could question him, the door opened and Ron, Hermione and Ginny entered the kitchen.

Arthur noted the new arrivals. "Good, you're all here. We think we might have found Harry, but we don't know what shape he's in yet. Albus tried to enter the building and was blasted by someone inside, using one of Harry's favorite hexes. He's in St. Mungos right now."

Molly and Hermione both gasped. Ginny looked grim.

"Professor Dumbledore's in St. Mungos?" asked an incredulous Ron.

Arthur nodded. "Yes. He suggested that someone else try entering the building and we have. Snape is now in St. Mungos, in even worse shape than Albus. Curiously, Moody was merely stunned. So was everyone else who approached the building."

Hermione frowned. "I know that, near the end, Harry was angry with Professor Dumbledore. I remember overhearing an argument between them. Harry threatened Snape with obliteration."

"Don't you mean Obliviation?" asked Ginny, frowning.

Hermione shook her head. "No, he meant obliteration. Harry and Dumbledore had fought about something. I don't know what it was, but I clearly heard Harry saying that was the last straw and that he'd had enough of Dumbledore's arrogance. He threatened both of them, then stormed off. A few days later, he attacked Voldemort and it was all over."

Ginny's breath hitched in her chest. "It's not over," she said firmly. "Not until Harry is home where he belongs and is safe. You all heard how gravely injured he was. Why did he leave the battlefield like that?"

"Why doesn't matter right now, Ginny," said Arthur from the fire. "I need everyone to step through the floo to my office. I have a portkey to take us to where we think Harry is. Dumbledore wants us to see if his friends might be allowed access where the Order has not."

"I don't know what good it will do, Dad, but we'll try. Harry barely spoke to us at all last year. It was as if he wanted nothing to do with us," Ron said sadly.

"Yes, but maybe with Voldemort gone, he won't try to push us away anymore," Hermione offered, the hope clear in her voice. Harry's actions in the past few years had hurt her greatly. She loved Ron, but Harry was the rock in her life. He was her friend, confidant and brother, all rolled into one. His background, growing up as a muggle, made it easier for him to relate to the problems she experienced in entering the Wizarding world.

Arthur pulled his head from the fire and, one by one, they stepped into the fireplace and traveled to his office. Once everyone was assembled,

Arthur pulled out a handkerchief and placed it on the desk. Everyone placed a finger to it and Arthur tapped it with his wand.

Potter Manor...

A moment later they landed in the middle of a small dirt road leading to an impressive manor house.

Remus gaped in surprise. "Harry's here? How is that possible?" he asked in confusion.

"Where is here?" asked Ginny, becoming annoyed. Lately the Order had become more and more secretive, especially where Harry was concerned, and she was getting irritated with them.

"This is Potter Manor. Harry was born here, but no one told him about this place. I'm sure of that. Even Sirius didn't tell him about it," Remus replied absently, staring at the large structure in the middle of a manicured lawn.

"Why didn't anyone tell Harry?" Ginny asked.

Remus shrugged. "Dumbledore didn't want him to know. Sirius wanted to, but was forbidden by Dumbledore."

While the adults seemed to shrug off Remus' statement, Ginny, Hermione and Ron looked irate.

"It's sounding more and more like Harry's anger with Dumbledore is justified," muttered Ginny, angrily.

Molly and Arthur looked at their youngest child in shock. Both seemed ready to yell at her, which would surely start another infamous Weasley fight.

"If Harry didn't know about this place, how could he possibly have come here?" Hermione asked, confused. She also hoped to sidetrack the Weasley's. They didn't have time for a fight.

"We're not sure, Hermione," said Arthur, still glaring at Ginny. "Moody thought to check the Potter family properties yesterday. He and Tonks came here, but he was stunned before he could even attempt to enter. Tonks pulled him out of range, then called Dumbledore."

Arthur's brow furrowed and he looked at them seriously. "When Dumbledore arrived, he said he could sense Harry nearby. He also tried to approach the house, but in Dumbledore's case, he was hit with multiple bone crushing hexes and several cutting hexes. Dumbledore was quite angered by the attack and ordered Snape to try. Snape got the same hexes, as well as an asphyxiation hex thrown in for good measure. Both men needed to be hospitalized.

"Since then, several have tried. Minerva received only a very light stunning, and then was gently levitated to the ground. Others, like myself, received the same treatment. Tonks, on the other hand, was heavily stunned and took hours to awaken, despite our attempts to revive her.

"Dumbledore feels that Harry may be unconsciously telling people who can and who cannot approach the building by what he does to them. That's why he asked for you three to try," he said, looking back at the manor.

"Arthur, you can't possibly mean that!" exclaimed Molly. "You can't expose our children to danger like this!"

Arthur sighed and rubbed his hand tiredly over his face. "Molly, Harry is a lot of things, but he isn't a menace or a monster. He's their friend and he won't hurt them. Besides, all of our 'children', as you put it, are adults. It's time to let go," he said gently.

Molly crossed her arms and glared at her husband. Her abilities as a mother were renowned in the Wizarding world, as was her inability to let her children go.

"Molly," Remus interjected, "I think Arthur may be right, but for a reason he doesn't suspect. We all know that Harry was badly injured in the battle last week. Harry's magic may be protecting him instinctively, rather like a wounded animal snapping at anyone trying to help it. The animal will allow its pack mates to help, but no other."

"I want to try!" proclaimed Ginny.

Ron and Hermione nodded vigorously in agreement. Harry might have forced a separation between them, but in their mind, he was still their best friend.

Arthur looked at the three of them gratefully, then handed Ron a necklace. "Ron, if he's in there and you can get in, put this in his hand and tap it with your wand. It's a portkey and it will take Harry straight to the Hogwarts Infirmary."

Ron's fingers closed tightly around the necklace and he nodded grimly before stepping off the road and onto the path that led to the front door of the house.

To call it a house was an understatement. The imposing building was just shy of a castle, in the late Tudor style. The large structure loomed ominously in the mists, giving those looking at it an eerie feeling of being watched. The ground floor windows were narrow and mostly shuttered. The upper floor windows were larger and dark, except for one room, where candles lit the interior.

Remus, Arthur, Molly, Hermione and Ginny watched as Ron got within fifty feet of the house before stopping.

"That's strange," Arthur murmured. "He's gotten further than anyone else has so far. I wonder why he stopped?"

"It's a shield," said a voice and they all turned to see Alastor Moody limping up the lane towards them. "And one of the most sophisticated shields I've ever seen. The boy can't go any further, but he's not being stunned. That alone should tell us something."

Remus thought for a moment, then he snapped his fingers. "It says that Harry doesn't want to hurt Ron, but Ron isn't the person he needs at the moment."

Hermione threw her hands up in exasperation and stormed up the lane towards Ron. "This is silly! Harry James Potter! You let me in this instant!" she shouted at the silent Manor.

Once she reached Ron, she grabbed the necklace from his hand and stepped forward. She managed to make it a few more steps closer before she, too, found herself unable to move forward. "HARRY!" she cried, but there was no reply from the silent imposing manor.

Arthur and Molly turned an eye to their youngest child. Though she had come of age over the summer, they still considered her their baby.

Ginny set her jaw and walked towards Hermione. When she reached her, she gently took the necklace from the sobbing girl and stepped forward. Ginny traveled a few more feet forward before a blow to her stomach sent her to the ground. The hand holding the portkey had been thrust into her own stomach!

"Ginny!" cried Remus. "What happened?"

Ginny stood and tried to step forward again. She succeeded in taking another step, but the hand holding the portkey did not move with her. She tugged a few times, but it wouldn't move.

"I don't understand!" she cried in frustration. "It won't let my hand past this point."

"Drop the portkey, Ginny," Hermione instructed in a calm tone that belied the silent tears dripping down her cheeks.

Ginny opened her fist, dropping the portkey to the ground, and her hand was free. She looked up at her parents in confusion.

"Ginny, if you can get in and bring him out with you, go. Right now, we don't even know if he's in the house. Keep your wand ready and stay on your toes," Arthur called.

Ginny nodded and walked towards the entrance of the house. As she approached, the door swung silently open. She stared at the dark interior for a moment, then straightened her shoulders and marched inside. The door closed behind her.

When Hermione joined Ron, he took her in his arms and she cried softly on his shoulder. Their best friend had alienated himself from them last year, then fought a terrible battle alone. He succeeded in killing Voldemort, but only after receiving horrific wounds of his own. Then he'd left without a word to anyone.

Ron gently steered his fiancée over to his parents. Remus and Moody were busy setting up a Wizarding tent, similar to the one they used at the Quidditch World Cup, as they waited for Ginny to come out.

Inside Potter Manor...

Ginny whirled on her heel when the door slid silently shut behind her. She tried to open it, but it wouldn't budge. Grasping her wand tightly, she looked around carefully. The entrance foyer was larger than the kitchen and living room of the Burrow combined! The doors were open and she could see an even larger family room with a roaring fire in the fireplace. It looked like an ideal place to curl up with a good book.

A marble staircase with a gold filigree banister spiraled around the entrance foyer. On the second floor landing she could see a light in one of the hallways. Mustering her courage, she climbed the staircase until she reached it. She walked down the lit corridor until she came to a set of wide open double doors.

Taking a deep breath, she stepped through the doorway and into a grand bedroom, clearly the master's suite.

In the middle of the room was a large bed, a lone figure sprawled upon it. The bed linens were soaked in blood. Too much blood, she thought, and her hand trembled as she placed her wand back into her holster. A fire burned brightly in the fireplace and atop the bedside table was a steaming bowl of broth, which looked as if it hadn't been touched. She approached the bed fearfully.

The figure was, without a doubt, Harry. His hair gave him away. But that was about the only thing recognizable about him. A huge gash marred one cheek and blood still trickled from it. She could see his chest rising and falling very slowly and she couldn't help the tears that fell from her eyes.

"Oh, Harry, love, what have you done to yourself?" she asked, her heart in that simple question.

"He cannot hear you, child. Even if he could, I doubt he would answer you." said a voice.

Ginny whirled at the sound, whipping out her wand. Behind her stood a girl not many years older than herself, but she was transparent. A ghost, then. Ginny stared at the strange specter for a long moment before the truth dawned on her.

"Mrs. Potter?" she whispered.

The ghost smiled. "I am. Or I was."

"But how is this possible?"

Lily Potter looked sadly at the broken form lying on the bed. "He made it so," she said softly.

"Harry! I've got to tell the others, Mrs. Potter. We need to get him help. Get him to Hogwarts..." Ginny trailed off when Lily began to shake her head.

"We cannot, child. He won't let us."

Ginny's eyes narrowed. "Alright, why don't you tell me what's happening here?"

"Harry fights the ultimate battle, but he is not fighting for his life. This time he is fighting for his right to die."

Ginny swallowed nervously. "Die?" she gasped.

Lily floated over to where Harry lay and she looked down on him sadly. Ghostly tears fell from her eyes and she nodded. "He was born in this house, and his magic brought him back here because he wanted to die somewhere he felt safe. Potter Manor has ever been a haven for its family."

"He came back here to die? He was just going to give up like that?" Ginny asked angrily.

"I'm afraid it was worse than you think, child. The wounds he received during his battle with Voldemort are serious, but not mortal," Lily said sadly.

Ginny stumbled back into a chair and sat down heavily. "But how did he expect to die if he wasn't mortally injured?"

Lily looked at Ginny for a long moment. "He was going to take his own life," she said, angry now.

"But why?" Ginny asked in a whisper.

"Do you really not know?" asked Lily incredulously. "He has done everything but taken home videos about it."

"Know about what?" Ginny didn't know what home videos were, but she knew this wasn't the time to ask about them.

Lily sighed and shook her head. Then she turned back to stare at the prone form on the bed. "All of his life he has been mistreated and abused by those cursed muggles. My own sister, damn her soul to burn in hell for all eternity! They took him in because Dumbledore forced them to do so. Rather than raising him with love and peace, they beat and abused him. They treated him worse than any house elf.

"And Dumbledore knew about it all. He allowed it! He condoned it! The damnable man even encouraged it. He paid the Dursley's for Harry's upkeep out of the money my husband and I left in trust for our son.

"Look at him, girl! Year after year he arrived at Hogwarts skinny and short. His shyness came from a fear of being beaten! He hated his fame, he hated his family. In Harry's eyes, the only people who loved him were dead - his parents, his Godfather.

Ginny wept as things began to click into place. Despite the articles about his wealth, he dressed in little more than rags when not wearing the school uniform. Then there was his reluctance to let anyone touch him at school. Everyone thought it strange that the Boy-Who-Lived was nearly crippled with painful shyness.

Lily hovered over Harry and ghostly tears fell like rain over his prone form.

"He came here to die, to rejoin his family. His task was complete and he felt that no one in the world loved him. He never felt he deserved to be loved."

"B-b-but that's not true! My family loves him! I love him!" she said, then she blushed heavily and Lily smiled gently at her.

"But your parents knew about his treatment at the Dursleys," Lily said softly. "That is part of what drove him to come here and to cast the killing curse upon himself. He thought he was truly alone and he could no longer abide the treachery of Albus Dumbledore."

Ginny bolted from her chair and ran to the bed where she grabbed his hand in her own. "Harry," she said between heart wrenching sobs. "I'm so sorry. I truly didn't understand. Why didn't you tell me? Why didn't you tell any of us?"

Ginny felt a wave of cold pass through her. She looked up with misty eyes to stare at the ghost of Lily Potter.

"What is your name, child?"

"Ginny. Ginny Weasley, Mrs. Potter."

"All is not yet lost, Ginny. There is still a glimmer of hope. But it remains in Harry's hands," Lily said softly.

Ginny looked at her with the question on her lips, but Lily held up a hand, staying her.

"Harry's life was not supposed to end like this. His tasks are by no means complete. When he cast the killing curse upon himself, he severed all but one tie his soul had to his body. At that point, Fate herself intervened to protect that bond. Even now, he struggles with her to break loose. He is strong enough to challenge Fate directly. Since that fatal casting, they have struggled for control of Harry's destiny. He does not understand that all the good he has accomplished in the world by killing Voldemort will become undone with his death. Fate called me from beyond the mortal plain to explain this to his soul, but so deeply wounded is he that he doesn't recognize me.

His experience and his life have been an abomination. Because of that, he wants no more of life. The longer he fights with Fate, the less chance he will have of succeeding. He is a powerful wizard, more powerful than has been seen in an age. But even he cannot control his soul. Even now it reaches out to re-bond itself with his body. But still, I fear that without the right healing, he will be lost."

"What do you mean?"

"Harry must be shown that there are reasons for living," Lily said in a meaningful manner.

Ginny looked down at her hands, refusing to meet her gaze.

"You love him, do you not?" the ghost persisted.

She nodded and blushed to her roots.

"Do not be embarrassed, child. That gentle emotion is more powerful than all the stars in the heavens," Lily murmured and Ginny looked up at her, smiling shyly.

"Why did you never tell him, Ginny?" asked Lily gently.

"I wanted to!" she exclaimed. "But the last two years he was so cold, so distant. He was pushing us away." She frowned and her eyes turned hard. "He's not pushing me or anyone else away any longer!"

Tightening her grip on Harry's hand, she stared down at him. "Harry!" she barked, noticing that he flinched slightly. "I need Ron and Hermione's help. We're going to get you better, I promise. And we'll show you what love is. But you have to stop fighting Fate. Now, I'm going to get help and you better not try to stop me, Harry Potter!"

Dropping his hand, she glared down at him for a moment before spinning away and storming from the room.

Lily watched her go with some amusement. The sudden change in the girl's attitude was surprising, but it was, perhaps, just what Harry needed.

Turning to the prone figure on the bed, she could only smile. "You have quite a little firecracker in that one, Harry. I approve."

Outside Potter Manor...

Ginny stood on the steps just outside of the manor house. "I know someone is watching. Go get Ron and Hermione right now!" she commanded.

She noticed the tent in the field and was surprised to see Professors Snape and Dumbledore step out of it and approach the front of the house.

"Miss Weasley! I see you've broken the enchantment on the house. Well done! Come inside the tent, while Professor Snape sees to young Harry."

Ginny scowled at the two and crossed her arms in front of her. Snape pushed past Dumbledore and strode forward angrily. "I have no time to waste playing around with some silly girl and that thick headed Potter welp!"

As he walked forward, a number of other people came out of the tent, including Ron and Hermione. The small crowd watched as Snape hit a particular invisible line and found himself being hurled back with great force. He screamed as he landed and rolled for nearly forty feet before lying limp on the ground, one leg bent at an unnatural angle.

"The power that protects this house is still active," Ginny called. "Harry is inside and unable to be moved. I need Ron and Hermione."

Dumbledore glanced back and forth between Snape and Ginny before finally turning to the crowd and nodding to Ron and Hermione. He gave them a meaningful glance and they both nodded to the Headmaster before moving forward.

"I'd drop any portkeys you might be carrying if I were you," Ginny called to them with a sweet smile on her face...a smile that never reached her eyes.

Ginny watched as Ron flushed and dropped the necklace.

Dumbledore frowned at Ginny. "Miss Weasley, I must insist that you..."

"Bugger off, you bastard!" she yelled at him, shocking the onlookers, including her parents. "You're the reason why we're here in the first place!"

Dumbledore sputtered, but she ignored him.

"Well?" she said archly to the dumbfounded Ron and Hermione. "Harry needs you. What are you doing standing there with them?"

Ron and Hermione were both shocked, but walked towards the manor anyway.

Ginny watched them approach, then turned and entered the grand foyer, waiting silently for them to enter.

A half minute later, the two filed into the foyer. Ron made a move to say something but froze, seeing Ginny holding them both at wand point. His sister gestured to the doors leading to the large living room and followed the two into the room.

Once there, Ron and Hermione sat down on a large couch and eyed the young redhead with some confusion.

"Put your wands on the table so I can see them," Ginny ordered them coldly.

"Ginny, this isn't necessary..."

"Do it, or I will stun you both and float you back out to those back stabbing bastards out on the lawn!" she shouted at them.

