

Wizards Fall:Rescuing the Rescuer

Standard Disclaimer:

Bob stepped onto the stage wearing a bright blue tuxedo and a top hat.

“Friends, readers and those who don't wash nearly often enough...”

He paused and blinked. Alyx rode onto the stage wearing a string bikini, each cup had a blinking red light on it. She was riding a pink llama.

“Whatcha doing?” she asked from the back of the llama.

“I was about to explain to our dear readers about this latest installment of the Wizards Fall saga,” Bob replied pompously.

The llama, not being impressed with Bob and his pomposity, promptly took a dump on the stage.

Both Bob and Alyx stared at the back of the Llama for a moment. There were unmentionable sounds and foul odors emanating from the rear of the beast. The unmentionable sounds echoed loudly in the large theater causing Bob and Alyx much embarrassment.

Alyx turned to the audience. “I apologize for my llama, he's not quite used to Bob and I've been forced to feed him all the donuts people have sent us. I can't let Bob have them. Anyway, we don't own Harry Potter, we don't own the movies... Well we do, but not the rights to them. We don't own anything, honest! Hell! I borrowed this Llama from Alan Rickman!”

Bob covered his face with his hands and shook his head sadly. “Must you?”

Alyx smirked at him. “Ummm, no, not really, but it is fun.”

“Ok, you said the words, now can I *PLEASE* continue?”

Alyx sniffed loudly. “Well since you put it that way,” she replied haughtily. “Please do.”

She clicked twice and trot the llama off the stage.

Bob sighed wearily and stepped forward. There was a loud squishing sound and he looked down. He really wished he had worn shoes with his tuxedo today.

Shaking one foot he looked out at the audience apologetically. “This story is part of the Wizards Fall series. If you haven't read Wizards Fall, this will make little sense to you. As we've explained several times on our yahoo group and elsewhere, it's our intent to create a series of short stories in the Wizards Fall universe depicting what happened following the fall of Voldemort.”

“There is a lot of speculation about what happens when they return from Avalon time, but to be honest, we're more interest in how they got there in the first place. IF and that's a BIG IF, we did a post Avalon time story, it would only happen after we have finished the tale of what happens in that fifteen years following Voldemort's death.”

With that, he turned and walked off the stage, every so often, shaking his foot and muttering under his breath.

Wizard's Fall: Rescuing the Rescuer

Norman's Cay (Four Years after Voldemort's Death)...

Harry surfaced, peeled off his diving mask and snorkel and tossed them into the small boat. Then, lifting up the wire leader with the fish attached, he tossed them into the boat, as well. Finally, he unclipped the small spear gun from his belt and put that in the boat before he climbed aboard.

He could have used magical means to swim under water, but he had been taught by a home grown wizard who used magic for more important things and resorted to mundane methods for simple things, like spear fishing. There was something relaxing and therapeutic in swimming in these waters like a muggle. And for Harry, any form of relaxation was to be cherished.

While he climbed aboard, the anchor lifted from the bottom and raised on it's own, the rope curling into a nice, neat spiral as it reeled in. Swimming with fins, mask and snorkel was one thing. Hauling a fifty pound anchor up by hand was another. He reached for his hat and a torn shirt. The motor fired up and the boat turned, pointing towards the low hump in the distance.

Harry smiled and leaned back. He dug into one pocket and pulled out a pipe, one which was filled with tobacco and lit. He looked down at his catch; two Snapper, a small Barracuda and several smaller Bonefish. They were good sized and would provide supper for the next several days.

He could conjure dinner, and he often did, but nothing beat freshly caught fish cooked over an open fire on the beach.

Harry pushed the throttles forward and the little engine sped up. In the distance, Norman's Cay grew slowly from a low hump to a small ridge on the horizon. Grabbing the steering wheel, he released his magic, running the craft by hand, the way Amos taught him. It was at times like this when he almost felt a sense of peace and contentment. Almost.

Norman's Cay grew slowly in the distance; it was his, finally. It was his third year living on the island and he finally owned all of it. When he first arrived, he was the only wizard on an island with nearly a hundred muggles. But over the course of the next three years, he slowly bought out the muggles, gently easing out those who wanted to move. Now there were a few muggles still living on the island, and more wizards, but the population had dropped from nearly a hundred, to less than thirty, mostly wizards, survivors of the war, like himself. People too badly scarred to have a normal life.

Harry scowled at that. *Normal? What is normal?* he asked himself angrily. *Whatever it is, it isn't me!* He snorted. *Normal is someone that sleeps through the night without waking up, screaming. Normal isn't someone with my power levels. And normal isn't someone who tries to kill themselves every couple of months,* he thought. Even in the silence of his mind, he couldn't keep the bitterness from surfacing.

He sighed and thought back to that terrible day just over four years ago. The battle had raged for hours, with Harry ranging from one side of the battle to the other, killing Death Eaters, waiting for Voldemort to finally show up. After Ginny's death, he had vowed he would never use a stunner in battle again. The Death Eaters wanted to eat death and he would serve it up cold.

Something strange happened to him in that battle. He had killed without reservation. It was Ginny's final gift to him. What happened to her had pushed him into a rage that had resulted in him using extremely lethal spells on his enemies. Not once during that terrible battle did he resort to using an unforgivable, but his spells were just as lethal. And that's when something strange began to occur. As the Death Eaters died, Harry could feel himself absorbing their power. He didn't just take it into his body. His core enlarged each time to accept the excess.