Hermione and Ron carefully laid their wands on the table and, for the first time in twenty minutes, Ginny felt she could relax a little.

"Now," Ginny began, "I will say this only once. I expect you both to stay seated and to remain calm. If you do that, I'll explain why Harry Potter is upstairs at this very moment, fighting to die. Not to live, but to die. He came here to commit suicide and very nearly succeeded."

Ignoring their stunned expressions, she looked at them meaningfully.

"I'll listen," Hermione said softly, her eyes wide.

Ron's shoulders sagged and he looked as though he had aged ten years in mere minutes. "Me too," he whispered.

Ginny sat on the edge of a chair across from them and began to explain everything. She talked for nearly an hour before she finally sat back and waited. She hadn't been ten minutes into her explanation when the pair started scowling and frowning at what they were hearing.

When she was finished, Hermione's eyes were shining with unshed tears. "So, Harry is upstairs, fighting with Fate herself to die after casting a killing curse on himself? And his mother, now a ghost, explained all of this to you?" she finally asked, seeking clarification.

Ginny nodded, then turned to Ron in surprise. Tears fell freely from his eyes and there was a look of panic on his face. The last thing he wanted was for Hermione, his future wife, to see him cry.

Hermione took one look at him and wrapped her arms around him. "Oh Ron, it's alright to cry."

"They lied to us, Hermione. All these years they brought us up to do the right thing. Then, under our very noses, they pretended to love Harry, all the while knowing how he was being treated," he said, then he buried his face into her shoulder and held on for dear life.

Ginny joined the couple on the couch and held onto Ron as well. All three wept for their friend and for the loss of innocence.

"It is never easy to discover your trust has been misplaced," a voice said softly.

Ginny looked up and nodded grimly at the specter of Lily Potter.

Hermione gasped. "Mrs. Potter? It's all true then?"

Lily nodded in reply.

"Has there been any change?" asked Ginny apprehensively.

"There has, but whether it is good or bad, I am not sure. He has ceased fighting with Fate over the thread of the bond. Even now his soul seeks to reattach itself to his body, but his mind is collapsing in upon itself."

"Is there nothing that can be done?" whispered Ron.

"There is a way, but it would take all three of you. It is not something that you can undertake lightly. You would have to see Harry at his most vulnerable and try to convince him that he is not alone in the world. It will teach you things about Harry that he has kept hidden from all of you, and teach you things about yourself that you might not want to know."

Hermione squared her shoulders. "Tell us what we need to do."

Ron and Ginny looked up fiercely at Harry's mother and nodded firmly. They would do whatever it took to save the life of their friend.

A short time later, all three were clustered around Harry's bed, staring down at him.

Hermione looked at Harry and had to fight the urge to be sick. Finally, she shook her head. "This won't do. Ron, conjure bandages. Ginny, levitate him off the bed. We need to get him cleaned up, bandaged and on fresh bedding before we do anything else."

In short order, Harry was floating above the bed, while Hermione and Ginny gingerly cut off his clothing. Ginny washed him with a sponge and some warm water, while Ron and Hermione worked on cleaning and sealing some of the bigger cuts. Lily was surprisingly helpful, as her training as a healer helped her to show the three of them which spells to use to clean and seal his wounds.

A house elf named Winnie brought fresh bedding and changed out the sheets at Lily's command. It took them several hours, and more than a few embarrassing moments, as they stripped Harry naked in order to insure they had found and dealt with all of his injuries, but finally he was lowered back to the bed and covered with a clean sheet and blanket.

The three clustered around a small table and Winnie brought them something to eat and drink, while Lily hovered nearby.

"Ginny," Ron began, "I think you should go back out to Mum and Dad. Let them know what Hermione and I will be doing and that we're not coming out again until Harry is better."

Ginny glared at her brother and folded her arms across her chest. "I'm doing no such thing, Ronald Weasley. I'm not leaving."

"But Ginny, Harry's our friend. It's bad enough that you saw Harry naked. Do you really think he wants you hanging around him?" Ron asked.

Hermione rolled her eyes. "Ron, if it weren't for Ginny, neither of us would be here. Harry wanted her here more than he wanted us."

Ron looked at his girlfriend stupidly. "Why would Harry want her in here? He's barely said three words to her last year."

"Harry barely said three words to anyone last year, but even I noticed that he always knew where Ginny was. He was always watching her."

Ginny stood and walked to one of the bedroom windows. She wanted nothing to do with this conversation. Harry's actions had hurt them all last year. She knew he watched her, but something had held him back. *He's so damn noble*, she thought to herself angrily. *He'd give up any chance of happiness for himself in order to make someone he cared about happy. Damn Voldemort and that blasted war!* So many lives revolved around it and were put on hold because of it. And now it was obvious to her that this could have been avoided if Harry hadn't been so afraid of letting someone, anyone, get close to him.

Ron looked at his sister standing in front of the window, silently crying, and it finally dawned on him. He held up a hand to silence Hermione and, standing, walked over to Ginny. He wrapped an arm around her and kissed the top of her head.

"I'm sorry, Gin. I thought you meant it when you said you'd gotten over Harry. He's my best friend, despite the fact that he's acted like a git for the last two years. If I can help you two get together, just ask," he said softly.

He saw her smile reflected in the window and returned it. His little sister was a powerful witch in her own right, one of the strongest ever seen by Hogwarts, and had been in love with Harry for years. Last year she had been sure they would get together. Instead, Harry had pushed them all away harder than he had in the past.

"Stupid git," Ginny said playfully, and Ron laughed.

He turned back to Hermione then, who had been watching them both with a fond smile.

"I swear, Ronald Weasley, you've achieved the emotional depth of a tea pot. Keep this up and you might even start to understand women soon."

Ron laughed and sat down at the table again. "Well, it's better than having the depth of a spoon, I suppose." Then his expression darkened and he glanced at Harry on the bed. "I only hope I have the emotional depth to help him," he said in a whisper.

Hermione followed the direction of his glance and nodded somberly. They all hoped for the same thing.

Lily moved towards the table, smiling gently at the three of them. "Harry is not the only one who needs to be healed, though I think the healing has already begun. He is lucky to have friends such as you three. Such friendships come but once in a lifetime, and Harry needs you three more than you can know. Now, sit and listen carefully as I explain what must be done."

Once the three sat at the table once more, looking at her expectantly, she smiled again. "You four remind me of Remus, Sirius and James. There exists a bond between you that transcends the normal bonds of friendship."

She turned to look piercingly at Hermione and Ron. "You two will show him the love of family, as he thinks of you both as the siblings he never had. Your love for each other is strong, and you must use it to sustain each other when you reach out to him."

Lily turned to Ginny next and beamed at the young redhead. "You, my daughter, are the one who holds a special place in his heart. You, and the love you feel for him, will need to be strong to pull him from the nightmare he is inflicting upon himself. While your brother and his heart's mate will provide a beacon in the darkness for him to grab onto, you will be like a sun burning away the darkness. It is to you, most of all, that he will turn.

"Now, each of you take a chair and place it so you can form a circle around him, yet still join hands," Lily said softly.

The three moved their chairs around the bed. Ron, who had the longest reach, took the end of the bed.

"In a moment, Hermione and Ginny will clasp Harry's hands and then clasp Ron's. When that happens, you will be shown an event in Harry's life. Which event, or when in his lifetime the event will have taken place, I cannot be certain. I do know that you will be able to influence the Harry in the vision, however. Some of these images will be deeply disturbing to you. Be strong, for yourself and for Harry. You must understand that these events are what made him the person he is."

The three nodded and Lily smiled when she noticed that Ginny already held Harry's hand.

With a deep breath, Ginny reached out and took Ron's hand. Hermione grabbed onto Harry, then reached for Ron.

All three blinked as a mist seemed to fill the room, obscuring their vision.

Outside Potter Manor...

Albus Dumbledore was an angry man. He paced within the tent and everyone watched him warily, unsure of why he was so angry.

His plans had been going badly since the end of Harry's fifth year. During the summer, despite all attempts to keep him locked up in Privet Drive, Harry had escaped out from under the Order's nose. He had managed to attend the reading of Sirius Black's will and ended up emancipated as a

result of that reading. That, in turn, gave him access to his family fortune, as well as Black's.

He could have worked with a rich, emancipated Harry. What he got, however, was an angry, rich and emancipated Harry who spent a small fortune hiring additional tutors for himself and refusing to cooperate with Dumbledore in any way. Harry spent his sixth year at Hogwarts and his nights and weekends in a private home he had built in Hogsmeade. When Dumbledore tried to force Harry back to the Dursleys at the end of the school term, Harry handed him a legal cease and desist order, forbidding Dumbledore and the Order of the Phoenix from having any contact with him over the summer.

Harry had dropped out of most of the school activities by the middle of his sixth year. Quidditch, the DA, all were things of the past. He spent hours running and working out. He'd vanish for hours at a time to "train", as he called it, but would provide no clue to anyone as to what he was training for. All attempts to track his movements failed utterly.

His grades remained steady, despite lost time in class, and every one of his teachers, save one, thought Harry could be the top student at Hogwarts, had he wanted to be.

Harry's break with the Order, and in particular Dumbledore, sent everyone into a panic. Harry had hired private investigators to reopen the case of his parent's murder and had discovered that it was Severus Snape who had led to Pettigrew's conversion to the Dark Lord's cause, and that it was Snape who had overheard the prophecy and reported it to Voldemort.

That, for Harry, had been the final straw. He remained in school, and remained unfailingly polite to his teachers in public, but he refused any private interaction with anyone, including his friends.

Attempts to force Harry into special classes resulted in complaints to the Board of Governors, who finally came down on Dumbledore, ordering him to stop harassing the boy. Harry's solicitor made it abundantly clear that Harry was attending Hogwarts for a standard curriculum only and that any deviation from that curriculum would result in legal action being taken against the school. The Board, wishing to avoid any legal complications, ordered Dumbledore to leave the student alone.

For the next two years, Harry attended school, obtaining excellent grades, and spent his nights and weekends at his house in Hogsmeade, where he trained for the meeting between himself and Voldemort. Dumbledore wasn't sure but, judging by what he witnessed after the final battle, Harry was probably the most powerful wizard on the planet, stronger than even himself.

Now Harry was sealed up in a building, not fifty yards away, and he might as well be on the surface of the moon. The building's defenses were formidable and highly selective. Severus had been hospitalized twice in his attempts to approach the building. The second time, Severus had nearly died. What angered Dumbledore the most was the simple fact that Harry was a revered hero at this point. They were calling him the man who killed the most dangerous Dark Lord seen in the past thousand years!

Albus ground his teeth together and fought the impulse to hurl curses. Grindelwald had been a powerful Dark Lord and he, Albus Dumbledore, had personally defeated the bastard!

That, however, had been forgotten in the wake of Voldemort's death.

He turned in response to a touch on his elbow and accepted a cup of tea from Molly Weasley.

"Thank you, Molly. You always know when a cup of tea is needed to settle one's nerves," he said with a grandfatherly smile.

Molly blushed and smiled back. She had always been in awe of him, even when she was a first year student, caught playing her first prank in the Great Hall.

Dumbledore turned his attention back to the manor house. Lights burned in the windows and he occasionally saw one of Harry's friends looking out, but no one had come out to explain what was happening. No one! And that angered him even more. If they didn't get a hold of Harry soon, the press would find out he was here. If that happened, Dumbledore wouldn't be able to keep things quiet.

Number Four Privet Drive, October 31st 1985...

Ginny, Hermione and Ron grabbed hands and the room faded from sight. A heavy mist filled their field of view and only the feeling of holding hands let them know they were not alone. After what seemed like hours, the mist rolled back to reveal that they were not in the manor house any longer.

They stood in a cupboard that had been magically enhanced so there was room for all of them. On the floor lay a small crib mattress and a threadbare blanket. A single light bulb lit the little room and on a shelf were a few books and some tattered clothes.

Ginny gasped and tugged on Hermione's sleeve insistently.

Hermione turned and the blood drained from her face when she saw that Harry was standing with them.

"Harry?" Ron said softly.

Before he could reply, the door to the cupboard slammed open and a small black haired child was hurled into the cupboard with enough force that he smashed up against the far wall. Dust sifted down from the stairway that acted as his ceiling and several spiders fell from their webs.

"You'll stay in there until you learn the error of your ways! And no food for you!" bellowed a large, older man.

Vernon," the older Harry hissed and the three could see him trembling with rage. Ginny choked out a sob and Hermione and Ron turned to look at the small boy.

"It's Harry!" Ginny said in a sorrowful voice.

"But that's Harry!" protested Ron, pointing to the taller Harry.

"I think they both are," Hermione murmured and the two turned to look at her. "This," she said, pointing at the adult, "is Harry as we know him. The child is Harry before Hogwarts. I think we're looking at pivotal moments in his life, things that have helped to shape him into the man he is today."

Little Harry slowly pushed himself up and looked at Vernon. "Yes, Uncle Vernon," he whimpered. He held his arm close to his chest, and the three could see from the angle of his wrist that it was clearly broken.

Vernon leaned in and Harry flinched back. Vernon removed the light bulb from its socket and little Harry whimpered in terror as the larger man pulled his bulk out of the cupboard and slammed the door closed. The sound of locks clicking into place on the door was heard clearly in the small cupboard.

Ron whirled to face Hermione. Both girls were clutching at each other. "Hermione! Think! Can we interfere in anyway here? Or are we just observers?"

"I'm not sure, Ron," she stammered, releasing Ginny's arm. "I don't think we can, but I don't think it will hurt to try."

Ginny knelt in front of little Harry. Despite the darkness, she was able to see. Harry held his hand in front of him and tears fell down his cheeks.

She leaned closer to him and she reached out a hand, but it passed straight through him. "Merciful Merlin, Harry, we never knew it was this bad," she said in a voice full of sorrow.

Little Harry's eyes widened. "Are you an angel?" he whispered.

Ginny rocked back on her heels in surprise. "I can't touch him, but he seems to be able to see and hear me, Hermione!"

"Talk to him, Ginny," Hermione commanded.

Ginny smiled at the little boy. "Do you believe in magic, Harry?"

The little boy frowned and backed away from Ginny. "Uncle Vernon says there is no such thing as magic. He'll hit me again if I believe in it."

Ginny tried to smile reassuringly at the small boy. "Magic is real, Harry," she said, then inspiration hit her. "Harry, think about your hand. Think about it real hard and wish it to stop hurting, wish it to be better."

Harry screwed up his face in concentration and Ron stifled a laugh at his expression. Then a strange thing happened. Harry's hand began to glow softly.

Harry's eyes widened and he looked at Ginny, his panic evident. She couldn't help how her heart melted seeing him like this. The glow around his hand grew brighter in the small cramped space, then it faded. He looked at his hand and flexed it carefully before smiling shyly at Ginny.

"Thank you, angel," he said softly.

Ginny reached out. Then, remembering she couldn't touch him, she dropped her hand. She wanted so much to wrap her arms around him and protect him.

"Was that magic?" asked little Harry.

"Yes, that was real magic," Ginny said softly, smiling at the look of wonder on his face.

"Can I use magic to make it so my parents were still here and loved me?" he asked sleepily.

"Oh, sweetheart, your parents had to go away. But they did love you. Never doubt that," Ginny said through her tears.

"For real? You're not fooling me, angel?"

"No, Harry. I swear your parents loved you and they didn't want to leave you."

Harry lay down on the small mattress and he pulled up the threadbare blanket around his shoulders. "Will I see you again, angel?" he whispered.

"Yes, you will. Now sleep and always remember your parents love you and are watching over you, no matter what anyone says," Ginny said.

Little Harry closed his eyes and slipped into a peaceful sleep. Ginny stood and walked back to Ron and Hermione, standing next to the adult Harry, who was mumbling.

"...my first use of magic to heal something the Dursleys did to me. Dumbledore knew what kind of treatment I was getting. When I had the memory blocks removed in sixth year, I remembered him being here for some of the beatings..."

Hermione looked at Ginny. Both girls eyes were filled with tears.

"He's asleep. He healed his hand and it exhausted him. He asked if his parents loved him. I explained that they did and that they didn't want to leave him behind, but had to. He's barely five years old, I think, and he's so alone," the redhead told her.

"Did you make him understand his parents loved him?" Hermione asked intently.

"I think so. He thinks I'm an angel. I walked him through healing his hand and that took a lot out of him. What's happening with big Harry here?"

"Nothing. He's unaware of our presence entirely, but I don't expect that to last. I think what we're seeing is two parts of his personality. The one part is extremely fragile and we can help, the other part is an observer. His comments are useful, but we can't reach him yet. If these visions continue, I think we'll see the observer eventually merge with the other part. That will be the most dangerous time for him. Maybe for us, as well."

"So what do we do now? And how can I help?" asked Ron nervously. All the talk and exposure to emotions and feelings made him uncomfortable. He didn't like talking about his own feelings, let alone others.

Hermione shot him a grateful glance, before looking at Ginny once more. "You've made first contact and, hopefully, an impression, Ginny. As such, I think you should deal with him directly. Ron will help me, or back you up as needed. How does that sound?" She looked at the two siblings then, biting her lip nervously.

"I think it might work," Ginny told her.

"Sounds like a plan," Ron agreed as the mist closed over them.

Ministry of Magic...

Kingsley Shacklebolt was finally beginning to enjoy his new office. Minister Fudge had been ousted a few days before the fall of Voldemort and, with the support of Harry Potter, Amelia Bones had been elected Minister of Magic in his place. It was a surprising move on Harry's part to publicly endorse her candidacy. It had, however, sunk any chance of Amos Diggory gaining the office as Dumbledore had wanted.

The Order's consternation over Amelia's election had been short lived. She had named several Order members to key Ministry posts. Shacklebolt had been named as head of the Department of Magical Law Enforcement. Alastor Moody had accepted a position as the Dean of the Auror Academy. Even Arthur Weasley had received a promotion to the Office of Muggle Affairs and a nice pay raise. While Amelia held no love for Dumbledore, the Order members generally thought she would make a decent Minister of Magic.

Shacklebolt didn't blink when he received a memo from the office of the Minister, asking that he detach Aurors Michael Wood and Cassie Breckenridge for extended duty involving an internal investigation. He shrugged and had one of his aides contact the two Aurors in question and direct them to the office of the Minister.

A short while later, a pair of very confused Aurors were ushered into the office of the Minister of Magic. Amelia stood by an enchanted window, looking out on a scene of a snow covered field. In the distance, mountains loomed in all their majesty. She adjusted her monocle and turned to face the two.

"Auror Wood, Auror Breckenridge, I've asked for you two personally because, as the former head of the Department of Magical Law enforcement, you two impressed me with your unwavering commitment to the job and to the truth. You are being assigned to my office for the duration of a secret investigation. You will inform no one but myself of what you learn during the course of this investigation. Am I clear on that point?"

The two Aurors looked at the Minister and nodded in agreement.

"Fine, then. Three days ago my office received an unusual communication. In the past three centuries, there have been exactly three letters received by the dead letter office. Until yesterday, that is. I probably don't need to remind you that it takes events of extraordinary proportions for someone who has passed over to send a letter back to the living. Such communications are always treated as emergencies. In the past, they have warned about an impending disaster, an attempt to assassinate the King and once to provide an important clue to cure a Wizarding plague.

"The most recent letter comes from someone claiming to be Lillian Audry Potter, and she writes about criminal actions taken against her son by some very prominent personages. She pointed out a few files for us to examine. When we did so, we found misfiled reports pertaining to Mister Potter as he was growing up, showing a clear pattern of abuse and neglect. The letter states further that there will be more information supplied in the near future to corroborate her allegations, and that additional evidence will come from the living.

"You two will begin your investigation by examining what we have. Find out how it got misfiled and why, and verify as much of the background material as possible. Remember that we're looking at some very important people involved in this mess, possibly even in the Department of Magical Law Enforcement itself. This will require the utmost discretion on your parts."

The two Aurors exchanged worried glances, then Michael Wood stood. "We'll get right on it, Minister."

"Very well. My Chief of Staff has copies of all the information we have so far. Talk to him. He'll make sure you have office space and help you get set up. I'm giving you carte blanche on this job. I can't have the savior of the Wizarding world treated worse than a common house elf," Amelia said evenly, though her eyes belied her calm tone.

Number Four Privet Drive, December 25th 1987...

The mists cleared around them and they found themselves still in the cupboard of Privet Drive. Little Harry lay on his stomach, his hands trembled in the cold room as he huddled under the pile of clothing. He didn't look like he had grown much. There were happy sounds of people moving around outside the small room.

Unable to go back to sleep, he crawled out from under the pile of clothes and pulled a shirt and a pair of pants from the pile to put on. They gasped when he removed his pajama top to reveal a heavily bruised torso. He dressed as quickly as he could, but it still wasn't fast enough. The door to the cupboard swung open and a hand reached in, grabbing him by the hair.

"Come out of there, you freak! You should have started cooking Christmas dinner by now!" exclaimed Petunia Dursley.

"Yes, Aunt Petunia," Harry said meekly.

There was something unsettling in the way Harry calmly accepted his treatment. He had to be in considerable pain, but he never showed any sign of it. The door slammed closed, leaving the four of them, Ron, Hermione, Ginny, and an adult Harry, standing in the little room.

A sound caught the attention of Hermione and Ginny. Both were surprised to see Ron looking away from them and trying hard to control himself. He was crying and didn't want them to see it. Adult Harry paid no attention to what was going on, his gaze fixed on the small door.

Hermione grabbed Ron and he wept on her shoulder. Ginny shot her a sympathetic look as she patted her brother on his back.

"I knew it was bad, but nothing like this," Ron confessed brokenly. "I used to think how lucky Harry was, the Boy-Who-Lived, rich, famous. All the girls wanted him. I refused to see how much he was hurting sometimes or how much he had lost. I was so jealous of him."

"Shh, Ron," whispered Hermione. "Harry knows that you love him like a brother. I don't think any of us knew just how bad it was. Those who did know didn't care."

Adult Harry turned his gaze to Hermione for a moment, nodded, then returned to contemplate the door again.

"I'm going to make it up to him. I swear it," Ron said fervently.

"We all will, Ron," Ginny replied quietly, though her eyes were on adult Harry. "I don't know if you can hear me, Harry Potter, but I'm begging you not to give up hope. We, Hermione, Ron and myself, need you. Not to fight evil, not to be a beacon of light. We need you to be in our lives. We need to see your lopsided grin and your unruly hair. Please don't give up."

Adult Harry stared at the door and gave no indication that he had heard her.

The three friends sat in one corner of the small room and talked for what seemed to be hours. Ron wanted to see if they could leave the room, and he did try once, only to find that the walls were quite solid and nothing he could do would open the door.

From outside the cupboard they could often hear someone yelling, and twice they heard Harry crying out in pain. Hermione tried to remember and explain all she knew about people that grow up in an abusive environment, but for once she had to admit even she was woefully lacking in knowledge on the subject.

The door to the cupboard opened and Harry was pushed back in.

"Don't I get any presents? Or Dinner? Please?" little Harry asked in a tremulous voice.

"No Christmas presents for a nasty little freak like you! As for your dinner, eat this!" snarled Vernon as he pushed a small apple into the boy's hands and slammed the door shut again.

The little boy tore into the apple with obvious hunger, eating it quickly, core and all.

"That's the first thing I had to eat since school let out three days ago," murmured Harry as he stared at his childhood self.

"Ginny, try talking to little Harry," Hermione suggested after glancing at adult Harry.

Ginny nodded and knelt next to the boy. Harry sat on his small mattress and everyone could hear the family enjoying their holiday meal. The smell alone was enough to make one's mouth water. Harry looked down at the stem of the apple he still held in his hand and tried to chew on it.

"Harry, can you hear me?" Ginny asked softly.

The little boy blinked in surprise, seeing Ginny slowly appear in front of him. "Angel? I thought you left me. I thought you had gone to go find a good boy to be with."

"But you are a very good boy, Harry, despite what your Aunt and Uncle might think."

"I can't be good enough for them. No matter how much I try, they don't love me," he whispered.

"I understand, Harry. Not everyone will love you, but there are people you don't know yet who love you more than you can imagine," she told him, trying to fight back her tears. Dealing with Harry like this was heartbreaking. She couldn't touch him or hold him. All she could do was speak to him.

"If they love me, why can't they take me, Angel? Don't they know how hungry I am?" Harry said, trying not to whimper.

"They don't know you're in trouble, sweetheart. I know your hungry and I wish I could make it go away for you. But never give up hope. People do

love you, and I promise one day I will make you a meal that will have more food than you can eat. You have a whole lifetime full of people who are going to love you. But you need to hold on and trust that they are out there and that they will find you.”

Harry burrowed under the pile of clothing with just his head sticking out. He yawned and looked up at Ginny, his heart in his eyes. “Will you really make a meal like that? For me?” he asked in a whisper.

“Yes, sweetheart, I'll make you a meal like that. And I'll see that each and every Christmas, you get the biggest slice of the goose,” she assured him, smiling. She wanted nothing more than to run her hand through his unruly hair and chase away his fears.

Ginny looked up at the other two and their eyes echoed her anguish.

Hermione stamped a foot in frustration and rounded on the adult Harry. “What good is showing us these scenes if we can't put a stop to this? Dammit, Harry, we didn't know. If my parents knew how you were being treated, even back before we went to Hogwarts, they would have stepped in to stop it!”

Harry ignored her. Ron reached out and put a hand on her shoulder and she whirled around to glare at him.

“Hermione, Harry knows we can't change the past. He's showing us this stuff so we'll understand,” Ron offered. “I never realized it was this bad. He hinted about it, but never came out and said anything, except that life wasn't good here. Why didn't I listen more carefully?”

Neither of them noticed adult Harry glance over at Ron for a moment before turning his attention back towards his younger self.

“But we knew all this before, Ron! I don't understand what the purpose of this... this torture is!”

“That's the point, Hermione. He's told us that his home life was bad. Did we believe him? Honestly believe him? Did any of us ever wonder why Harry always come back from summer holiday so skinny? We just knew his home life was bad, but none of us knew it was this bad. None of us suspected it.”

“But you suspected something, didn't you, Ron? After your first summer holiday?” asked Ginny curious now.

Ron hung his head as his cheeks colored. “Yeah,” he whispered. “We rescued Harry from his family that summer. They had locked him in his room and put bars on the windows. When I told Mum and Dad about it, they told me not to worry. Mum said she'd take care of it.”

“You thought an adult would take care of it, Ron. That's all you can do when you're little,” Hermione offered.

“He was my friend, Hermione,” Ron said brokenly.

The mists swirled and started to thicken. “I think we've seen all we're supposed to see here,” murmured Hermione.

Outside Potter Manor...

Dumbledore stepped out of the tent and frowned. He had been forced to tell Amelia where Harry was and she had assigned Aurors to guard the property. It had been a wise move on her part it seemed, as he could now see the small crowd of reporters being held back by the Aurors.

It had been two full days and, while no one had seen any sign of movement from within the manor house, the situation hadn't changed. Several more attempts to enter the house had been met with varying degrees of force. The adult Weasley's had been lightly stunned, Moody, Tonks and Remus had been heavily stunned. Dumbledore no longer attempted to approach the building. It was clear that Severus and himself were on the top of Harry's hate list.

Another person near the top of that list was Nymphadora Tonks and Albus was surprised by that. While he knew why she was there, he hadn't known that Harry had seen through their subterfuge.

After the Christmas break of his sixth year, Harry returned to Hogwarts to discover a new girl sorted into Gryffindor. She was apparently a transfer student from another school, despite the Hogwarts tradition of not accepting such transfers. The girl had tried on several occasions to entangle Harry in a romantic relationship and had failed.

The girl was, of course, Nymphadora Tonks. She was trying to get close to Harry on the Headmaster's orders.

Dumbledore could only surmise from the way she was being treated now, that Harry had known about her and her disguise all along.

Arthur stepped out of the tent and joined Dumbledore.

“Albus, I've been thinking. Considering what my daughter said to you the other day, I can only surmise that somehow she's found out what we did,” he said quietly.

Dumbledore turned to look at the elder Weasley. “What we did was for the greater good of our world, Arthur. If, in fact, Harry is inside explaining our actions to his friends, we may have to take steps to ensure that it goes no further. Ah... Look, here comes Severus, back from St. Mungos at last!”

Arthur turned to look up the lane at the approaching Potions Professor. The man now walked with a profound limp and he leaned heavily on a cane.

Albus frowned as Snape approached. “Severus? Weren't the healers able to fix your leg properly?”

"They fixed what they could, Headmaster, but I'm afraid the limp is now permanent." snarled Snape, who then turned and looked at the house with loathing and more than a touch of fear. "Potter hasn't come out yet, I take it?"

"No, Severus, but we have hope," Dumbledore told him softly, his gaze now fixed on the distant manor.

Number Four Privet Drive, July 31st 1991...

The mists cleared and Harry and his friends found themselves in the smallest bedroom of number Four Privet Drive. A tired Harry Potter was slowly unpacking his belongings under the watchful eye of Vernon Dursley. He moved stiffly, as if in pain, which confused the three friends. He was fine when he got off the train!

"Summer after first year?" offered Hermione.

"It has to be. The bars are on the windows," murmured Ron. "We pulled them off when we rescued him."

They turned their attention back to the scene unfolding before them.

"No, boy! You aren't keeping your freakish school books. Just pull out the clothes like I told you," Vernon said, his face red with anger.

"But Uncle, how will I do my homewo..."

Harry's statement was cutoff as Vernon backhanded him. Harry spun and fell, hitting his side painfully against the edge of the bed. He gasped and there was an audible snapping sound as a rib broke. He lay half on the bed and half on the floor for several minutes, panting and trying to gather his strength.

Vernon clenched his fists and glared at Harry. When it was obvious the boy wasn't going to move, the large man pulled the rest of his nephew's clothing out of the trunk and threw them on the floor before slamming the trunk closed and locking it.

Harry looked at his Uncle in time to see the man drag the trunk from the room and slam the door shut, locking it from the outside.

He sighed and lifted up his shirt. His friends gasped seeing the fresh bruising that had to have happened recently and Harry placed a hand on his ribs. He winced and his hand began to glow with a soft pulsating blue light. His breathing began to ease and the hard look of pain on his face softened. He wasn't pain free, but he felt better.

Harry glanced at the barred windows, then over at Hedwig. "I'm sorry, girl. Looks like we're both prisoners this summer," he said mournfully.

Hedwig eyed her wizard and huffed a few times, causing him to smile. Snowy owls rarely hooted, but Hedwig was capable of a wide range of sounds that somehow Harry was capable of understanding. She exited her cage and flew over to land next to him, where she playfully nipped at his ear. He smiled and caressed her.

"I've always loved that owl," Ginny said softly.

"I know what you mean," Hermione replied. "It always seemed to me that Harry had a very close relationship with her, closer than most wizards or witches have."

"You mean you two don't know?" asked Ron curiously.

The two girls turned to him. "Know what?" asked Hermione.

"Don't you remember first year Care of Magical Creatures? Hedwig isn't Harry's owl, or pet, she's his familiar. I saw that right away. His connection to her was, and is, incredibly strong."

"His familiar?" Hermione asked thoughtfully. "Yes, it fits. Most of us never achieve that sort of rapport with our animals. That's why true familiars are so rare. I should have seen it, and I guess I shouldn't be surprised that Harry achieved it in his first year."

"So, what now?" Ginny asked.

"Well, in the previous cases, we could communicate with Harry. But I think there's still some event we're waiting for. Why don't you try talking to him again, Ginny?" offered Hermione.

The three turned back to face Harry. He had just put up a calendar on the wall, showing the number of days until his return to Hogwarts. As they watched, he climbed onto the small bed and pulled the covers up to his shoulders. His eyes shone with a desperate loneliness.

Ginny shrugged at Hermione's suggestion and walked over to the bed. Rather than sitting on it, she sat on the floor near the head of the bed and leaned against the wall. This Harry was more grown up than the previous boys she'd spoken to. This Harry would be harder to talk to.

"Harry?" she whispered.

Harry smiled, his eyes unfocused and half closed. "Angel, I thought you had left me for good."

"I'll never leave you, Harry. I love you." she replied softly.

Harry's eyes moved to rest upon her. "I know you... I think. But that's not possible. How can I know you if you're an angel?"

Ginny smiled at him. "Magic. With magic, anything is possible, Harry. You know that."

Harry started to return the smile, but it faltered. "Maybe, but it won't get me out of here. My friends are home and safe with their families, while I'm stuck here. I'm glad they're safe, but I hate them!"

All three friends blinked, taken aback by the venom in Harry's snarled confession.

"Why?" asked Ginny as she struggled to remain calm.

Harry's eyes dropped and he looked ashamed. "Because they're safe and have families who love them. My friend Ron? He hates the sweaters his mum makes for him. He doesn't realize how lucky he is to have a mum, or brothers and a sister..."

At the mention of the word sister, Harry's eyes flicked to Ginny's face in shocked recognition, then he shook his head. She wasn't the Ginny he remembered. This Ginny was considerably older. But even in his young mind, he recognized that if Ron's sister grew up to look anything like his angel, she'd be a beauty.

Ginny spotted the flicker of recognition in his eyes and smiled again for him. "All things are possible with magic, Harry." she said softly.

"Are you really here?"

Ginny looked up at Hermione for guidance, but the young woman only grimaced and shrugged helplessly.

Sighing, the redhead turned back to the boy on the bed. "I suppose we are, in a way. We can interact with you, but not your surroundings." When he looked at her in confusion, she smiled sadly. "We can't touch you, or open doors for you," she explained.

Harry shook his head slightly. "That's too bad. I guess I should be happy. If I'm going to hallucinate, I'm at least seeing someone beautiful, like my mum was."

The room was suddenly awash with a bright light. Harry gasped sharply, his eyes rolled into the back of his head and he slipped into unconsciousness.

Ginny looked at her friends helplessly.

The door to the bedroom opened and Vernon walked in, followed by Albus Dumbledore. Ginny stood and stepped away from Harry', fearful, even now, of the great Albus Dumbledore.

The Headmaster stepped over to Harry's bed and frowned for a moment before he turned on Vernon. "I thought I told you to keep the bruising to places easily hidden!" Dumbledore snapped.

Vernon recoiled and looked at the old wizard fearfully. "I'm sorry, sir, but he needed to be put in his place."

Dumbledore scowled. "Well, let us make sure you do not bring down the muggle authorities again. We can not keep intervening in their investigations. I want the boy delivered to the train suitably meek and pliant!"

Vernon nodded and a feral smile crossed his face. "I'll see to it, sir. I promise."

"See that you do," Dumbledore said, as he leaned closer to the boy and cast several healing spells over the visible bruises. As he straightened up, he frowned suddenly and peered at one corner of the room - the same corner Ron, Hermione and Ginny were standing in

The old wizard tilted his head slightly and stared long and hard at the corner before turning away and exiting the room, Vernon on his heels. As they left, the door closed by itself and the locks clicked into place.

Hermione's expression changed to one of outrage. In the seven years she'd spent at Hogwarts, she had respected and admired Albus Dumbledore, the shining wizard who led the path of the light. Coming here to Potter Manor had seen a steady erosion of that image and her opinion of the man. This latest vision, however, buried it for all time. In her opinion, Albus Dumbledore now ranked a close second to Voldemort himself! She turned when she heard Ron muttering under his breath. Ginny also stared thunderously at the now closed door.

"I'll kill him with my own bare hands," Ron vowed.

Hermione placed a hand on Ron's arm, stopping his building tirade. He turned to look at her.

"No, Ron. I'm not letting my future husband spend his life in Azkaban! Dumbledore is going to pay, I promise both you and Harry that. But he's going down legally," she said angrily.