Harry's power was already equal to Voldemort's when the battle began. And thanks to the Dark Lord's cowardice in refusing to face him until he absolutely had to, Harry was able to add more than twenty wizards worth of power to his already considerable core. And then, when Voldemort fell, crushed and dead, his soul obliterated beyond any hope of ever passing into an afterlife, Harry received his power, as well.

Harry's physical wounds from the battle were relatively minor and easily fixed. The mental and emotional wounds, however, ran deep and bled often. Too often.

He glanced up and smiled. The dock attached to his villa was visible, and sitting on the dock was one of the oldest wizards in the Bahamas. Named Amos Jefferson Smith, he had shown up shortly after Harry had moved in and he had stayed on the island ever since.

Amos was a character, and one of the few people capable of making him smile these days. He spent some time with the old man nearly every day. Amos had taught Harry much about the islands, and living in the tropics. He taught Harry how to fish, and how to spearfish, as well as how to handle his boat. Amos was a precious gift to the wounded, bitter young man, and had taught Harry much of the practical way of life on the island and how to live.

Despite his advanced age, Amos owned and operated the largest boat on the Cay, which he used to make supply runs to the big island of Nassau. He was a key person for the Cay and very likable, which was why no one minded his other eccentricities.

His biggest eccentricity was his ship. The Mary Celeste was a nineteenth century brigantine, which he operated without a crew. In fact, he often operated the ship from below deck, adding to the already considerable legend of the renowned ghost ship.

Amos smiled broadly, standing on the dock as Harry pulled the little boat along side and cut the engine.

"Harreee, mon, whot I tell ya 'bout fishin' in de full sun?" asked Amos in his sing song island accent.

Harry grinned and reached down. He cut the Barracuda off of the leader and handed it up to the old man. Amos' eyes lit up with great pleasure and he accepted the three foot long fish with relish.

"I know, Amos. Wait to fish in the morning or late afternoon. What can I say? I was bored and I didn't want to conjure dinner," he replied. Then he held up the rest of his catch.

Amos nodded in appreciation. "Well, put de fish on ice an' come inside b'fo' ya turn as dark as me. I gots news, an' it's no' so good," Amos said sadly.

Harry shot a glance at his friend and hurriedly rinsed off his snorkeling gear using the fresh water tap at the end of the dock.

Amos stopped on Harry's deck and placed his fish in a red and white cooler. He knew Harry would always share his food with him, but that wasn't the real reason why he was attracted to the haunted young man. He had felt his arrival when Harry first bought the island, and he felt the turmoil within him. Harry was a volcano ready to explode, but Amos thought he might be able to help him, so he moved to Norman's Cay as quickly as he could. As he got to know Harry, he learned to like him. He ended up teaching him a lot about living on the island.

"So, Amos, other than coming over here to mooch some fish, what brings you?" Harry asked. He sat in a wicker chair and leaned back. He tapped out the ashes of his pipe into a large shell he kept for that purpose, then refilled the pipe.

Amos noted the dinner table piled high with newspapers scattered about, filled with Harry's unsteady scrawl. He didn't fail to notice the freshly emptied bottles of bourbon either. "Harreee, dis no good fo' ya," Amos said, pushing one empty bottle with his foot.

Harry eyed Amos for a moment and the older man sighed heavily. This was a fight he couldn't win, but that didn't mean he wouldn't stop trying. Harry was on a downward spiral and he would nag him until something gave.

Amos threw up his hands in frustration. "Fine! But don' tink I'm gonna stop naggin' ya, Harreee," he snapped.

Harry shook his head. "I know you won't, old friend. But I don't think this is an argument we should be having now."

Amos nodded and sat opposite Harry. "I was talkin' wit dem Weasley boyos. Mon, dey be right smart, and dey business be doin' well, but dey want me ta tell ya wha' dey heard. Seems ol' Trent Jackson got hisself picked up by dem Aurors when he wen' ova ta Delaport Bay ta pick up engine parts. Dey also heard dat all de aurors are bein' folded into one group unda de ICW."

Harry scowled. He had heard rumors on his last trip to Nassau that the International Confederation of Wizards was pushing to unite law enforcement into one world wide group, one global Ministry, but he didn't think they'd get away with it. It was an initiative sponsored by Dumbledore and Minister Scrimgeour.

Trent Jackson? Now that was a piece of unhappy news. He was a former Auror who had fought alongside Harry against Voldemort. And, like Harry, after the war had ended, he retreated from the magical world. Like so many others who had joined Harry on the Cay, he was searching for his humanity, or perhaps his sanity. In either case, he was living a simple life, fishing and selling his catch to the markets up in Nassau. He didn't make much, but then, he didn't to. Harry owned all the buildings now, and he didn't charge Trent rent for living in one.

"Arrested? Why?" asked Harry.

Amos shrugged. "Donno. He was gettin' parts and dem Aurors stunned him. Took him away in manacles, dey did."

Harry stood and walked to the edge of the deck. Leaning against the railing, he thought quickly. He didn't care much about himself, but the others worried him. Trent wasn't the only damaged soul on the island. With a shake of his head, he turned to face his friend.

"Amos, I know you're not done with your mooch patrol, so as you make the rounds, stop at every house and tell them that tomorrow I am putting the island under a keep away ward. I'll key them all into the ward, but if they want others to enter, they have to tell me about it, so I can key the new people in."

The old man cocked his head thoughtfully. "Yes. De ward would keep dem Aurors out, at leas' fo' now. But it be an easy ward ta break."

"I know that, Amos, but I'll layer a few other wards to warn me about others approaching the island. That way, I can find out what is going on. If worse comes to worse, I'll put the island under a *Fidelius*."

Amos nodded and picked up his cooler. "Alright, I be telling dem. In de meantime, Harreee, ya lay offa de bourbon. Dat stuff rot da mind," the old man said firmly. Then, with a wave, he turned away and started up the beach, swinging his cooler full of fish from one hand.

Harry sighed and walked inside. He opened a new bottle and poured himself a tall drink, then he walked over to his table and started working on the manuscripts again.

Norman's Cay (Several days later)...

"Oy! Freddo! Company coming!" shouted George.

Fred looked up from the miniature cauldron and spotted Harry ambling up the lane leading to their house and factory. Despite Ministry interference, Weasley Wizarding Wheezes was going strong world wide, doing business via owl post. One of the first things Harry had done when he bought the island was place an owl confundus charm on it to keep out the unwanted owls. It meant the twins had to trip to Nassau every other day to pick up or send out orders, but they didn't mind.

The twins had arrived about eight months earlier, seeking help from Harry. Their business in Diagon Alley had been raided and shut down by order of the Ministry, all because they had copied an idea from the muggles, producing the worlds first magically enchanted rubber chicken.

When they arrived, Harry had helped them by putting them up at his place while they built a home and a place to make their jokes. When they were done, Harry had placed their buildings under a *Fidelius* charm, setting himself as the secret keeper.

"Harry!" shouted Fred. "Mate! How are you?"

George came up behind his brother, grinning. "Harry, come in! Amos said you might be stopping by a few days ago."

Harry smiled softly. He had a soft spot for the twins, who treated him more like a brother than an investor. "Hi, guys. I thought I'd stop by and find out first hand what happened to Trent," he replied.

George came out of the kitchen holding three bottles of butterbeer. He handed one to his brother and another to Harry, then motioned for Harry to sit.

"There isn't much to tell," Fred said sadly. "We went to Nassau to arrange for more Boomslang skin and watched several Aurors leading Trent into

the Ministry office there.”

“You weren't caught? Guys, you know the Ministry would leap at the chance to lock you up,” Harry replied.

George shook his head. “Not going to happen. Every trip we take, we do it polyjuiced. This time we were disguised as an American couple.”

Harry smirked and wondered which one had assumed the female role. Then he shook his head. “I just don't understand what the Ministry is pulling these days. Trent was a retired Auror. That's it. He wasn't wanted. He hasn't committed any crime. Why would they take him?”

The twins exchanged a thoughtful look, then George nodded to Fred.

Fred frowned and turned to Harry, leaning forward in his chair. He played with his bottle for a moment, then sighed. “Harry, mate... We didn't want to be the ones to tell you this, but it looks like its down to us anyway.”

Harry looked at the two with worry.

“We, that is, George and myself, think that they arrested Trent in an effort to find you,” Fred said.

“Me?” Harry squeaked in surprise.

“Yes, you,” replied George. “Look, Trent is only a partial pureblood. His mother has a squib sister and he's close to his aunt. He's always been close to her. That is an arrestable offense these days. But we think they did it mainly because he was close to you. He's about the only wizard here who doesn't use polyjuice when he goes off island.”

“Wait a minute. You mean having a squib relative is now grounds for arrest?”

“Haven't you been reading the papers, Harry? There are a whole bunch of things that are now illegal, mostly dealing with muggles, muggle born and half bloods.”

Harry leaned back and was silent for a while. He'd known it was happening, but he'd done his best to ignore it. But knowing that someone he knew might have been arrested just to try to find him was enough to make him ill. “Do you guys still have contacts off island?” he asked suddenly.

Fred nodded.

“Do you think you can find out where Trent is being held?” he asked intently.

“We can try, but why?” asked Fred.

Harry stood and looked down at the two for a moment. “I'm not going to let them punish Trent for something he didn't do. Knowing me is no reason to be arrested.” As he spoke it seemed like a little of the old Harry shown through again. He wasn't going to let others suffer for him.

He turned towards the door, then stopped himself and turned back to the twins. “I'm going to start warding the Cay, guys. If you want others to reach you, let me know and I'll make allowances for that in the wards.”

“Erm... Speaking of that, Harry. Angelina and Alicia have expressed an interest in joining us. Lee Jordan and his wife, also,” George said.

Harry's expression altered and he grin. “Really? That's brilliant. Look, guys, I may own most of this island, but I really don't control what happens here. I don't want that kind of responsibility. All I'm asking is that you tell me so I can adjust the wards for them.”

Fred nodded. “I'll send an owl to Lee right away.”

Harry smirked. “Why send an owl? Orb him.”

The two looked at him blankly and he sighed. He hadn't really meant to tell anyone about this, but the twins would be the only ones who'd understand and appreciate his little exercises in larceny.