"No wonder Harry felt so alone." Ginny murmured. Then, seeing the expressions of her friends, she added, "Dumbledore is the leader of the Order of the Phoenix, the head of the school. To Harry, it must have seemed like everything was staged. I mean, getting to know Ron and me, when our parents are so much a part of the Order? Or you, Hermione? Your respect for the Headmaster is second only to your love of books. And what about Remus or Tonks? The only thing that probably wasn't staged was Sirius, and I'm beginning to wonder if Dumbledore didn't somehow maneuver Harry and Sirius into that disaster at the Ministry. Harry didn't know who he could trust or who his true friends were."

"No wonder he pushed us all away in the last two years," Hermione said as she leaned against the wall and slid to the floor, tears streaming down

her face.

"Hermione?" Ron asked in alarm.

"Oh, Ron," she whispered. "All those times on the train when I yelled at him for not doing his summer homework? He *couldn't* do his homework! How he must have hated me."

Ron moved to comfort Hermione, but stopped in surprise when the adult Harry spoke. "He never hated you, Hermione. He was annoyed at you plenty of times and hurt by your actions on occasion, but he's never hated you. He loves you like a sister."

Ron and Hermione stared at the older Harry in surprise. Ginny stepped over to stand in front of him. He looked at her and his expression softened.

"Harry? I'm sorry... I, we... didn't know," she said softly.

Harry looked at her for a moment, then nodded grimly. "I know, Angel, but the game must be played out," he said as the mists swirled about them.

Outside Potter Manor...

Inside the wizards tent in front of the Manor, the Order of the Phoenix was in a state of disarray. When the Potters had been killed nearly twenty years ago, Albus Dumbledore offered the Order an option that would require tough action on their part, most of it illegal. But if they held true to the course, they would be instrumental in saving the Wizarding world. Some of the current members hadn't been privy to decisions made so long ago, having only joined recently. Tonks and the Weasleys had joined in recent years, but once they had been accepted, they had been informed of what the Order was doing.

Under Dumbledore's leadership, the Order was supposed to be guiding Harry Potter into his fate. That would have been the case, except for two small details; Sirius Black and the fact that Harry fought Voldemort and his followers alone and lived. Dumbledore had not expected him to survive when he first planned out Harry's life.

During the summer of 1998, a little more than a month after he had graduated, Harry had vanished from his home in Hogsmeade. The Order had been watching him closely, but he often gave them the slip, either by evading them entirely, or by stunning people, then leaving the scene. By the time the Ministry detected the massive waves of magic emanating from Riddle Manor in Little Hangleton and word trickled down to the Order, the battle was over.

Order members arrived to find the building leveled, the nearby graveyard torn up and one Harry Potter standing amidst the field of destruction. Voldemort's still smoking ash-pile laying at his feet. With so many Aurors present, the Order's hands were tied. They were unable to get close enough to Harry to control what he said, or even control who approached him. The battlefield was full of the ghosts of Voldemort's victims. They made sure everyone knew what had taken place there. While they spoke, Harry apparated away, leaving everyone behind.

Now the Order's core members were in a state of panic, which confused the regular members. George and Fred Weasley couldn't understand what had produced the anxiety that certain key members, including their parents, were feeling.

"Tonks, what the bloody hell is going on?" asked Fred.

"Yes. Do tell, Tonks," demanded George.

Tonks looked nervously about. "Look guys, I'd like to tell you, but you're not cleared for this information," she said.

When she spun on her heel and walked away, Fred and George eyed each other for a moment.

"Brother mine, are you beginning to smell a rat in our own house?"

"I don't know. Something isn't right. This has got to be more than just the fact that no one can get in to reach Harry."

Fred and George glanced over at their brother, Bill, who nodded grimly in agreement.

Hogwarts, April 1st 1992...

The mists cleared a bit slower this time. The first thing they noticed was the change of location. They were in the Gryffindor common room, not Privet Drive!

Harry stumbled out of the stairway from the boys dorm and collapsed onto one of the couches.

"This must be second year. He's still wearing the watch he broke during the Tri-Wizard tournament," Hermione said thoughtfully.

"Even in second year the nightmares were becoming unbearable," adult Harry murmured.

"Hermione, what about the time line?" Ginny asked worriedly.

Hermione blinked in surprise, then she remembered that while she had been the smartest witch in her year, Ginny now obviously took that position. And privately she admitted that even she was sometimes surprised by how intelligent Ginny could be. The point the younger woman had raised was valid. Were they viewing Harry's memories, or were they somehow traveling in time?

She didn't know the answer to that question.

"I don't think we should take any chances disturbing it, Ginny. Keep your comments general and don't make any comments about specific events," she offered, it was about the best they could do. Hopefully it would be enough.

Meanwhile, Ron moved to stand next to adult Harry. "We had a lot of good times in this room, mate," he said quietly. "I just wish you'd remember that."

Adult Harry watched his younger self on the couch, but the corners of his mouth turned upwards for a moment.

Young Harry buried his face in his hands.

"What's wrong with him? The nightmares didn't really start until after Cedric," asked Ron in confusion.

"That isn't true," said the adult Harry. "Right now he dreams about the night his parents were killed, and about Vernon finding him and beating him. He's terribly worried about Hermione up in the infirmary. She's been petrified. He knows something isn't right with Ginny and that worries him. He's scared and knows that soon it will be time for school to end and he'll have to return to the Dursleys."

Ginny walked over and knelt next to the couch. "Harry?" she said softly.

He lifted his face from his hands. A single tear marred his cheek. He smiled gently at her. "Now I know you're an angel. The real Ginny is upstairs sleeping. Can you help Hermione? Slytherin's monster got her..."

Ginny smiled and shook her head at him. "No, I can't, but when the time is right, help will come for Hermione. I'm here to help you, if I can."

Seeing that single tear run down his cheek disturbed Ginny more than she wanted to admit. Harry was always so strong. He never complained about his pain, or his troubles. Somewhere back on Privet Drive Harry had learned that expressing his feelings led to more punishment. His treatment had taught him to bottle everything up and shove it away.

Harry bowed his head, dropping his eyes from Ginny's. "I'm glad Hermione will be alright. Ron thinks she's nutters most of the time, but I like her. She's sometimes bossy, but she's a good friend. Don't tell her I said so, but I think Ron fancies her a bit."

Hermione looked torn between wanting to lecture Harry for calling her bossy, and wanting to hug him, even back then, he cared about her. Ginny suppressed a giggle while watching the sputtering witch. Ron sat heavily in a chair laughing.

"I won't tell her," Ginny promised.

Harry looked up at Ginny and she was struck by the power in his gaze. There was a power there that burned white hot. His gaze was emotionally charged as well and it took her breath away to see the pain and anguish in those vibrant green eyes of his.

"Will it ever get better, Angel?" he whispered.

"It will get better. I know you can't see it, but you need to believe me, Harry. There will come a day when you'll wake up and find that no Dark Lord is after you, no more monsters. It will just be a regular day and you'll just be Harry," she replied.

"School is nearly over. I don't want to go back to the Dursleys," he whispered.

"I know, sweetheart, but we can't change that. If I could, I would never let you go back there again," she replied fiercely.

Ginny backed up as there came a flash of light and Harry's eyes rolled up into his head.

The door to the common room opened admitting Dumbledore and Snape. Both men walked over to the unconscious boy.

"Excellent, the potion is increasing the nightmares he's experiencing. It will make it easier for us to guide him, if he's confused and tired from a lack of sleep," Dumbledore said.

Ron growled deep in his throat and reached for his wand, only to find his wrist locked in adult Harry's iron grip. "The game must be played out," he murmured before releasing Ron's hand.

"But what of the Weasley girl, Headmaster? She's let Slytherin's monster out of his lair several times now. It's only a matter of time before it kills someone," Snape said.

"Perhaps, Severus, but I suspect young Harry here will take care of that particular problem for us. After all, is that not what we are preparing him for anyway?" Dumbledore replied.

Ginny stepped back until she bumped into adult Harry. He placed a hand comfortingly on her shoulder. Her complexion paled and she trembled. "He knew! He knew what was happening and did nothing to help me!" she said with a whimper.

Harry wrapped an arm around her and held her so her back was pressed against his body. She trembled in his grip. "Voldemort was the Dark Lord, but Albus Dumbledore is the Great Betrayer," he said sadly. "I didn't learn how much he had betrayed me until my sixth year."

"Quickly, Severus, give him another dose of the potion and let us be off before another student wanders down to the common room," Dumbledore

Instructed.

Snape nodded and pulled out a syringe. He lined it up and plunged it into Harry's neck. The young boy grunted in pain, but both teachers ignored him.

Snape pulled back and looked at Dumbledore curiously. "Headmaster?"

"It's strange, Severus. I feel a presence here, but there is no detectable magic, no invisibility cloaks or concealment charms. Just a presence. This isn't the first time I've felt it around Potter."

Snape looked in the general direction Dumbledore was looking and cast several detection charms. "There's nothing there, Headmaster."

Dumbledore shook himself and smiled at Snape. "Perhaps I'm getting paranoid in my dotage, my boy. Come, let us go back to my office and we will see where recent events lead us."

Snape nodded and followed the older wizard from the common room.

The three stunned friends watched in silence as the two wizards left the room. Ron and Hermione turned to face the adult Harry, who still held Ginny. She had turned around, burying her face in his shirt. The knowledge that Dumbledore knew what was happening to her and did nothing was a crushing blow. She trembled in his arms and Harry held her tightly, his eyes still focused on the door to the common room.

"That bastard," growled Ron. "I'll see he loses his job for this!"

"He's going to lose a lot more than his job over this, Ron. If I have to, I'll share pensieve memories of this with Rita Skeeter to get him prosecuted," murmured Hermione.

Even Ginny looked up in shock at Hermione's words. She was always the calmest one among them, being slow to anger and even slower to condemn people who had wronged her. But Rita Skeeter was one of those people. Hermione would rather take up naked potion making than talk to Rita Skeeter!

"Dumbledore made a critical mistake," said the adult Harry, causing everyone to look at him. "The spell he's using to knock me out isn't perfect. It still allowed the event to be recorded by the subconscious. When my Occlumency teacher started working with me, he helped me uncover these memories, removing the blocks on them."

"Mate, you need to stick around so the four of us can fix this, and put certain people in their place," Ron said seriously.

Harry eyed Ron silently for a moment, doubt clouded his eyes. Then the mists rose again, obscuring vision.

Ministry of Magic...

Amelia looked up from the report she was reading as the alarm sounded. She paled. It was only the second time in her entire life she had ever heard this particular alarm, the first being just three and a half days ago. She waited, knowing full well that someone would bring her the letter.

Well, she mused, the last letter said more information would be forthcoming .

The door to her office opened and a young woman walked in carrying a sealed scroll and a small box.

Amelia was startled. Now the Dead Letter Office was accepting parcels from beyond the grave?

She hastily broke the seal on the scroll and unrolled it.

Minister,

I know it is unusual to receive two letters from the same person like this, but as I promised in my previous letter here is more information concerning my son, Harry Potter, and the crimes that have been committed against him.

First off, he is in the manor house which is now guarded by your Aurors. He has lain here since his fight with Voldemort, sorely wounded in body and even more so in mind. Even now my son struggles for his right to die, not knowing that if he does, all the good he has done by killing Voldemort will be undone. His closest friends seek to help him live, and perhaps they will succeed. Their love for each other and for my son is very strong.

My son struggles to die because he believes that the world has turned against him. He believes that there is no place in this world, magical or muggle, that he can find happiness. He was deliberately placed into an abusive environment, against my recorded wishes, and was carefully led through a regime of torture and abuse designed to make him a pliant tool for Albus Dumbledore.

The package contains a Pensieve. It used to belong to Dumbledore, but was stolen by Peeves, the Hogwarts poltergeist. It contains many memories that Dumbledore does not want anyone, especially my son or yourself, to know about. Dumbledore believes he lost the Pensieve several months ago. Peeves would have eventually returned the Pensieve, but my return has granted me some measure of authority among the living dead and incorporeal of this world. Peeves delivered this to me when I commanded the ghosts of Hogwarts to seek evidence of Dumbledore's crimes.

Minister, my son lies on his death bed, firmly believing he has been betrayed by both worlds. His friends wrestle with his desire to die. Should he succeed, your world will fall as darkness consumes it. Voldemort was merely a representative of that darkness. Without Harry, the darkness will attack your world directly. There is hope that his friends will succeed, but it is a task they cannot do alone. You must step forward and see justice done, Minister. For one that has sacrificed all for this world, I beg of you, see that justice is done.

Lily Potter

Amelia let the letter slip from her numb fingers in shock, then she fumbled to press a button on her desk. A half minute, later the door opened to reveal one of her aides.

"Summon Aurors Wood and Breckenridge to my office immediately," she snapped.

Her aide squeaked and darted from the room. Amelia waited, staring at the unopened package sitting on her desk.

Hogwarts, May 25th, 1995...

The mists cleared again and they all stumbled a bit before orienting themselves. This time they were in the Hogwarts infirmary. In a nearby bed lay Harry Potter, his arm bandaged from the wound Wormtail had inflicted to bring back Voldemort.

A younger Hermione and Ron burst into the infirmary and Harry propped himself up on his elbows. Mrs. Weasley followed right behind them. The adult Hermione watched on in horror as she inadvertently interrupted what was probably the first motherly hug Harry had ever received. It was a moment she remembered vividly, but seeing it from a different angle gave her a new and totally different perspective on the event, a perspective which added no small amount of guilt to her conscience. How close Harry had come to breaking down in Mrs. Weasley's arms and Hermione's actions stopped that. Would things have been any different if he had?

After the younger Ron and Hermione had been sent back to their dorm, Dumbledore appeared to speak with Molly.

"Molly, I know you will support us, and I do appreciate your wanting to join the Order of the Phoenix. We have a very difficult road ahead of us and some of the tasks I may ask you to do will be unpleasant. Are you sure you're up for this?" he asked.

"Mum, say no," whispered Ron.

Ginny choked back tears and clutched at Ron's arm, while her mother appeared to think over Dumbledore's question.

"Albus, we trust you. This is war, and some parts of that are bound to be unpleasant," she said firmly.

Dumbledore gestured to Harry's still form on the bed. "This lad, this child, is to be our savior, although he doesn't know it as yet. First, we must prepare him for the ordeal he will undergo. We must strengthen him and still keep him reliant upon us. Because of that, we deny him the love and affection he might otherwise have received at the Dursleys. You and your family will show him love when we permit him to visit you. This way, he will come to treat you like surrogate parents, people he can trust."

Molly's expression at first was angry, but soon settled into one of determination and she nodded to Dumbledore.

Ron and Ginny both gasped in anger at her betrayal. Hermione noticed adult Harry and tugged at both of her friends, trying to gain their attention. Ginny looked over to see the look of anguish on Harry's face. He stared at Molly and his anguish was obvious. His shoulders hitched a few times and his eyes grew moist, but no tears fell.

Ginny let go of Ron and grabbed Harry in her arms. He didn't say anything, but he folded himself down into her embrace and let himself be comforted by her. A moment later, Ron and Hermione joined the hug. For a long time all four clung to each other. Nothing was said. Nothing needed to be said.

Slowly, they pulled themselves together and backed away from adult Harry. As the visits or visions of the past progressed, adult Harry was becoming more animated, more like his normal self. Hermione and Ron moved to sit on a bed near where Harry lay. Ginny held onto adult Harry, whispering comforting words to him as he straightened.

Time passed and eventually Molly left the infirmary with a determined look. There was a time of silence while Harry slept, then the door opened and Snuffles entered the infirmary again. He padded over to Harry's bed and licked at the boy's face. Harry woke up and laughed. Snuffles transformed into Sirius, who smiled at Harry and moved to sit on the edge of his bed.

"Sirius," Harry said happily. "I'm so glad you're here."

"Me too, Harry. Listen, I don't have a lot of time, Dumbledore wants me to go off on a mission. But if I can arrange it, I'll swing by Privet Drive and see you this summer. Keep an eye out for Snuffles, alright?"

Harry nodded, his expression darkening at the mention of Privet Drive, but he was also heartened by Sirius' concern.

"I wish I didn't have to go back there," Harry said sadly.

Sirius nodded grimly. "I know, Harry. I wish you didn't have to go there either. But look at it this way. Someday, you and I will have a place of our own, maybe with a Quidditch pitch, eh?"

When Harry nodded happily, Sirius checked his watch and stood. "I've got to go, Harry. But there's a chance I'll find Wormtail on this mission. If that happens, I'll be able to clear my name."

"I hope you find him," Harry whispered fervently. Sirius smiled and ruffled his godson's hair, then he turned and slipped from the infirmary.

Ginny waited a moment then she left the adult Harry and walked over to sit next to his younger self.

Harry blinked in surprise and reached for his glasses. "Angel?"

"Yes, Harry. I'm here."

"I thought I wouldn't see you again, Angel." he said softly, laying his head back on the pillow.

"I came because I thought you needed to talk, Harry," Ginny replied.

"Voldemort's back," he whispered, his face full of anguish, "I brought him back... and killed Cedric." He choked back the urge to weep and ground his teeth.

"No, Harry, you didn't bring him back. You were forced into helping bring him back, and Voldemort ordered Wormtail to kill Cedric. You and he were just unlucky enough to be in the wrong spot at the wrong time," she said, correcting him.

Harry looked at her doubtfully. He heard her words, but he wasn't sure he believed them. Suddenly there came a flash of light and Harry collapsed back onto the bed, unconscious. A moment passed, then Dumbledore and Snape walked into the infirmary.

Snape administered a potion to Harry via injection, then turned away from the boy on the bed to look at Dumbledore. "There, this potion will help give him nightmares for weeks, Headmaster," Snape said quietly.

"Excellent, Severus. I fear, however, that Black is becoming a threat to our plans. He offers the boy a measure of hope we cannot allow."

Snape sneered. "Black? That mongrel is a waste of our energies. If you want, I'll poison him."

Dumbledore held up his hand. "No, Severus, that would be too suspicious. We must bide our time and wait for the right opportunity. Sirius is an impetuous man, and given the right circumstances, will leap to his death without looking or considering the consequences."

The two wizards conversed for a moment longer before leaving the infirmary. Ginny turned to look at the adult Harry and stopped in surprise. She tugged on Hermione's sleeve and pointed. The adult Harry had started to shimmer softly in the light.

"I've been expecting this, Ginny. Sooner or later, the two Harrys would merge into one. Since this puts us at the end of his fourth year, I wouldn't be surprised if the next time we come back it's just after Sirius died."

"Alright, but is this really helping him, Hermione?" asked Ron. "I don't know about you, but I feel pretty useless and I'm not at all happy with some of the things I've done now."

"I know, Ron. This is forcing all of us to look at our relationship with Harry and with each other," Hermione said pensively. "It's a good thing to do once in a while, but I'm not happy with some of the things I've done either."

Ginny walked over to the older Harry and stood in front of him so that he had no choice but to look at her. "Harry, I know this won't make up for the betrayals, or the insults and injuries, but I'm sorry. None of us really understood."

Harry looked at her for a long moment, his eyes filled with longing. "I'm sorry, too, Angel. But the cycle isn't broken and we must play on."

The mists rose around them, clouding their view.

Outside Potter Manor...

"Albus, I think you should come out here. Minister Bones is approaching with several Aurors," shouted Tonks.

Albus climbed out of the entrance of the tent and conjured a table, some chairs and a tea service. If he was going to deal with the Minister at this point in time, he might as well do it in a civilized manner. Pasting a smile onto his face, he strode forward to meet Amelia with an outstretched hand.

"Amelia, what a delightful surprise! Please, do have a seat and let's have some tea while we talk about what brought you out here," he offered.

Amelia smiled thinly. "Alas, Professor, I am here in my official capacity and have no time for pleasantries."

She glanced around at the people filing out of the tent and smiled inwardly to herself. Across the field, unobserved, were several Aurors using the latest of Japan's surveillance cameras to photograph each face for later identification.

"Is it true, Professor, that you've heard no word from the three people you've sent inside the Manor?" asked Amelia.

Albus looked at her sharply. Her tone clearly indicated that she was up to something, but he didn't know what.

"Yes, that is true," he admitted reluctantly.

Amelia nodded to herself. "Very well, then, Albus, I'm afraid I am going to have to ask you to leave the area. The government is now treating this as a criminal case of illegal imprisonment, perhaps even kidnapping," she said loudly enough to be heard by everyone. Amelia knew that the three were alright, but she needed to chase Dumbledore and his Order off the property.

She had turned away to speak to one of her Aurors when Dumbledore interrupted her. "But Amelia, I'm afraid you don't understand."

"No, Albus, you don't understand. You and your organization have no official status, and certainly no right to be sitting in this field, which, by the way, is private property. Either the three people are in that Manor and are not under any duress of any kind, in which case, you are still trespassing on private land, or they are held against their will and you are still trespassing on private land, *and* interfering with official government business. Now, if you will excuse me, we have work to do. Oh, and leave the tent. It will make a suitable command post for our operation. We will see that you're fairly compensated for it."

Several members of the Order made move to protest, but Dumbledore waved them to silence.

"Amelia, I demand to speak to Kingsley Shacklebolt. He is the director of the DMLE, not you. You do not have the authority to oversee DMLE operations any longer," Dumbledore said angrily.

Amelia looked at Dumbledore, her eyes hard. "Auror Shacklebolt stepped down from his position this morning and resigned from the Auror force, citing personal reasons. He is currently appearing before a review board concerning some of the actions he has taken in recent years. He is quite unavailable, I'm afraid. In his absence, I am temporarily running the DMLE, along with my other duties. Now, will you move your people out peaceably, or do I have to ask my Aurors to remove you by force?" she asked coldly.

Dumbledore's shoulders sagged. Shacklebolt resigned? This was a major blow to the Order's place in the Ministry! And without his help, they had no choice but to leave.

"We'll go." Albus stated flatly, his eyes burning with anger.

Amelia nodded, then consulted a scroll in her hand. "If there are any members of the Weasley or Granger families here they may stay, since this does concern them directly." She looked up to see Arthur Weasley approaching her.

"My family is here, but there is no one from the Grangers. Hermione is a muggle born witch and her family is quite ignorant of what is occurring here."

Amelia nodded and made a notation on the scroll. "Fine, Arthur. Please take your family back into the tent and have a seat. We'll send someone to inform the Grangers of what's happening."

She couldn't help but notice the look exchanged between Dumbledore, Molly and Arthur. The boys seemed relieved to be allowed to stay, but were confused by what was happening and didn't understand the look their parents shared with the Headmaster.

Hogwarts, September 2nd, 1996...

The mists swirled heavily for what seemed like hours before finally clearing. This time they found themselves in Dumbledore's office.

"Remember, Severus, do not antagonize the boy too much. We must find out where he has been all summer," Dumbledore said seriously.

"I understand, Headmaster, but if I know Potter, he was probably lording it up somewhere!"

"This must be the start of sixth year!" exclaimed Ron.

"Look! We've lost adult Harry," Ginny observed.

Hermione was about to reply when the door opened and a sullen Harry Potter was ushered into the room by Professor McGonagall. There was a faint flicker about Harry, almost as if there were two images of him superimposed, one of the other.

"See! I told you he's merging with the time line," Hermione commented.

"Ah, Harry, do come in and have a seat. Might I offer you a lemon drop?" asked Dumbledore in his best grandfatherly voice.

"No, thank you," replied Harry quietly. Dumbledore blinked in surprise. Harry was clearly keeping a tight rein on his emotions, unlike last year.

"No doubt you know why I sent for you then, Harry?" asked Dumbledore

"Mr. Potter." Harry said flatly.

"I beg your pardon?"

"Mr. Potter. Only my friends and those I trust are allowed to call me Harry."

Dumbledore scowled for a moment, shuffling some papers on his desk as a signal for Snape to begin his legilimency.

"We're all friends here, Harry," Dumbledore offered, smiling at him.

Harry turned to glare at Snape and the dark man began to tremble. "If you continue to try probing me illegally, spy, I will stir your brains with a spoon and leave you a babbling idiot. No doubt it will be an improvement."

Snape grabbed his head and began to moan loudly.

"Harry, Severus! Enough of this!" bellowed Dumbledore, standing and leaning over his desk.

He released Snape, who slumped back in his chair holding his head.

Harry turned back to Dumbledore and arched an eyebrow at him curiously.

"Harry, I want to know where you spent last night, and where you were over the summer holidays," Dumbledore demanded, sitting down once more.

"As to where I was, Professor, I spent an enjoyable evening at my new home in Hogsmeade. It is where I intend to spend all my nights and weekends from here on. My summer months were spent elsewhere until my home was ready," he replied coldly.

"But Harry, without your presence at Privet Drive, the blood wards collapsed. Your family has no wards protecting them now," protested Minerva.

"So they're defenseless? What a shame," he replied sarcastically.

"But Voldemort will find them now!" protested Minerva.

"One monster finds a family of weaker monsters and consumes them. It's called survival of the fittest. Don't expect me to feel any pity or love for those muggles you imprisoned me with. They're cruel, foul examples of the very worst of humanity. If you want to love them, be my guest, but don't expect me to."

Dumbledore leaned back on his chair, shocked. He had expected that Harry might still be angry, but he never expected this! He must calm the boy and bring him back under his wing.

"You've obviously become an accomplished Occlumens, Harry. Would you care to share with us where you picked up the skill?" asked Dumbledore, trying to get the meeting back on track.

"A funny thing happened to me on the way home last year. I learned I was rich. Rich enough to hire the best tutors available and pay well for their silence. I learned a lot of things over the summer months Headmaster, including who I can trust and who I can't."

"You can trust us, Harry," Dumbledore said soothingly.

"Hardly," Harry sneered. "If I don't have Voldemort attacking me in this castle, then the students are turning against me, or this foul excuse for a potions teacher is ridiculing me. There is little here to trust anymore. That's why I'm staying in my own home from here on."

Dumbledore frowned. "I'm afraid you simply cannot leave the castle. It is for your own protection."

Harry smiled thinly and gestured with his hand. Both Dumbledore and McGonagall gasped at his demonstration of wandless magic as several pieces of parchment appeared.

"This," Harry said, holding up one piece of parchment, "is a copy of my emancipation proclamation. The other is a 'Cease and Desist' order filed with Her Majesties court. It basically says you have no authority over me, other than in matters relating to the standard Hogwarts curriculum. So you see, Headmaster, I am legally out from under your thumb and I intend to stay that way. My solicitor stands ready to file more damaging legal actions against you, so I suggest you accept these and shut the fuck up," he snarled.

"Potter! Twenty five points from Gryffindor and a detention with me tonight!" exclaimed McGonagall angrily.

"You might want to reconsider the points, Professor. Since I'm no longer sleeping in the tower, you're only punishing Gryffindor for something a non-Gryffindor has done. Now, if you will both excuse me, I have class to attend."

When he stood and turned to leave, Dumbledore drew his wand. There was a double flash of light as the spell rebounded off of the shield around Harry and all three professors slumped in their seats.

Spinning around quickly, Harry shook his head at the three unconscious professors. Even the DA knew to check for shielding charms whenever possible before casting at an opponent!

"And you killed Grindelwald? Must have been pure luck," Harry muttered, staring down at Dumbledore.

Glancing down at the Headmaster's desk, his brow furrowed in puzzlement when he spotted a piece of parchment with a list of names on it. Curious, he leaned over far enough to pick it up and read it. Seconds later, his face paled and he dropped it in shock.

Turning away quickly, he sprinted out of the office, anger and anguish warring on his face.

Hermione stepped over to examine the parchment and she gasped. "Listen to this!" she exclaimed.

Albus,

If Potter continues to remain uncooperative, it may be necessary to use his own friends against him. Therefore, I suggest we induct Ronald

Weasley, Hermione Granger, Ginevra Weasley, Neville Longbottom and Luna Lovegood into the Order of the Phoenix for the express purpose of providing us with information on what Potter is doing.

Alastor Moody.

"They never asked me to join," said Ginny. "What about you two?"

Both shook their heads, but a moment later, Ron cursed loudly, causing both women to scowl at him.

"Harry doesn't know that we weren't asked to join," Ron explained angrily. "He's read what looks like an official document and for all he knows, we've turned against him!"

Ginny looked aghast. "That's why he pushed us away. Dumbledore was planning on using us and Harry found out about it."

The reason for Harry's break with them was now plainly apparent and it was all Dumbledore's fault.

"We didn't get a chance to interact with Harry this time," commented Ron, puzzled.

"I don't think we were supposed to, Ron. This is getting perilously close to our time and anything we say now may really impact the time line," offered Ginny, as Hermione nodded in agreement.

The three stood there for a moment longer, and then the mists swirled up around them once more.

Headmaster's Office, Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry...

Dumbledore sat at his desk, his head in his hands. Around him in the magically enlarged office stood members of the Order of the Phoenix, and they were all shouting and arguing with each other. Nymphadora Tonks and Amos Diggory had been called to the Ministry, and the Weasleys were still sitting in a tent outside Potter Manor, but the bulk of the Order were in the office, and they were clamoring to be heard.

"Just what is going on?" shouted someone from the back of the room.

"QUIET!" bellowed Dumbledore. The Order took a step back in shock and stared at the unflappable Headmaster, who sounded seriously flapped. Within half a minute the room settled into silence.

"Alright, then. Amelia was basically correct in ordering us away from the manor house. I don't like it, and I think she is over reacting to the possibility that Miss Weasley, Miss Granger and Mr. Weasley are being held against their will, but there's nothing that can be done about it now. In any event, the Weasleys are still on scene and they will be able to report to me if there is any change in the situation.

"More troubling is the news about Kingsley Shacklebolt. As a member of the Wizengamot, I tried to find out more information concerning what was happening to him and was politely told that the Wizengamot had no jurisdiction within the internal operations of the Ministry."

"Albus, why am I getting the impression that you're holding something back from us?" asked Minerva McGonagall. She was not a core member of the Order, and hence not privy to the kind of life led by Harry Potter or the decisions that led up to that happening.

Dumbledore frowned and leaned back in his chair. "I'm being as honest and open as I can, Professor McGonagall. The Ministry has taken over the case of Harry Potter, and since he is no longer a student here, we can't even claim Hogwarts jurisdiction."

Minerva scowled. "But I don't understand, Albus. Even before the final battle you told us it was important to ensure that Harry did as we told him. Now that he's killed Voldemort, don't you think he has a right to live his life as he wants? Great Merlin! I can understand why you wanted to keep an eye on him while he was a child, but we've been hounding him even after he came of age. He hated us for that. He hated you for trying to interfere in his life. When will we stop?"

A number of the Order members looked at Minerva with surprised respect. She was openly questioning the Headmaster's decisions and she was making sense.

Dumbledore took his glasses off, placed them on his desk and pinched the bridge of his nose tiredly. "What you fail to understand, Minerva, is that this is a most dangerous time for Mr. Potter. He has just killed the Dark Lord and there is a genuine danger that he will step into that role himself."

Minerva looked at Dumbledore incredulously. Clearly she wasn't buying his reasoning, nor were some of the Order members. But for most, a majority, they nodded sagely and agreed with their leader.

"It is necessary," continued Dumbledore in that grandfatherly tone of his, "that we be available to ensure that Harry remains true to the light."

Satisfied, Order members began filtering from his office. Dumbledore started to relax a bit, but he also knew that some of the general membership hadn't bought his explanation, and that worried him.

Hogwarts Library, May 12th, 1998...

The three friends looked around with interest when the mists cleared again. A calendar over the librarian's desk gave the date near the beginning of their NEWTS in early May.

Harry walked into the room. The shimmer, like two images were overlaid, was gone. The merging was apparently complete. Harry placed a large number of books on one of the desks and sat down. Pulling a book from the stack, he began to thumb through it, stopping now and then to take notes.

Hermione walked over to him and read over his shoulder. When she looked up at her friends, her face was pale. "This... these... he's writing down obscure spells that can kill a person, but most of these have an equal chance of killing the caster as well as the victim!"

Ginny and Hermione shared a look, but Ron just shrugged. "I don't know why that surprises you, Hermione. Look at the date. In less than two months he'll fight Voldemort and he's looking for anything he can use to defeat him, even if it means sacrificing himself in the process."

Hermione glared at Ron. "How can you say that about him?"

"He tried to kill himself when he got to the manor, remember?" Ron replied softly.

Hermione's head whipped around to glare at Harry, then back to Ron.

Ginny wrapped her arms around herself. She shuddered at the concept and choked back a sob.

"Look at it from his point of view, Hermione. He's been told he's worthless, a freak. No one wants him. And he's been told he has this destiny... to fight the most powerful dark lord seen in nearly a millennia. He planned on going into that fight and winning, even if he had to give up his life. He went into that fight without having a reason to come out alive. In a perverse way, Dumbledore got exactly what he wanted, even if it didn't happen the way he had hoped. He got his weapon. I think, if I were in his shoes, I'd probably be doing the same thing," Ron said, trailing off pensively.

Hermione moved to a nearby chair and sat down. Ron's words shocked her, and not just because he was right. Dumbledore *had won* in the end.

A noise from the library door caused Harry to look up. Ginny and a group of Gryffindor sixth year girls entered and Harry's eyes locked on Ginny. He seemed unable to tear his gaze away from her. The girls quickly went about getting their books. Once they'd signed them out, they left the library.

"That was Harry all last year, also," Hermione said sadly. "He watched you, Ginny. He watched you all the time. It reminded me of the looks Ron used to give me before he asked me out."

Ginny nodded. "I know," she replied softly. "I felt sure that last year was the year he'd ask me out, but he barely spoke to me." She shook herself angrily. "Damn this war, damn Voldemort and damn Dumbledore," she swore, then she walked over to Harry and crouched down next to him.

Harry's eyes widened as Ginny slowly appeared before his eyes and he recoiled backwards.

"Harry?"

Harry's eyes darted to the still visible form of Ginny Weasley as she left the library, then back to the girl crouched before him. "Angel? Why do you have to look so much like her?" he asked plaintively.

"Why didn't you tell her how you felt, Harry?" she asked, ignoring his question. She wasn't prepared to explain that she wasn't an angel. And this was a question she *had* to get answered.

Harry crossed his arms, placing his hands on his shoulders and his expression grew pained. "I can't," he said quietly. "She's so beautiful, so perfect and if anyone knew how I felt about her, she'd be in danger. If not from Voldemort, then from Dumbledore. Besides, I'm nothing compared to her. I'm not good enough for someone like her."

Ginny flushed and she looked up at Hermione, who motioned for her to keep him talking.

Turning back to Harry, she asked, "Don't you think she's working for Dumbledore?"

"No, she wouldn't do that to me. I have to believe that," he whispered, shaking his head in denial.

"And what about Ron and Hermione?" she pressed.

Harry's expression darkened. "Those two? I wouldn't put it past them."

Ron and Hermione exchanged a hurt look between them.

"Why, Harry?"

"Hermione respects Dumbledore too much. And Ron? He thinks being the Boy-Who-Lived is something to be jealous of," he said, rolling his eyes. "I didn't want to believe they were working for him, but they've been up to the Headmaster's office several times this past month, dozens of times all year."

Hermione looked indignant. "I haven't been to the Headmaster's office..."

"Hush, Hermione. Let me see if I can find out more information," Ginny said before turning back to Harry. "How do you know about this, Harry?"

"The Marauders Map, Angel. I've seen them on the map."

Ron started to sputter.

"Save it, Ron. We can deal with this after we're done here," Hermione snapped.

"Why do you have to look like her, Angel?" Harry asked again.

Ginny winced inwardly. This was a question she wasn't prepared to answer. Harry had revealed things to 'Angel' that he never would have revealed to Ginny and she was afraid that he'd back away from her if he knew the truth. She mulled over a list of possible answers, then opted for one that seemed the best choice for now.