He moved over to a chair and sat.

“I got bored last year, so I apparated to London and decided to visit the British Museum,” Harry said.

“Only you would apparate four thousand miles to go to a museum,” George said with a grin.

Fred poked him in the side. “Hush, brother. Harry's telling us a story.”

The twins turned back to Harry with identical grins.

Harry sipped his butterbeer and waited for them to calm down. He was used to their antics by now.

“Are you two done?” he asked when they began to squirm with impatience.

They glanced at each other, then turned back and nodded.

“Anyway, I was in the wizarding section, visiting the Hall of Merlin, when I stopped to look at the Avalonian Grimoires. The display had the first book open and the remaining twenty volumes laying on a table. It was a compelling display and protected by several wards. The sign said that you could

purchase duplicates of the Grimoires in the souvenir shop for a hundred galleons.

"Noting that, I glanced at the originals one last time, then I went down to the shop to pick up a set to read for myself."

"Waste of money, mate," Fred muttered.

George nodded. "Too right. We have a copy and couldn't make head or tails out of it. One of the few times we spent money and found it to be a total waste."

Harry leaned back and grinned. "That's because the copy you bought didn't match the originals."

The twins stared at him incredulously. "What?" exclaimed Fred.

"It's true. Whatever spell they're using to duplicate the books isn't making a perfect copy. I bought my set and noticed it immediately. I don't know, maybe others couldn't see the lettering in the originals, but I sure could and the copies didn't have them. I nearly took them back for a refund," Harry replied.

"And you know this how?" demanded George.

Harry suddenly flushed and looked sheepishly at them. "Erm... Well, I sorta... Oh, alright! If you must know, I saw that the open page in the first book had glowing letters that were missing from my copy. So, I broke into the museum later that night and replaced my copies with the originals. Since no one ever made a fuss about them being stolen, I figured no one else was able to see the glowing letters like I can."

George's eyebrows merged into his hairline. He looked at Harry with something akin to awe.

"You broke into the British museum and stole priceless manuscripts?" asked Fred incredulously.

Harry frowned. "You know, you're making this sound a bit dodgy, mates."

"Harry," George said, grinning. "You stole from the British Museum! It doesn't get more dodgy than that."

"How did you manage it?" asked Fred eagerly. "You said yourself the manuscripts were protected by wards."

Harry shrugged. "I opened an hole in the wards. Then I summoned the books, banished the copies back into the display case and closed the hole."

Fred leaned back and started to laugh. What Harry had described would be impossible for anyone but Harry Potter.

George looked intently at Harry. "Alright, mate, give. What did the Grimoires have in them that isn't in the duplicates?"

"A lot of stuff, actually. Look, I can copy them correctly. There's too much to cover here, and frankly, some of the stuff I don't understand. Even with the advanced explanation, the Avalon Equations are way over my head. There's other stuff, like the Book of Wards, which is really interesting, or that orb spell I mentioned. Swing by my place sometime in the next week and I'll make you a copy of what I have, alright?"

The twins nodded and Harry stood. With a wave, he left them, heading back towards the beach.

Fred and George looked at each other for a bit.

"He looks like shit," Fred said sadly.

"It's the booze. Amos says he's still only getting a few hours sleep a night, too," George replied.

"We could dose him with some dreamless sleep when we go over," Fred offered.

George chuckled, but he shook his head. "Nah. You know he'd only catch us out. I'm afraid what he needs isn't something we can give him."

"Ginny would have set him straight," Fred said in a strangled voice, then his head dropped.

George placed a hand on his brother's shoulder. "I know," he said softly, mourning with him.

Ginny had been killed several days before the final battle. She had been attacked by a squad of Death Eaters led by Severus Snape and had been brutally raped before they slit her throat. Harry had personally led several former DA members and the Weasley brothers to capture Snape and the others after Voldemort was dead. Snape had fought viciously, but Harry captured him and nearly killed him before Fred and George talked him out of it.

Harry's Villa, Norman's Cay (Three weeks later)...

Fred and George came upon Harry in an interesting state. He was stripped down to just his shorts and was sitting on the deck. Around him floated pieces of his dive gear while he sat reading a manual on Scuba diving and, in particular, tank care and maintenance.

"Harry, why don't you just use gillyweed instead of this stuff?" asked Fred.

Harry started in surprise and looked around wildly before spotting Fred and George grinning at him.

He shrugged. "This is more of a challenge. The tank only holds so much while wearing one. Gillyweed does it all for you. That's nice, but there's no challenge to it."

"If you say so," Fred said dubiously, eyeing the muggle equipment nervously. He and his brother weren't experts in muggle stuff, but they were developing a healthy respect for their ingenuity.

"Listen, mate, we heard back from one of our contacts. It seems Trent's been taken to a holding facility run by the Aurory in Manchester. We couldn't find out much, except that they haven't been treating him well," George said softly.

Harry sighed. "Do you at least know where the place is?"

The twins nodded, and George handed him a map with the location marked.

Harry checked his watch. It was still too early for him to do anything about it. He looked at the twins. "Fred, can you orb Amos and ask him to bring Mother Marie to the island? I don't know what kind of shape Trent will be in, but he'll probably need a healer."