"I can't tell you yet, Harry. But I promise you that someday real soon I'll be able to tell you everything. Hopefully, you'll understand," she replied softly, mentally adding to herself 'and not be too angry with me'.

Harry looked at her blankly for a moment before nodding and she breathed a sigh of relief. She knew she'd have a lot of explaining to do when they finally came out of this vision thing they were in.

Hermione pulled out her wand and cast a memory diagnostic charm on herself. It was a fairly basic charm, but it would reveal the presence of altered memories caused by spells. She looked at the small diagnostic readout floating above her wand and scowled.

"Hermione?" Ron asked, noticing her angry look.

"There's evidence of at least one *Imperio* us curse and multiple *Obliviate* s. This has to be the work of Dumbledore and the Order!"

Ron walked over and knelt down next to her, enfolding her in his arms. "We'll get this straightened out, Hermione. I promise!" he said firmly.

Ginny leaned closer to Harry. "Do you trust me, Harry?" she asked.

"Of course I do, Angel."

"Then believe me when I tell you that you weren't the only one betrayed. Hermione and Ron didn't agree to spy on you. They wouldn't do that to you. If they were spying on you, it's because they were forced into it."

"Yes..." Harry trailed off in thought for a moment, then his expression darkened. "I wouldn't put that past Dumbledore at all."

"Ron and Hermione both love you like a brother, Harry. They'd give their lives to protect you. Hermione was especially hurt when you shut her out," she replied softly.

Harry looked ashamed. "I didn't want to, but I didn't know who to trust anymore. Dumbledore was turning everyone against me. And then I saw their names in his office on the map," he said, then his expression turned doubtful. "Ron and Hermione love me? Why?"

Ginny leaned back on her heels and thought furiously. "Oh, sweetie, they love you because you truly are a good person. You could have turned into another Voldemort. You and he were raised in a similar manner, but you didn't. He turned out evil and ugly and no matter how hard things got for you, you remained good. Ron and Hermione love and miss you terribly. They want you back in their lives, they need you back. You're Hermione's best friend, Harry, and she misses you terribly."

Harry looked down at the books on the table and shook his head. "I've hurt them so badly," he whispered. "Will they ever forgive me?"

"Yes! Just come back to us, Harry. We need you!" Hermione snapped at him from the shelter of Ron's arms.

Harry blinked in surprise at hearing a disembodied Hermione snapping at him.

"They'll forgive you, Harry. They understand now why you did what you did."

Staring at the red haired beauty crouched before him, he smiled. "Thank you Angel."

Ginny stood and walked over to Hermione and Ron to talk to them for a moment. As she did, the mists rose to obscure everything from view.

Outside Potter Manor...

Fred and George Weasley sat off to one side of the comfortable interior of the tent and watched the scene unfolding before them. Without Dumbledore present, Molly was in a state of near panic and Arthur had his hands full trying to keep her calm.

Minister Bones was busy speaking with several Aurors, but even she was keeping an eye on the two adult Weasleys. Something was clearly wrong.

Fred nudged George and they stood and walked over to where Arthur and Molly were sitting. Behind them were Bill and Charlie, who were curious about what the twins intended.

Arthur looked up in surprise at the grim faces of his four sons.

"Dad, I don't know what you two have done," said Fred seriously.

"But it's time for you to come clean about it," finished George.

Molly looked up at her sons in righteous indignation. "How dare you suggest we've done anything wrong?"

“Oh, really? Then the Ministry kicked the Order out of this tent because they were merely trespassing? I've overheard the Aurors. Shackbolt has been relieved of his duties and is facing criminal charges. Tonks is facing a review board and probable criminal charges, and the Minister sponsored a bill to remove Dumbledore as Supreme Mugwump today! Now what is it that the Order did that was so bad?” demanded Charlie angrily.

With each statement Molly's complexion paled further and she sagged against Arthur. Amelia watched the family conversation with interest. Charlie had made no attempt to be discrete.

“Boys, there are things you don't understand,” protested Arthur.

“What we don't understand,” said George angrily.

“Is why our parents are acting like criminals,” snarled Fred.

Charlie and Bill looked at the twins fondly.

“I love you two, but it will take all day if we have to listen to you both,” Bill said, before turning to his parents.. “Look, I don't know what you've done, but I do know it's not going to go well for you if you keep hiding it. And I want to know why you're suddenly chasing Harry like he's an animal to be caged. We've been treating him like family, for Merlin's sake! Hell, if Ginny has her way, he *will* be family!”

Arthur released his wife and looked hard at his sons. He was proud of them all. He looked over at his wife and knew he'd have to be strong for her sake, as well as the family. “Fred, ask Minister Bones to join us,” he said quietly.

“Arthur! You can't!” Molly protested.

“Molly, what kind of parents are we when we raise our sons to be honest and do the right thing, yet don't follow our own teachings? Shall we just tell them to shut up and do as we say and not as we do?” Arthur asked intently.

Molly gasped and clutched at his arm. She leaned against him and closed her eyes for a moment. “You're right,” she whispered.

Arthur looked across the tent towards Minister Bones and squared his shoulders. “Minister, I think you might want to listen to this,” he said quietly, wrapping what little dignity this affair had left him about himself.

Riddle Ancestral Home, Little Hangleton, August 1st, 1998...

The mists cleared much slower than before.

They were outside and it was dark. A thick fog loomed around them, but they could clearly see the small run down home only a short distance away. Behind them, a path wound down a gully towards what looked like a village cemetery. There was a distinctly uneasy appearance about the location and the three friends moved closer together, as if seeking comfort and protection.

All three jumped when they heard a booming sound and the air about the building flickered wildly before flaring once, then fading entirely. From their vantage point they could see Harry standing in front of the door to the house.

“He apparated through anti-apparation shields!” Hermione exclaimed. “He tore them apart like a hot knife through butter.”

Ron moved closer to Hermione, placing a hand on her shoulder. “This is it. He's showing us the final battle.”

Ginny shivered and wrung her hands. “We can't do anything to help him,” she moaned.

All three friends quieted as Harry lifted a long staff and used it to knock on the door. With each successive rap on the door the tip of the staff grew brighter and brighter. At the fifth knock there was a powerful explosion and the Riddle Ancestral home ceased to exist. The house literally flashed to splinters and blew in the general direction of the cemetery in the gully below. The home was leveled to the first floor. There was a moment of shocked silence and from the rubble below came the moans and cries of injured Death Eaters. Then Harry spoke.

“Knock, knock! Come out, come out, where ever you are...” Harry said in a sing song voice. A door leading to the basement banged open and from it poured dozens of Death Eaters, most out of their customary uniforms, having been caught by surprise.

The Death Eaters seemed shocked to find themselves facing only Harry. Several looked around anxiously for the Aurors or the Order. Potter would have to be insane to try to take on the Dark Lord all by himself. And yet, there he was.

Peter Pettigrew was the first to try anything. “*Avada Kedavra* !” he shouted. Harry smiled thinly and demonstrated a skill he had been extensively drilled in over the past year; deflection. With a gesture of his staff, a beam of light arced out and collided with the incoming killing curse. The collision caused the killing curse to change direction. Walden McNair gasped in surprise when the curse slammed into his chest, then he fell limply to the floor.

“Oops,” smirked Harry, “Tsk, tsk, Peter. Is that any way to pay back the life debt you owe me?”

Peter paled and glanced between McNair's still form and Harry.

Harry gestured again with his staff and another spell arced out in Peter's direction.

Pettigrew started to duck the spell when he realized it was going to miss him. He relaxed, which was a mistake on his part.

The spell stopped directly over Pettigrew and there was a flash of black light. A scream began, only to be horribly cut off.

Everyone turned to see a red smear where Pettigrew once stood.

"He crushed Wormtail, Harry's mastered the gravitational constant," Hermione muttered in awe.

"Huh?" Ron asked.

"Later, Ron," she replied absently. She was intent upon the battle shaping up before them.

The sound of clapping turned them back toward Harry and the impending battle.

"Bravo! Bravo!" came a voice from below.

Harry smiled. "I wondered when you'd show yourself, Tom."

Voldemort emerged from the basement and stared at the wreckage that used to be his ancestral home. "Well, I did think the old place was due for remodeling, but don't you think that was a bit extreme, Harry?"

"Not really, Tommy. It was old, ugly and stank like an unwashed armpit."

The two men stared angrily at each other for a moment and several of the Death Eaters raised their wands.

"So, the great Lord Voldemort is incapable of handling one wizard by himself? What do you say to the idea of leveling the playing field, Tommy? EVANESCO!" Harry shouted. His staff flared and a second later only Voldemort and Harry remained on the field.

"Where did you send my people?" snarled Voldemort.

Harry laughed. "Right about now your 'people' are learning what hell is like. I banished them to the magma chamber under Mount Etna. Didn't you know? That's where all the garbage is sent when household banishing charms are used."

The three friends gasped in surprise when they realized that Harry had, in one move, take out the Dark Lord's entire army. And he had used a simple household cleaning charm to do it!

Voldemort's eyes flared redly and he raised his wand.

Both men fired curses simultaneously before attempting to dodge. The friends gasped as Harry rolled to one side and sent off another curse. He had been grazed by Voldemort's first shot and was bleeding heavily from a gash in his cheek.

But his wasn't the only injury. Voldemort's left arm hung limply at his side.

Voldemort hurled a fireball. Harry dodged, then summoned some of the debris from Riddle's house, which caught Voldemort unaware. He was knocked to the ground by the piece of a door and a large cut appeared on his side. Harry rolled again, avoiding the debris that flew past Voldemort and the Dark Lord hurled several curses at him. Harry staggered to his feet and spun several times, getting hit with heavy bludgeoning spells.

The three friends stood in terror as they watched their friend fight for his life. The spells being cast were brutal in the extreme. Bone crushing hexes, hexes which caused organs to explode and skin to peel from the body. The two combatants fought like demons and the night sky lit up with the light of spell fire.

Spells bounced off shields or were dodged. The ground behind the two opponents exploded and shuddered with the impact of hundreds of lethal hexes. Occasionally, a curse struck its target, but neither opponent seemed to have an advantage over the other.

The ground rocked and the sky flashed with multicolored lightening. Then it happened. It was sheer chance, but that's all it took.

In an effort to dodge a curse, Voldemort slipped slightly in his own blood and the curse Harry sent his way hit, though not where it was aimed. In an instant, Voldemort's arm was vaporized, along with his wand. Screaming in agony, he pitched to his knees.

Harry watched him carefully for a moment, then raised his staff high and slammed it into the ground. He muttered a long incantation and the ground lit up as though it was on fire. The strange glow surrounded Voldemort and he screamed repeatedly as his body began to smoke.

Voldemort's skin blackened and his clothing flashed to flame. "Please, Harry," he croaked piteously. He fell onto his belly and tried to crawl one handed towards Harry to beg for mercy.

"I'm sorry, Tom, but for the good of all, this must be done," Harry whispered. There were tears streaming down his face.

Hermione closed her eyes in anguish. "After everything Voldemort's done to him, he still weeps for him," she said hoarsely.

"Harry's no monster, Hermione. I know he's mourned every death since his parents," Ginny replied, closing her own eyes in an attempt to stop her tears.

"Rest in peace, Tom Riddle," Harry whispered.

Voldemort gave one more anguished cry and then collapsed against the ground silent. His body continued to burn, growing hotter until little was left except for ash and a burn mark in the shape of a human form.

Harry stood a few feet away, swaying and trying to steady himself using his staff. Around the area wisps of light formed and moved closer. Slowly the lights took forms and the three gasped, spotting the shades of people they knew and people they didn't.

Harry blinked owlishly at the shades that were now clustering around the ash pile of Voldemort.

"Mum? Dad? Siri?" he whispered.

Three of the spirits turned to him. Harry fell to his knees and began to weep, leaning heavily against his staff in an effort to remain upright. "I've avenged you!" he cried weakly.

One shade broke from the group and floated over to Ginny, Hermione and Ron.

It was Lily Potter.

Lily turned to look at her son with longing, then turned back to Ginny. "My child, do you know what you must do?"

Ginny raised her head, her expression determined. "I know what must be done," she said firmly. Turning away, she walked to Harry.

Hermione and Ron moved to follow, but Lily stopped them. "You must not. This is her task. In a way, she is as much a child of prophecy as my son. Now she must complete her task."

Ginny knelt next to the exhausted young man. "Harry, you must listen to me," she said firmly.

Harry looked up at her. "Angel? Ginny?"

"Harry, you must leave this place. Dumbledore is coming!" she said.

"Let him," he replied with a sigh. "I'm so tired, Angel. Or are you Ginny? I just want it to end."

"If you don't leave here, Harry, it won't end," she told him, trying to fight her tears. She knew full well what he'd do when he left this place. "Dumbledore will get a hold of you. You'll be healed and forced to do what he wants," she hissed angrily.

"But... but I have no place to go."

"Yes, you do. Go to Potter Manor, Harry. You know where it is, it's in your blood. The Manor will protect you and let you complete your task."

In the distance, she could hear the sound of wizards apparating in and shouting to each other.

"Harry you must hurry," she urged.

Nodding, he reached out to touch her but didn't have the strength. "I've always loved you, Ginny, since your first year at school. I'll do what you say," he whispered, and then he vanished without a sound.

Ginny stood and walked back to her friends. Ron wrapped his arms around her and she wept in his embrace.

The three watched as the wizards swarmed into the area. Several of the shades approached Amelia Bones and some of the others to explain what had happened.

Not a single specter approached Dumbledore.

"Voldemort is dead! Harry Potter killed him!" shouted one of the Aurors.

Lily Potter turned from the scene and looked at Ginny, smiling gently. "Well done, child. You have started his healing. Now it's time to complete it."

The mists swirled around the three and the battlefield receded.

Inside Potter Manor...

Ginny slowly opened her eyes. She was gloriously warm and comfortable. She blinked at the strange surroundings and it took a moment for her to make the connection of where she was. She was in a bed and from her position she could see another bed with Ron and Hermione huddled on it. Both were just waking up and taking stock of where they were.

She made to move and then froze. There was an arm thrown over her and she could feel someone spooning up behind her. She turned her head enough to see the unruly black hair. She was in bed with Harry! As carefully as she could, she turned in his embrace. She searched his face, but for the first time in a long time he seemed to be sleeping peacefully.

Hermione and Ron sat up on their bed and looked over at the two. Ginny waved them to be quiet.

"He'll wake up soon, and I fear I must go before he does," said the ghost of Lily Potter.

"Must you?" begged Ginny. "He knows so little of you."

"I must. Fate will not allow us to meet in this lifetime, but I am content. He will know a great love and together you will become legend," Lily said softly. Then she turned to Hermione and Ron.

"Friends like you are worth more than all the wealth in the world. Harry has begun to heal. Thanks to your love and friendship, he will complete the process. Live and love well, my children. Know that your lives will be blessed." she said. Then, with a gentle smile, she faded away.

The three exchanged a glance, then Ginny turned back to Harry as he stretched a little and his eyelids fluttered.

He slowly opened his eyes and looked around, confused. Then his gaze settled on Ginny.

"Angel?" he whispered. "Am I dead?"

"No, love, you aren't dead. And you won't die if I have anything to say about it," she said, tightening her arms around him.

Harry's eyes widened. "It was you all the time, Ginny?"

She nodded, though she had the grace to blush.

"It was all of us," Hermione said softly. She and Ron had moved from the bed they had been placed on, and were now standing beside the bed.

When Harry blinked wildly and looked around, Hermione gently placed his glasses on his face.

"You all saw what Ang...er, what Ginny saw?" he asked.

The three friends realized he was trying hard not to show any emotion and all three were afraid he'd begin to backslide on them. Ginny, taking matters into her own hands, reached out, grasped his chin and forced him to look at her.

"We had to know in order to help you. I promise you, Harry, we three will never leave you. We're family, the four of us."

Harry trembled in her embrace and she pulled him in closer. He closed his eyes and rested his head on her shoulder.

He remained silent for a moment, then great, wracking sobs echoed through the silent room. Ginny tightened her embrace and, an instant later, Ron and Hermione joined them on the bed. They held tightly to each other, weeping for everything that had been lost and gained.

When they finally drew apart, Harry looked at his two best friends uncertainly. "Ron, Hermione... I'm so sorry..."

Hermione pulled Harry into a hug, stopping him from saying another word. "Don't you say it, Harry Potter. We were all fooled by Dumbledore. It was his actions that caused the problems between us."

Harry stared into Hermione's eyes for a moment, then nodded. He glanced over at Ron. "Alright there, mate?"

Ron's face flushed and Harry was certain from experience he was about to receive a Weasley temper tantrum, but Ron just shook his head and grinned at him. "Honestly, Harry, you're laying about in bed with my little sister wrapped around you tighter than your pajamas and now you're groping my girlfriend? Can't you make up your mind?"

Harry stared at him for a long moment, before he began to laugh.

It was a sound the three friends hadn't heard in a long time, and they soon joined him.

Shaking her head in amusement, Hermione grabbed Ron's hand. "Honestly, Ron! You should know by now that Harry always thought of me as a sister. Now, let's go find something for all of us to eat. I think your sister wants to have a few words with Harry and we don't need to be here for that."

Ron followed Hermione off the bed, then stopped to look back at Harry. "You'll be here when we get back?" he asked quietly.

"I'm not going anywhere," he replied.

Harry watched the two leave the bedroom, then he turned back to Ginny, who still had an arm draped over his stomach. She lay beside him, watching him carefully.

Harry lay back carefully. Now that the shock of waking up among his friends had worn off, he realized just how sore he was. He closed his eyes and was silent for a long moment. Ginny lay next to him, relaxing her grip on him and unsure what to say next.

"All my life, whenever things got really bad, I dreamed of the angel who comforted me. Do you know how many times I thought about killing myself and then changed my mind because I thought I wouldn't see my angel again? And then I met you, Ginny, and you looked like her. I thought that maybe it was just a coincidence, you know? That maybe a real angel didn't have a form, so they took the form of someone you knew. But as you got older, you looked more and more like the angel that visited me when I was at my lowest points..."