Mother Marie was an old island native like Amos, who visited Norman's Cay from time to time. She was well versed in healing and birthing and served several islands as the primary care healer.

"I'll take care of it," Fred replied. "George can pop on over to Trent's place and clean it up, refresh the cooling charms and such. Are you going to get him tonight?"

Harry nodded grimly. He couldn't let Trent suffer because of him.

The twins exchanged a glance then Fred turned back to Harry. He opened a pouch at his belt and pulled out a grapefruit sized glass ball that looked as though it was filled with white cotton and held it out to Harry.

He took it, then looked at the twins.

"It's a Randy Ram. Just smash the ball before you leave. The ram will attempt to hump every person it comes across and it's devilishly difficult to get rid of," George offered with a devious grin.

Harry laughed, and the hand holding the ball glowed for a second.

"What did you do?" asked Fred, now curious.

"Do you remember your fireworks that couldn't be dispelled back in your sixth year?"

George's eyes widened. "You mean the doubling trick? Where the fireworks doubled every time Umbridge tried to banish them?"

Harry nodded and Fred collapsed on the deck, laughing. "Oh, mate, you are evil, truly evil. You know the first thing someone will do is try to either banish or cast a finite on the Ram."

"I'm counting on it," Harry replied with a grin. "I'll leave about six tonight. That should empty out the building enough so that movement won't be too much of a problem. Searching for Trent will take time."

"Do you want us to come along?" George asked.

"Nah. This should be fairly simple. Besides, you guys can't get past the wards like I can," Harry replied. "But assuming all goes well, why not prepare for a party to celebrate Trent's rescue?"

Fred and George turn to each other and grinned madly. "LUAU!" they shouted.

Harry chuckled and shook his head. He had introduced the twins to the custom of Luaus a couple months back and he was beginning to regret it. He had learned about them during his wanderings after he'd left Britain. He found the culture and the customs of the Polynesian society charming and had learned how to cook many of the dishes served at a luau, as well as some of the traditional dances.

When he held his first luau, with the twins present, they thought it was the greatest party idea ever.

"Alright you two, go plan the luau while I get ready," he said with a wave of a hand.

The twins nearly bounced off his veranda and onto the beach in their excitement. The girls and Lee had shown up only a week ago and they would finally get a chance to show them how to party, island style.

With a wave of one hand, Harry sent all his dive gear back to his shack, then he turned and walked back into his villa.

Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, Office of the Headmaster...

Albus Dumbledore staggered into his office, his robes torn and covered in a sticky mess. Fawkes chirped enquiringly and then had to dodge the stinging spell sent in his direction by an angry Dumbledore.

Fawkes settled on his perch again and made a chortling sound. Dumbledore whipped around and the large bird vanished in a burst of flame.

Dumbledore's curse bounced off the wall behind the empty perch and ricocheted into a shelf containing some of his favorite books before exploding.

He cursed and swore at his familiar. The bond between them had been eroding for nearly twenty years and tonight it had finally snapped, although it would be weeks before Dumbledore realized that Fawkes was well and truly gone.

He opened the door to his private quarters and hurriedly stripped out of the loathsome robes, then he climbed into his tub with a sigh of relief.

He leaned his head back and closed his eyes. It had been a hellacious day that had started with an emergency floo call from the Ministry. The Auror facility in Manchester had a security breach and they needed his help as quickly as possible.

Canceling his morning staff meeting, he hurried beyond the wards of the school and apparated directly to the facility.

At the entrance, he found Kingsley Shacklebolt and a large group of Aurors trying to open a door and not succeeding.

Scrawled on the door in big block letters was a hand made sign that read;

Stump the Mugwump!

Open Sesame!

"Thank goodness you've arrived, Headmaster," Kingsley said.

"What seems to be the problem, Chief Auror?" asked Dumbledore.

"We received a distress call from our interrogation center, but when we arrived, we found the door sealed. For a while there were screams from inside, but it's gone quiet except for some strange snorting noises," Kingsley reported.

Dumbledore nodded. "Very well. Get your men ready, Kingsley, and I'll see to opening the door."

For the next hour Dumbledore tried every unlocking spell he could think of. He even tried blasting the door, much to the amusement of the Aurors, who were starting to make snide comments. Finally, he sat down on a conjured chair and stared at the door for a long time.

Minutes ticked on in silence and the aurors shuffled restlessly.

Suddenly, he sprang to his feet, looking very annoyed at himself. "Open Sesame!" he cried.

The door swung open revealing total blackness inside. All the interior lighting had been extinguished.

"First squad, enter and fan out. Second squad, cover them! Third squad, illumination spells!" barked Kingsley.

In seconds, thirty aurors stormed into the building lobby. Kingsley and Dumbledore followed at a more sedate pace. Ten aurors cast illumination charms, lighting up the interior of the large lobby area. Several people gasped, seeing some figures prone on the floor in the poorly lit room.

The door behind them swung shut ominously.

"OPEN SESAME!" shouted Dumbledore.

The door remained stubbornly closed.

The floor trembled and one of the prone figures lifted his head and moaned piteously. His robe was torn to shreds and covered in blood. "Noooo!" he wailed.

A second later a mass of white flooded into the room. "Baaaaa"

"Fire! Fire! Fire!" shouted Kingsley.

Dumbledore's eyes opened and he shuddered violently. He grabbed his bar of soap and started to scrub viciously at his skin, trying to clean a stain that only he could see.

Kingsley and his men had made it out after a three hour pitched battle with sheep! Sheep, for Merlin's sake! They had been forced to use the killing curse on hundreds of the enchanted beasts. Every other spell they tried resulted in duplicating them!

Dumbledore scrubbed harder, his breath coming in gasps and sobs. The sheep hadn't been trying to kill them, they were... Well... He shuddered again and tried not to think about it. He had only been caught twice. Twice was more than enough.

Other aurors, like Kingsley, had to be rescued six times, sometimes more, from the Randy Rams. Now that he thought about it, he wasn't sure Kingsley was fighting all that hard the last few times he had been caught.

A flash of flame caught his eye and then a patch of white. Dumbledore screamed like a first year discovering Snape under her bed as Fawkes dropped the sheep in his bathtub and vanished, never to be seen at Hogwarts again.

A floor below, Minerva McGonagall paused in her rounds and wondered if she really heard screaming.

Harry's Villa, Norman's Cay (Several Months later)...

Harry rolled out of bed and stumbled towards his bathroom in search of a headache potion. He had cut back on the bourbon, but his sleep hadn't improved like Amos told him it would. *If things don't improve soon, I'm going back to the booze full time*, he thought.

After the rescue of Trent Jackson, he had placed the island under heavy wards, including the addition of a *Fidelius* charm. That had allowed the twins to finally drop the charm on their place, much to their relief.

Angelina and Alicia arrived a week before Trent's rescue and moved in with the twins. Lee Jordan had followed a few days later with his wife and their baby daughter, Annette. Slowly, the population of Norman's Cay was growing.

The outside world wasn't getting any better. Harry heard rumors from Amos of roving bands of Aurors running around, harassing muggle borns or half bloods, and the Ministry was allowing it. There was talk of other, harsher things happening, but they were just rumors.

He was glad his friends had made it to the island and were safe, but he really didn't care very much what the rest of the world did. Although, annoying the Ministry or Dumbledore was always good for amusement in his book. He paused and wondered if Dumbledore could eat mutton anymore.

He blinked in surprise, seeing Amos standing out on his deck peering inside. With a wave, the large glass doors slid to one side, letting Amos in.

"Give me a moment," he mumbled to his friend.

Amos eyed him up and down and grunted in displeasure. "A moment? Harreee, mon, when be de las' day ya had a good meal and eigh' 'ours sleep?"

Harry slid a pair of Bermuda shorts over his boxers. "Look, Amos, it's too early for this crap. Don't think I'm not glad to see you, but this nagging..."

"Iz gonna continue till ya realize ol' Amos be right!" the old man snapped, then he picked up a bottle off the floor. "Dis be killin' ya, mon."

Harry's shoulders slumped. "I know. I just don't know what to do about it anymore. I've cut back on it a lot," he offered half heartedly.

Amos nodded, then poked him. "Ya come wid me. I be makin' a run up ta Nassau ta pick up food'n supplies. You be ma crew today."

Harry glared at the old man. "Amos, you don't have a crew. You told me yourself you use magic to run your ship."

"So? Mary Celeste is big enough fo' ya to be crew today. I make ya so tired ya eat and sleep tonight. 'Sides, ya learn ta run Mary Celeste. It be a good ting ta learn," Amos stated.

Harry sighed. He wasn't making any progress with the Avalon Equations, although he had made considerable progress in other areas. Some of the wards he had placed on the island were totally unique, things he had developed after reading the Book of Wards.

"Why not?" he said, shrugging.

Amos laughed and hit him on the back. "Good! Dress yerself. We sail in half an 'our."

Four exhausting hours later, Harry and Amos guided the nineteenth century brigantine into a slip Amos leased year round. The docks were owned by a long time wizarding family who had lived in the Bahamas for several centuries, so they weren't surprised to see only two men running the Mary Celeste.

"Amos, I'm going to check the owl drop. I think you and Mr. Jones can see to the loading of cargo?"

Amos waved and Harry walked down the gangway with a grin. Nassau was a old city and the people worked hard to make sure that a lot of it kept the old world colonial charm. Harry always enjoyed his trips to the town, even if he didn't come here frequently. Normally, the twins or Amos checked his owl drop for him.

The owl drop was in the oldest part of the city, the part reserved for the small wizarding population. He stepped into the owl post office and tensed. He felt the anti-apparation wards going up around him. He knew he risked running into the Aurors that were looking for him. Apparently the Aurors had finally found him.

The owl drop was his only real vulnerable point. Even though the individual boxes were anonymous, the Ministry could trace his mail, eventually, to this point. Harry made a mental note to change the routing of his mail again. He'd obviously waited too long this time.

He stepped deeper into the lobby of the post office. A side door opened and three men and one woman exited the room. All had their wands drawn and aimed at him.

The clerk behind the counter blanched. "Hey! No fighting in here!" he cried, half-heartedly. There were rules, after all, and they should be followed.

"Shut up, asshole. We're Aurors," said the woman, who looked vaguely familiar to Harry. She waved a badge in the direction of the clerk.

The clerk nodded once, scrambled his way to the back of the shop and slipped out the back door. The door slammed shut with a resounding bang.