"I honestly don't know if I fell in love with Ginny Weasley because she looked like my angel, or I fell in love with my angel because she looked like Ginny Weasley. I don't think it matters either. I just know I don't want to be alone anymore, Ginny. All last year I watched you. I wanted to touch you. I wanted to be held by you and I knew I couldn't."

Harry turned slightly and opened his eyes to look at her. He was surprised to see fresh tears falling silently from her eyes and he gently moved to

wipe them away.

Ginny blinked her eyes clear and smiled gently as he turned in her arms to face her. She leaned over and before he could say another word, she kissed him. Harry surprised her by pulling her closer until she was sprawled out on top of him.

The kiss started out gentle and tentative, but quickly flashed white hot.

She melted against him and was surprised by the depth of passion he was invoking in her. She was still fully clothed, but he wasn't and she could feel his arousal throbbing against her despite his injuries. His reaction only fueled her own and her hands wandered over his body lightly, ever mindful of his wounds.

Eventually they had to come up for air and the kiss broke. Ginny and Harry stared at each other, panting, their hearts racing.

"That was even better than I thought it would be," he gasped.

Ginny sighed contentedly and carefully rolled so that she lay next to him. Harry leaned back and rested his head against his pillow. When she moved closer and put her head on his shoulder, he smiled.

"Harry?"

"Hmmm?"

"Where do we go from here?"

"Honestly? I'm not sure. This is new territory for me. What would a guy do at a moment like this? Do you think I should ask Ron? No, forget that idea."

"Harry?"

"Hmmm?"

"You're rambling," she said with a husky laugh.

He grinned at her. "I suppose I am," he said, then he sighed and his expression grew sad. "Are you sure you want to get involved with me, Ginny? You know how I was raised. I don't think I even know what love is..."

Ginny frowned at him. "Yes, Harry, I know how you were raised. And I know how people have been treating you all your life. It's my intention to change all that from here on, so you better get used to it, Mr. Potter. First, we have to get you to a healer to finish the job we started. When that's done, we're going to figure out what you're doing with your life beside spending it with me."

Harry nodded and when he yawned, she smiled at him. "Sleep is what you need the most of right now, though. I'll go find Ron and Hermione and see if we can figure out how to bring a healer to you."

Harry nodded sleepily and closed his eyes. Ginny waited for a few minutes before she kissed his forehead and then climbed out of the bed.

She was looking out the bedroom window towards the tent in the field when Ron and Hermione returned to the bedroom with food and tea. Ron handed Ginny a plate.

"Is he sleeping?" Hermione asked quietly.

Ginny nodded and dug hungrily into the food Ron had given her. "He needs a healer still, but he's much better," she said, hastily swallowing some food before talking.

Ron looked at her and she couldn't help blushing.

"I bet he is," Hermione murmured, trying hard not to laugh. Then she peered out the window as a group of people exited the tent. "Isn't that Minister Bones?" she asked.

"Yeah, that's her, alright," Ron replied, looking down at the people below. Then he seemed to hesitate. "I don't see any of the Order. Just Minister Bones and a bunch of people I don't know."

Ginny decided to seize the moment and grabbed Ron by the arm. "Ron, run down there and ask for Minister Bones and a Healer to come into the house."

Hermione looked surprised, then agreed with Ginny. "Of course! The Minister would help. She and Dumbledore have never been more than slight allies and they have been opposed on several issues."

Ron nodded and left the room at a dead run.

Outside Potter Manor...

Amelia stepped from the tent and turned to the Auror in charge. "I want you to make sure that no one approaches the Manor, not even our people..."

“Look!” someone shouted.

Amelia turned in time to see Ronald Weasley leave the house and run towards the tent at a fast trot. Several of the Aurors pulled their wands.

“Stand down,” barked Amelia, glaring at them.

Ron ran toward Amelia and skidded to a halt once he'd reached her. He suddenly realized that he was surrounded by people.

“Mr. Weasley, can I presume things are better than they were in the house?” Amelia asked coolly.

Ron scowled. “Yes and no, Minister. I was sent out here to ask if you could help Harry before Dumbledore got his claws into him again.”

Amelia's expression softened and she nodded. “Very well, Mr. Weasley. How can I assist Mr. Potter?”

“He needs a healer, Madam Minister, and I think he needs to talk to someone from Magical Law Enforcement. However, he doesn't know who to trust right now, other than yourself,” Ron said seriously.

Amelia nodded, then turned to one of her people. “Get the healer out here now and get me a witness pensieve,” she snapped.

Two of the Aurors scrambled into the tent to retrieve the healer. As they did, Ron's brothers and parents exited the tent.

Ron spotted his parents and scowled at them. Amelia placed a hand on his arm. “Your parents have confessed to what's been happening, Mr. Weasley. They have agreed to help us in the investigation.”

Ron nodded, still glaring at his parents.

Molly was wrapped in Arthur's arms and she seemed almost afraid to look at him.

“Ron,” Arthur began.

“Don't,” Ron replied harshly, interrupting him. “The only reason why I don't completely hate you both is that I know for a fact that you've only been involved for a few years and didn't know the extent of what the Order put Harry through before you joined. I may be able to forgive you some day, but I doubt Ginny ever will. Right now she's up there cradling the injured man she loves, the man she's going to marry, if she has any say in it, and she knows the whole tale, from the beatings and starvation in the cupboard, to using our family to keep him pacified.”

Ron's brothers blinked in surprise and glared at their parents. Fred muttered under his breath.

“Someone is injured?” asked a man dressed in healer green.

“Yeah, up in the house. Minister, if you and your healer would follow me?” Ron asked tensely.

Inside Potter Manor...

Ginny and Hermione watched silently from the window as Ron ran from the room.

“What are you thinking, Ginny?” asked Hermione.

Ginny stared silently out the window for a moment, her eyes unfocused. She wrapped her arms around herself. “I think he's going to be a long while recovering, but he will recover. Harry's always had this child like innocence about him. I can see it's still there, even now. I think he'll be fine, so long as he has people around him that are willing to show they love and trust him,” she said gently.

Hermione laid a hand on her friend's shoulder. “We'll always be here for him, Ginny. I think your brothers will also. Merlin knows Fred and George love him.”

Ginny smiled at the thought of her two brothers. Those clowns had been the first of the Weasley clan to come out and say Harry was as good as family. Ginny turned to look over at the bed where he lay, sleeping.

“Mrs. Potter told me his tasks aren't complete, that killing Voldemort was merely one of his jobs. I don't know what his other tasks are going to be, but I don't intend to let him do them alone anymore. He's given too much for our world...”

Both girls turned when the door to the bedroom opened again and Ron entered, bringing with him a healer and Minister Bones. Ron pointed to the bed and the healer immediately crossed over to it. Ron ushered the Minister to a table and the girls joined them.

“Miss Granger, Miss Weasley, are you two alright?” asked the Minister.

Ginny nodded for Hermione to speak. She had more to say than Ginny did.

“We're fine, now, Minister. We haven't been held against our will. We've spent the last few days reliving memories with Harry, key events in his life, several of which could have resulted in Harry turning into another Dark Lord. We also discovered that Ronald and myself have been routinely memory charmed, probably by Headmaster Dumbledore. Ginny needs to be tested for memory charms, as well.”

Amelia Bones frowned and conjured parchment, quill and ink. She started taking notes as Ginny, then Hermione and Ron, filled her in on their

experiences since entering the mansion. Nearby, the Healer worked on Harry, finishing the job the three had started.

After nearly two hours of questions and answers, the healer interrupted them. Ginny looked up worriedly as the healer approached, but his smile was enough to reassure her.

"Minister? Mr. Potter is doing much better. These three should be commended for their healing work. They took care of several dangerous wounds and made him considerably more comfortable. He needs to remain in bed for the rest of today and tomorrow, then he can move about, so long as someone is with him for another day or two. There was an infection, which I've cleared up, and I've left several pain killing potions next to his bed for him to take, as needed.

"I would also strongly suggest he see one of St. Mungos cosmetic healers. There is considerable scarring on his back. They're very old wounds, probably from as far back as childhood, and they healed badly. The cosmetic healers can do a lot these days to make those scars less noticeable."

"I'll mention it to him, but unless the healers promise to be completely discrete, I don't see it happening," Ginny told him seriously.

The healer looked at Ginny for a moment in surprise. Something in her reply and her attitude screamed 'family member', even if Harry had no family. With a mental shrug, he nodded and excused himself.

Amelia watched the three friends, surprised at how protective they seemed to be of Harry. It was as if they'd appointed themselves his guardians. Then again, she mused, Harry hadn't had many people willing to be in his corner and stand up for him.

"Madam Bones?" Harry said weakly from the bed.

Amelia turned to face the bed. Before she could stand, Ginny was by his side. He smiled gently at her and caressed her hand.

Amelia walked over to his bedside and did something very uncharacteristic. She smiled down at him gently.

Ron brought a chair over so she could sit down and she nodded her thanks. Once seated, she turned back to the young man on the bed. "You should rest, Mr. Potter. You've been through a terrible ordeal. Your friends here have been telling me about it and the injustices committed against you," she said softly.

Harry waved a hand impatiently and made a move to sit up.

Ginny pressed him firmly back into the bed. "No getting up yet, Harry. Those are the healer's orders and you're going to follow them."

Harry looked up at her in bemusement. "Alright Ginny," he said softly. The look the two exchanged was embarrassing to the others.

Turning to Amelia, Harry looked at her thoughtfully for a moment. "I take it Ginny, Hermione and Ron have filled you in on the sordid details of my life, Madam Minister?" he asked.

"Yes, we've been telling her. You aren't the only one who's had crimes committed against him. Both Ron and Hermione have been obliterated illegally," Ginny said quietly.

"Minister, as much as I want Dumbledore to pay for what he's done to me and my friends, making him pay would tear our world apart, wouldn't it?" Harry asked tiredly.

Amelia sighed heavily. This was something that had been worrying her since the whole business had begun.

"Yes, Mr. Potter, you are correct. Albus Dumbledore is seen by many as a hero, much like yourself. He defeated Grindelwald and is a respected leader of the light and of our world. To prosecute him would divide us. Families would be split, friends would turn against each other. While I care little for my position as Minister, it could easily topple the government."

Harry nodded knowingly, but his friends looked startled. "Minister, if you can give me a few moments alone with my friends, I might have a suggestion that would allow us to avoid all that possible unpleasantness."

Amelia looked relieved and stood up. Walking back to the table, she sat back down and began to collect her notes. From the corner of her eye she watched as Harry talked with his friends in a low tone. At first all three seemed to be completely against what he was saying. Slowly, however, he managed to bring them around to his point of view.

The last holdout was Miss Weasley, who seemed to be dead set against whatever Harry was proposing. Harry finally reached out and gently grabbed her with both hands holding her cheeks. She stared at him, startled. When he spoke to her, her features softened. Finally both were shedding tears and she embraced him. Ron and Hermione watched the pair and smiled. It was a very private moment, but Ron and Hermione were family.

The Great Hall, Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry...

Dumbledore sat at the head table eating breakfast with those staff members still in the castle during the summer holiday break and considered his options. Shacklebolt and Tonks had been both relieved of duty and arrested according to his sources. Several other members of the Order had vanished from sight. He suppressed a growl. All that he had worked for seemed to be vanishing. The Weasleys were still at Potter Manor and he hadn't heard from them.

He was relying upon them to keep him informed of what was happening. He still intended to grab Potter and bring him to Hogwarts before the

Ministry could get their hands on him.

The summer had seen the end of the Dark Lord in a most unexpected manner. Harry Potter had killed Voldemort and, apparently, all of his Death Eaters. Pure blood society was still reeling from the number of prominent members that were missing. Whispers that so and so was a follower of You Know Who only cause others to shake their heads. Potter had vanquished Voldemort's army and so far only two bodies have been found. One was Walden McNair. The other had been too crushed to identify.

"Minerva, it looks like Oliver is going to play keeper for England at the world cup this year," piped Filius Flitwick.

Minerva looked suitably smug, while Snape looked on sourly. There hadn't been a single Slytherin recruited into the professional leagues in nearly seven years. Snape knew why, too. In a word, Potter. When he'd joined the Gryffindor team they'd become unstoppable. Even after he'd left the team they continued to outshine every house they played against. As a result, Gryffindor had been the only team scouted for nearly four years.

"I knew that boy would do well," Minerva said proudly.

Snape snorted and Minerva turned to glare at him.

"Now, Severus, let Minerva have her moment of house pride. It is no mean accomplishment to be England's keeper at the world cup. Take pride in the fact that he was once your student, as well," Dumbledore said absently. His mind was still on other matters.

The doors to the Great Hall opened and Dumbledore's eyes narrowed when he saw Minister Bones walk in, followed by a large number of Aurors. All conversation at the table ceased as the Minister approached.

Dumbledore stood. "Good morning, Minister Bones. Would you care to join us for breakfast?"

Amelia looked at the leader of the light for a moment, then shook her head. "Thank you, but no, Headmaster. I'm here on official business."

"In that case, perhaps we should take this to my office?"

Amelia shook her head again. "That won't be necessary, Headmaster. Our business together will be brief," she replied.

Turning to face one of the professors, she smiled thinly. "Severus Snape, I place you under arrest for the crimes of mind rape and illegal use of memory charms on a minor. You are also being charged with conspiracy to commit murder," Amelia said coldly. As she spoke, several Aurors moved around the table to come up from behind Snape, while still others held him at wand point.

"Murder?" Dumbledore thundered. "Who?"

"James and Lily Potter," Amelia told him.

"That's impossible," protested Snape. "I did nothing against the Potters!"

Amelia looked at the Potion Master coldly. "We have evidence that clearly shows you gave Voldemort the Prophecy, which resulted in the murder of the Potters. I suggest you save your protests for your trial, Snape."

"Minister! I must protest!" exclaimed Dumbledore, standing. Snape, paler than normal, looked at Dumbledore hopefully.

Amelia turned to Dumbledore and placed several pieces of parchment in front of him. "Headmaster, those are copies of testimonies given under truth serum by Mr. Ronald Weasley, Miss Hermione Granger, Miss Ginevra Weasley and Mr. Harry Potter. There is enough material in these documents to put you in Azkaban for several life terms, or perhaps even earn you the kiss.

"Mr. Potter has offered to not press charges against you for your crimes, and so have the others, but only under the following conditions. You will resign your post as Supreme Mugwump, as well as your position as Headmaster, effective immediately. You will retire from public life. If you do so, you will be allowed to live the remainder of your life unfettered." When Dumbledore puffed out his chest and leaned towards her menacingly, she held up a hand. "I will add that I find Mr. Potter's offer far more generous than I think you deserve, Albus. His testimony alone would have resulted in your being kissed.

"Personally, despite our having had our differences, I never would have thought you would have fallen so low. Your actions are a disgrace, a stain on the good name of Hogwarts and on the Wizarding Community. It was utterly reprehensible, the pain and torment you put that child through. If I didn't think it would hurt our community, I would be arresting you here today." She glared at him so fiercely, he actually leaned away from her.

"Unfortunately for Snape" she continued, "he is not being offered any such protection and will be prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law. A whole generation of Hogwarts students will remember and cheer this day, seeing justice finally done."

Dumbledore paled and sat down heavily. Amelia pushed two documents and a quill in front of him. "These are the instruments of your resignation. All you need do is sign them," she said coldly.

Dumbledore glanced over in time to see a stunned Snape being manacled and his confidence fled. With a trembling hand, he reached out and picked up the quill, signing both documents. Then he leaned back on his chair, suddenly feeling very old.

Amelia rolled up the two documents, then turned to the shocked Deputy Headmistress. "Professor McGonagall, I have spoken with the Board of Governors this morning and they agree that you will assume Professor Dumbledore's position as Headmistress of Hogwarts. Professor Flitwick will become your deputy. If you have any further questions, please feel free to contact my office, or the Board of Governors."

"I understand," Minerva whispered, though she clearly didn't. Everything was happening too fast.

"Mr. Dumbledore," Amelia said, "these Aurors will escort you to your former office so that you may remove your personal effects, as well as your quarters for the same purpose. They will then escort you from the school grounds. Please be sure to let us know where we can reach you. You may be called as a witness to Mr. Snape's trial." Turning away, she nodded to the Aurors that had Snape in custody.

One prodded Snape with his wand and the former professor shuffled from the Great Hall, followed closely by his captors and the Minister of Magic. Several other Aurors stayed behind, watching Dumbledore tremble in his chair.

Harry's Hogsmeade house (Six Months Later)...

"Do I have to do this, Ginny?" Harry asked.

"No, Harry, you don't have to do this. But you remember what the Empath said about confronting your problems? This is just another way of doing so."

Harry hung his head and nodded slightly. The last few months had been especially hard on him. Ginny and Hermione had spent as much time as they could trying to help him overcome the issues brought on by the Dursleys.

Harry sat thinking about it. He had agreed to do an interview with Luna for the Quibbler. She was in her final year at Hogwarts and working part time for her father at his paper. The Quibbler had become much more respectable in the years since the Rita Skeeter article. The real move towards respectability came when the Quibbler published the first ever verified photographs of the Crumple Horned Snorkack.

The door opened and Harry impulsively gripped Ginny's hand. They had been married barely a month ago and this was a milestone event for Harry. Meeting and talking with Luna about his life as a child growing up on Privet Drive had been suggested by the Ministry Empath. He felt that Harry could benefit from sharing the experience, and meeting with an old friend would perhaps help as well.

Luna walked into the room followed by Minerva McGonagall, now Headmistress of Hogwarts. Luna and Minerva had been warned prior to their arrival that Harry was still a bit jumpy, so they both approached him cautiously.

Luna walked over to Harry first. She wore a sad smile on her face and she looked at him with an expression of regret.

"Harry, I'm glad you allowed me to visit with you. I told Neville that you'd get better. And I'm glad you finally found your angel," she said.

Harry looked at Luna and shook his head in surprise. Only Ginny, Ron and Hermione knew about his 'Angel', or the fact that he still sometimes called Ginny that.