"We have orders to bring you in, Potter. Seems Minister Scrimgeour wants to have some words with you," said the woman. She wore an expression of pure glee, as if she had finally come to the end of a long chase. Perhaps she had.

Harry grinned. He had no intention of letting anyone take him anywhere.

"Only four Aurors? I'm hurt!" Harry said, placing a hand over his heart, mockingly. "I would have thought that the Ministry would be more afraid of me."

One Auror flicked his wand. "Hands in the air, Potter. Don't make any sudden moves or I'll kill you and bring your half breed head back to the Ministry in a trash bag."

Harry looked at him for a moment. "You know, Terry, you weren't very smart at Hogwarts. I see that working for the Ministry hasn't improved your intellect any, Mr. Higgs."

Terrence Higgs growled and grabbed the manacles that the woman was holding. He pushed forward and roughly grabbed Harry. He snapped a manacle around one wrist, then Harry calmly held out his other wrist for him. Snapping the second manacle on, the Aurors relaxed somewhat.

The woman made a gesture and six other Aurors removed their invisibility cloaks.

"Alright, let's get him back to the Ministry," said the woman.

"Oh, I don't think so," Harry said softly. His eyes began to glow with power. A low rumbling filled the room and the Aurors stared at him in shock. The manacles were supposed to suppress his ability to perform magic!

"How? Stun him!" shouted the woman in a panic.

Ten stunners lashed out and stopped just short of hitting Harry. The beams hit a barrier and simply vanished. The Aurors stared, dumbfounded.

The manacles around Harry's wrists seemed to shimmer, then fell to the floor with a noisy clang. They were still locked in the closed position.

At the same time, all ten Aurors dropped to the ground as if they had been stunned.

Harry walked over to the woman and pushed her over so she lay on her back. Her eyes darted back and forth in terror. Eventually, they settled on Harry, but her panic hadn't diminished.

"I bet you're wondering how I could perform magic when the manacles are supposed to prevent that. Am I right?" he asked amicably. He sat cross legged on the floor next to her and turned her head so she could see him.

The woman's eyes darted around the room, but all she could see was Harry and the ceiling of the owl post office.

"I'll tell you. Your manacles are designed to work against regular, normal wizards, and I couldn't be one if I tried. Well, that's not totally true. I am fairly regular when it comes to bowel movements and such. But I don't suppose you're interested in that sort of thing, are you?"

Harry shook his head when the woman didn't answer him. "I didn't think you were. Now, I have a real problem. You see, I can't send you back to the Ministry, knowing what you do. You can keep a secret, can't you?" he asked her, his eyes wide with hope.

She strained against the spell holding her and tried to speak.

"I didn't think you could," he replied for her, his shoulders slumping sadly. "But no matter. I have just the solution! I'm going to wipe your memories, all of them, and take away your magic. Won't that be fun?"

The woman's eyes widened and he could see her clearly struggling against his binding spell, not that she had any chance of breaking it.

"You're dangerous to me and my friends. I'm sorry, but there really is no other way. I'm sure you understand," Harry said softly, patting her gently on the shoulder for a moment. He then lifted his hand and as the woman watched, it was enveloped in a blue light. He placed his hand softly against the woman's forehead. She tried to scream, but her jaw was locked shut.

A moment later he lifted his hand. "Thank you for the gift of your magic," he said with a bit of a giggle.

The woman's eyes fluttered closed, and she vanished, leaving behind all her clothing and belongings.

One by one, Harry wiped the memories and removed the magic from each Auror, adding it to his already considerable core, then he sent them on their way.

When he finally reached Terry Higgs, he grinned evilly. He reached down and wiped the man's memories and removed his magic. He'd saved Terry for last so he could give him one final, parting gift. He mumbled under his breath for a moment and a terrible stench wafted up from Terry's unconscious body. With a snort of disgust, he sent Terry back to the Ministry. Let them wonder why Terry smelled like rotten eggs. They'd have a long time to work on the problem, as the smell would never fade with the passage of time.

The Ministry would know their mission had failed, but they would never know why, or who was responsible for the failure. Instead of trying to discover what happened, they would spend their time and effort trying to cure what couldn't be cured. It wasn't until later that Harry would learn the Auror team had been led by Minister Scrimgeour's daughter and Dumbledore's great grandson.

He collected the invisibility cloaks, thinking they might be useful, then he banished all of the auror's belongings and clothing. Once he was finished,

He walked to his drop box and pulled out a thick wad of parchments. He stuffed that in his pocket and left the building before the clerk could hand the nerve to return.

Amos worked Harry mercilessly on the trip back to the Cay. He grilled him on operational details of his ship, as well as having him climb the mast by hand to set the sails, then climb back down, several times.

Arriving back home, he ate a quick meal and crawled into bed. Amos had been true to his word. Being the sole crew member aboard a ship that normally had a much larger crew was exhausting work. For the first time in nearly a month, Harry slept through the night without waking up from a nightmare or needing a drink.

News From Some Old Friends...

Harry groaned and rolled out of bed. He looked down at himself, disgusted. He was still wearing his clothing from the day before. He'd been too tired to care last night. Stripping and dropping the clothing on the floor, he walked into the bathroom and started the shower. He sighed in relief as he stepped under the hot spray. His body ached, all of it, every square inch. He stood under the shower and vowed revenge on Amos. Maybe he'd stick a nice large rock crab down his shirt or something.