"I'm pleased to see you doing so well, Harry," murmured Minerva, who looked extremely uncomfortable.

"Please, Professor, Luna, sit," he said, gesturing to nearby chairs. He waited until both had sat down, then an elf appeared and served them tea.

"I don't know what I can say to make you feel more comfortable, Professor. I don't blame you for what happened," he said softly.

Minerva nodded but couldn't find the words needed to reply to him.

"Harry, tell me about this foundation you've started," Luna said soothingly.

Harry smiled for a moment. "The Sirius Black Foundation is dedicated to ensuring the welfare of Wizarding children, and more specifically, Wizarding orphans. We'll have a real orphanage, but it will be used only as a measure of last resort. The primary purpose of the fund is to ensure that all Wizarding children are raised in a loving and safe home..."

For the next two hours Harry answered Luna's questions, sometimes with painful truthfulness. Ginny stayed close to him at all times, and was always available when one of his recollections brought him close to tears.

After Luna and McGonagall left, Harry stood up, exhausted from his ordeal. Emotionally, however, he felt his burden had lifted at least a little. Ginny squeaked in surprise when he lifted her off her feet and carried her into their bedroom, where he made love to her slowly, as if it were the most important thing in the world.

Always before he'd held a part of himself back from her, even during lovemaking. That night, however, he opened himself completely to her and gave her everything. As they moved together, he felt the shadow of all the hate, pain and fear he'd carried with him through the years wash from his soul, leaving him cleansed and, finally, whole.

Number Four Privet Drive (A few days later)...

The sound of breaking glass shocked Petunia Dursley from her sleep.

"MUM!" came a shout from Dudley's room.

Vernon rolled out of their bed and scrambled to put on his slippers and robe, while Petunia did the same.

Vernon glanced out the window and was shocked by what he saw. There was a huge crowd in front of his home. He cringed when he saw they were

wizards! The noise from the crowd was attracting the attention of their neighbors. At the end of the block, two police cars had blocked the road to stop any more vehicles from approaching.

“PIGS!” shouted someone from the crowd. He heard another window downstairs break.

“Child Abusers! Burn them!” shouted voices in the crowd.

A police lorry slowly edged its way up the street, around it was a cordon of uniformed police. The crowd reluctantly gave way to the strangely armed muggles.

Vernon rushed downstairs, fully intent on having the police arrest the crowd that was clearly disturbing the peace on Privet Drive. Petunia and Dudley followed close behind him.

A banging came at his door and Vernon rushed to open it.

“Thank heaven! Officers, arrest those people! They’re vandalizing my home and disturbing the peace!” shouted Vernon, while turning a nauseating shade of puce.

Petunia and Dudley nodded in agreement.

A uniformed officer with ornate shoulder boards stepped into the foyer of number four and looked at the Dursleys for a moment, his disgust obvious. When the man ignored Vernon and merely looked around the Dursley home, Vernon started to steam.

When it became too much for Vernon, he placed himself within inches of officer’s face.

“Officer! I demand you do something immediately...” Vernon’s shouting stopped, only to be replaced by an oddly timid squeak. The ranking policeman had pulled out a wand and was currently holding it directly between Vernon’s eyes.

“Vernon Dursley, Petunia Dursley and Dudley Dursley, you are all under arrest. You are being charged with conspiracy to abuse and mistreat an underage wizard. Go ahead Dursley, resist arrest. I dare you,” the policeman said coldly.

When the Dursleys were escorted to the lorry in manacles, the crowd roared with approval and several of the Aurors, dressed as cops, turned and waved to the crowd.

Luna’s article had helped Harry, and served Ginny’s purpose.

Dumbledore Ancestral Home (One Year After Voldemort’s Death)...

Dumbledore walked slowly to the door. The past year hadn’t been an easy one for him. Aberforth had moved away and the last of the house elves had died, leaving Albus to deal with everything on his own. The deal he had cut with the Ministry required him to refrain from public life, although he still occasionally received letters from former students.

He had expected to be able to retire as the renowned mentor to the Boy-Who-Lived, as well as the slayer of Grindelwald. He had expected his retirement to be filled with parties and people wanting his advice. What he got instead was silence. People remembered him for killing Grindelwald, the previous dark lord, while Harry Potter went down in the history books as the man who killed the most dangerous, most powerful dark lord in a thousand years.

The great Albus Dumbledore, former Supreme Mugwump and Headmaster found himself on the outside looking in. The word from the Ministry was that something had happened that resulted in Dumbledore retiring in disgrace. And although that rumor was never confirmed, the simple fact that his name vanished from Ministry invitation lists provided the confirmation so many needed.

It was late in the day when the knock came at the door, and Albus was careless in his rush to see who had come to visit. So few people spoke to him these days. He threw the door open and there was a flash of light.

When he came to, he found himself tied up, but sitting comfortably in his chair. Blinking, he looked around, surprised and more than a little alarmed that anyone would see fit to attack him.

“Well, well, well. If it isn’t the great Albus Dumbledore,” said a familiar female voice.

The bright light shining in his face dimmed enough for him to see who his attackers were. He took one look and blanched.

“For the past year I’ve had to help my husband come to terms with the disaster you deliberately created for him, old man,” hissed an furious Ginny Potter.

“Mrs. Potter, I’m sure you can understand what we were up against. Why your own...”

“ENOUGH!” she shouted.

Hermione placed an hand on her arm, trying to remind her why they were there.

“Enough of your lies, old man,” Ginny snapped at him, then she stepped back and Bill Weasley moved to the front.

"We're here tonight because we wanted to voice our displeasure over what you did to one of our own. Harry isn't here tonight, and he'll never learn about this evening from us. You, on the other hand, are another matter. You hurt a member of our family. He's a better man than you could ever hope to be, Albus Dumbledore. He didn't want to punish you," Bill said firmly.

"Regrettably for you, we're not quite as mature or as noble as Harry is," Hermione said quietly.

Fred, George and Ron chuckled at her comment.

Bill looked at his future sister in law fondly and nodded. "We're all mighty proud of Hermione. She's managed to do something few others have done. She's merged the healing arts with muggle psychology and, in the process, has invented a whole batch of new spells."

Hermione reached around him, placing a small necklace around his neck. Attached to the necklace was a small plastic cubed shaped pendant.

"I used to admire you," she said, glaring at him. "You were my idol, a hero, but you're little better than Voldemort was."

"This," she said, holding the pendant, "is a memory cube. It's a new invention of mine, similar in nature to a pensieve. Within this cube rests some of the more notable memories of Harry Potter. Events which you will have the distinct pleasure of reliving as if you were Harry. His injuries will become your injuries, his fears, hatreds and terrors will become yours. It's only fair that you discover first hand what you wrought."

She tapped the cube with her wand and Dumbledore's eyes fluttered closed.

"How long will this take, Hermione?" Ron asked, somewhat in awe of his fiancée.

"Three or four hours," she replied with a shrug.

"Are you sure he'll feel everything?" asked Ginny tensely.

Dumbledore's head whipped back and his eye started to blacken.

"I think that answers," said Fred.

"That question," finished George.

Ginny folded her arms across her chest and watched Dumbledore for a moment, a single tear fell down her cheek.

"Ginny? Don't tell me you feel sorry for this git?" asked Ron incredulously.

"No, Ron, I don't. I just wonder if it's enough. He's hurt Harry so badly. How Harry remained as good as he did is a miracle. He could have turned into another Voldemort," she whispered.

Bill stepped over and pulled Ginny into an embrace. "He could have, Ginny, but he didn't. And with you and Hermione and Ron around to help him, he never will. I don't know all he's gone through, but you three have explained enough to bring us here tonight."

Dumbledore moaned and a pair of hand shaped bruises appeared on his neck.

Three hours later, Hermione removed the memory cube from around Dumbledore's neck. The group stole quietly from home and apparated back to Potter manor.

"Are you sure he won't remember who did this to him, Hermione?" asked Bill.

"Trust me, Bill. The last thing the cube did was dump his memories of the day. The memories he relived from Harry are planted so deep in his subconscious he won't be able to consciously access them. He'll have all of Harry's fears and insecurities, and he'll wake up feeling like he's been badly beaten, but that's all," she told him confidently.

The five others nodded and breathed a sigh of relief. If Hermione said it was so, it was.

"I don't know about the rest of you, but Harry's due back from America in a few hours and I want to get some sleep before he arrives," Ginny said with a yawn.

"Did you ever find out what he had to do in America, Ginny?" asked Hermione curiously.

She frowned. "No. I know he didn't want to go. But the American Department of Magic was so insistent he finally told him he'd go if they paid him a thousand galleons an hour and the bloody idiots actually agreed to it!"

Hermione and the others goggled at Ginny, who could only shrug her shoulders. Who could possibly understand anything the Americans did?

Potter Manor, Later that Day...

Soft kisses drifted across the back of her neck and she stretched luxuriously. A hand gently caressed her breast before sliding up to cup her cheek and she tried to suppress a giggle as his breath tickled the back of her neck.

"Mmmmm. I like waking up like that," she said quietly.

And I like waking you up that way, Mrs. Potter," said Harry.

She laughed, while he sat up and climbed out of bed. He walked over to table where a house elf had set out breakfast for the both of them.

Rolling to face him, she watched as he sat down and poured himself a cup of hot tea.

"Did you have a good trip?" she asked.

"It wasn't bad, but you know I hate those international portkeys. It's nice to know that Hermione figured out why I always fall using one, but she still hasn't come up with a solution," Harry said with a shrug, then he picked up a breakfast roll and reached for the jam.

"So what did the Americans want?"

Harry laughed. "Can you believe it? According to the Americans, they, and the rest of the Wizarding world, seem to think I am some sort of expert on dark magic! They had a problem they could have easily solved, but were willing to pay me to tell them how to solve it instead!"

"Well, dear, you did kill the Dark Lord. To some, that's enough to qualify you as an expert."

Harry shook his head and sniffed in disbelief. "I'm no hero. Bloody Yanks still took my advice, though. They paid me for fifty hours work when I only worked thirty. Said the extra twenty was a bonus!"

Ginny sat up and smiled to herself. Harry would never see himself as a hero, no matter what she, or the rest of the world thought about him.

Harry picked up the newspaper. "Say, did you see this? Someone put Dumbledore in the hospital! It says he has no memory of his assailant, but the Prophet says it must have been a band of dark wizards to hurt someone so powerful."

Ginny froze for a moment, then she grinned slightly. "A band of dark wizards in Britain? Be serious! If there are any dark wizards still in Britain, they're all hiding from you."

Harry's eyes narrowed and he looked at his wife suspiciously. Ginny threw on her robe and walked over to the table, where she picked up Harry's roll and bit into it.

"So this is the first you heard about it?"

Ginny nodded and sat down in his lap, wiggling a bit to get comfortable. Harry buried head against her shoulder and thought that there were some things he just didn't want to know about.

Potter Manor, five years later...

Harry sat at his desk in the study and thought about the strange days following his battle with Voldemort. In a way, the battle that followed the battle was more important and more life altering than his struggle with the Dark Lord.

To his surprise, Ron, Hermione and Ginny moved into Potter Manor. Ginny rarely left his side for the rest of the summer that followed, and between the four of them, they formed a unique sort of extended family. Ron and Hermione took over a bedroom a few doors away from Harry's, and Ginny just up and moved into Harry's room. And when Ginny needed to return to school, they all moved back to Harry's house in Hogsmeade.

The weeks following his battle with Voldemort were a difficult mix for Harry. Hermione delved into the healing arts and mixed muggle psychology together. Between Hermione, Ginny and a Ministry assigned Empath, they slowly worked Harry through the emotional trauma of his childhood and helped him learn to deal with things instead of bottling his feelings up.

For Harry, learning to talk about his feelings and sharing them with Ginny and Hermione often left him feeling wrung out and emotionally drained. Ron was the spoiler of the crowd. No matter how difficult things became, he was there to make Harry laugh and remember that life could be fun.

Harry's evenings alone with Ginny opened up a whole new experience for him. The two slowly explored the physical implications of their relationship. They spent many a night just holding each other and talking. And in time, Ginny took Harry by the hand and gave him that most precious of gifts that one lover can give another. By the end of that particular evening, it was Ginny who came away surprised, as Harry took over. He opened his mind to hers, letting her see, in a way no words could describe, how he felt about her. That night she wept for joy in his arms, content and safe in the knowledge that he loved her.

In the months following Voldemort's defeat and the dissolution of the Order of the Phoenix, Harry managed to reconcile with several of the Order members, including his future in-laws. Arthur lost his job at the Ministry and things got very difficult for the elder Weasleys for a while.

Ginny missed her parents, but was struggling with forgiving them herself. She couldn't bring herself to ask Harry to forgive them when she hadn't yet. Surprisingly it was Harry, wanting Ginny to be happy, who made the first moves, though he did so in secret.

He bought the mortgage on the Burrow and told the bank that had been trying to foreclose to stop harassing the Weasleys. A few days after dealing with the bank, he created a portkey and took Ginny, Ron and Hermione to the Burrow. It was a surprise he had spent nearly a month setting up.

The other Weasley men were in attendance, at Harry's request. Molly tried to put a meal together from what remained in her meager larder, but each boy brought with them a dish already cooked. Molly broke down in tears. While Ginny was trying to console her, Harry announced that he had stopped the foreclosure on the Burrow, and that he knew of a job opening at one of the companies he owned, that would be suitable for Arthur if he

wanted it. That announcement managed to achieve one of the greatest moments in Wizarding History: the day silence reigned at the Burrow.

Harry nearly found himself the victim of the infamous Weasley huddle, but he apparated out of the way before everyone could leap on him. The Weasley boys pitched in and gave their parents enough money to tide them over until Arthur started drawing a paycheck again. And when Harry and Ginny announced their wedding plans, it was total pandemonium. Molly broke down and cried, crushing both of them to her.

Harry made peace with several other Order members over the following year, but there existed a strained relationship still between many of them. He made peace with Remus for Sirius and his parent's sake, but the relationship never became what it should have been. Shackbolt was sent to Azkaban, along with Snape. Nymphadora Tonks was relegated to a desk job in the Office of Office Management, just about the worst department in the Ministry.

Harry married Ginny over the Christmas holiday of her seventh year. The separation the couple went through while she attended her final year at Hogwarts was painful for both of them. With Ginny married, Headmistress McGonagall gave her permission to spend her nights in the house in Hogsmeade that Harry owned. Just two years later, when Ginny presented Harry with twin girls, Hermione Molly and Lily Ginevra, he broke down and wept at her bedside. Ginny had fulfilled the promise she had made to herself, to give Harry the one thing he wanted more than anything in life: a family of his own.

"Uncle Harry!" piped a little voice.

Harry looked up in time to see Ron and Hermione's son, Harry Arthur Weasley, run into the room. He smiled and lifted the small boy up into his lap. The bushy haired little red head was practically bouncing with happiness and Harry couldn't help but smile seeing the mix of Hermione and Ron in the three year old.

"Hullo, Harry! Where have you been?"

"Shopping with Mama and Aunt Ginny!" said the little boy excitedly.

Harry glanced over at the door. Ginny stood smiling at him. She was holding one of their twins and Hermione was holding the other. Ginny had given birth just a few months after Harry Arthur had been born. He would have been happy to stop there, but Ginny wanted sons, as well, which explained why his wife was so obviously pregnant again. At their feet were numerous bags.

"Did you get anything good Harry?" he asked the little boy.

"Mama wouldn't let me, but Uncle Fred and Uncle George gave me a few things," the boy whispered conspiratorially.

Hermione frowned and moved to into the room. Harry held up his hand. "He'll be alright, Hermione. You know Fred and George love him too much to give him anything harmful," he said, then he turned to his wife.

"Well, did you spend enough to bankrupt me?" he asked teasingly after noting the pile of bags on the floor. Ginny stuck her tongue out at him and slapped him gently on the arm.

"Yeah, like that's possible. You don't even hold a steady job but these little consultations you go on have earned you almost as much money as you've inherited."

Hermione and Ginny let the girls down and they scampered over to Harry. With a wink, he lifted the boy from his lap and placed him on the floor. He was quickly joined by the two little girls in a game that involved much giggling.

"Speaking of jobs," he muttered and began rooting through his papers.

"Another consultation? The last one took you to Hong Kong for three weeks!" Ginny exclaimed in dismay.

Harry pulled a piece of parchment out from the pile. "Well, no, not really. This one doesn't pay as well as the others, but Ron and I spoke about this for a few hours last night. Seems that Madam Hooch is retiring from her position as flying instructor, and Minerva is looking for a defense teacher again. One she hopes will break the curse on that job."

Ginny and Hermione both sat heavily on the nearby couch and looked at Harry hopefully. "Ron's going to teach flying?" Hermione asked in a squeak.

Harry grinned at her. "Yep! I talked him into it. I know how much you hate him being an Auror and how afraid you are he's going to get hurt. You know that rainy day fund I set up that you've been putting your paychecks into?" he asked.

Hermione nodded and looked at him cautiously. With Hermione and Ron, and little Harry all living under Harry's roof, he had adamantly refused to let them pay for any of the expenses. That, in turn, allowed them to put the bulk of their salaries away in a special fund Harry had set up for them at Gringotts. Now Harry had the look on his face that he normally wore before he pulled a prank on someone and Hermione didn't know whether to be worried or not.

"I had Gringotts set up that fund so that the money was invested into various opportunities. It took me two hours last night to explain to your thick headed husband that, while he might not be the richest wizard in the country, he was very well off and didn't need to volunteer for the dangerous jobs anymore. It would have been so much easier if he weren't so damn proud to take some money from me, but since he wouldn't, I had to work around him... and you. You two could afford your own manor, if you wanted, but to be honest, I like having my family under one roof. In fact, I think...ooph!"

Harry was silenced by Hermione hurling herself into his arms. He grinned and looked over at his smiling wife and she winked at him.

Harry shook his head as he hugged his best friend. Life was funny sometimes, and his was coming full circle. Next stop, Hogwarts...

FINIS