The thought made him laugh. Amos was nearly as old as Dumbledore and, in some ways even wiser than that coward. But he was nothing like Dumbledore. For one thing, Amos listened to Harry. He wasn't very smart about magic, but his magic was strong and practical, having spent over a hundred years refining and developing his own style without the interference of a formal education.

While Harry showered, Dobby popped into his bedroom and performed a quick clean up. Dobby had followed Harry to Norman's Cay, wanting to bond with him, but Harry wouldn't let him. He had been sneaking into Harry's house for three years now, helping where he could, then he'd return to Grimmauld Place to wait until Harry needed him again.

Dobby picked up Harry's clothing, placing them in the hamper. He paused when he felt the wad of parchments in the pocket of the pants. He removed the wad and placed that on Harry's kitchen table, next to the Avalonian Grimoires. With his task complete, he popped away, just in time to avoid being caught by Harry as he exited the bathroom.

He dressed, then glanced at the table with his notes and the Grimoires and he decided they could wait until later. He walked outside, collecting his mask, snorkel and spear gun, then continued out onto the dock where his boat was waiting. He considered taking the scuba tank, but he hadn't finished reading the manual on it.

Four hours later and still shy an hour of noon, he returned with a decent catch, which he put on ice. Then he washed up and turned to work on the Avalon equations again.

He was able to relax in comfort once inside. Despite the tropical heat, the villa was under a permanent cooling charm, so once he was indoors, it was always comfortable, no matter how hot or cold it was outside.

He sat at the table and blinked in surprise, noting the wad of parchments he had retrieved from the owl post yesterday. Then he turned and looked through the open door to his bedroom. All his clothing had been picked up. Shaking his head, he muttered under his breath about insane house elves and started sorting through his mail.

He leafed through the parchments, ignoring the letters from the Ministry. He didn't need to open them to know they were demanding his presence once again. Harry tossed those letters into a special hoop he had set up. The letter vanished, on it's way to the Minister of Magic's office, where it would explode harmlessly, but very loudly. It was just one of the ways he liked to remind the Ministry that he was still breathing.

Harry paused and stared at the letter in front of him. He recognized the elegant script. It was from Albus 'Fucking Coward' Dumbledore, the great white chicken. He growled in the back of his throat and tore open the seal.

My dear Harry,

It's been many years since we last met and I would really like to extend an invitation for you to come visit Hogwarts. Much has changed since you last walked these corridors.

I understand that you visit Severus Snape at least once a year. It pleases me no end that you are able to bury your enmity against him. He was once a good man, and I have little doubt he could be again, should he be willing to undergo treatment for his hostilities. I wonder if perhaps the next time you visit him you might suggest that he volunteer for the anger management program offered jointly by the Ministry and St. Mungos. They have had wonderful success with a newpotion that suppresses antagonistic behavior. Volunteering for the program might even earn Severus some time off his sentence, or perhaps some improvements in his quarters.

Harry snorted in silent laughter and looked out at the beach. *What value is time off for good behavior when one had a sentence of life without the possibility of parole*, he thought. *And quarters? It's a five foot by five foot prison cell, for Merlin's sake! Hell, the loo is a metal bucket on the floor.* The only improvement Azkaban had seen was the loss of the Dementors that Harry destroyed in the last battle with Voldemort.

Shaking his head, Harry looked back down at the letter in his hand.

I would really like to see you again, my boy. I feel we parted on uncertain terms and I think it might be best if we talked about it. My going into hiding was exactly what you needed in order to kill Voldemort. I was doing you a favor and I would like to take the opportunity to explain that in better detail, in person, rather than a cold, impersonal letter.

I don't know what you have been doing since you left, and I worry that you might be making wrong decisions. My office is always open to you.

Minister Scrimgeour has also expressed an intense interest to have you return to public life. You hold the hereditary seats on the Wizengamot for your family and for the Blacks. I believe the Minister wants you to reclaim those seats and take your rightful place in wizarding society. I do so hope you'll see fit to come home. I know your parents wouldn't want you to stay away from Britain for so long.

*Regards,
Albus Dumbledore, Grand Sorcerer, Headmaster of Hogwarts
Chief Warlock of the Wizengamot.
Supreme Mugwump of the International Confederation of Wizards.
Holder of two Orders of Merlin (First Class)*

Harry balled the parchment up and threw it across the room. Before it had traveled two feet, it ignited and burned to ash. The ash fluttered, then broke apart into a hundred pieces before vanishing.

"Dumbledore!" he snarled, gripping the edge of the table in his hands. The Minister had only two uses for him, either as a public relations showpiece or as a prisoner, and he wasn't about to let either happen.

The villa shuddered and one of the large bay windows exploded outwards. Harry stopped and pushed down his anger. Closing his eyes, he took a deep breath. The glass shards immediately flew back into place and the window repaired itself.

Harry slowly opened his eyes and turned back to the letters. *Control, Harry*, he thought to himself. *Can't lose it! If I let him anger me, he's won.*

After several more explosions sent to the Ministry, he came upon another letter that gave him pause. With trembling hands he broke open the seal and unfolded the parchment.

*Harry,
At one point in my life, I thought I would never write to you or want to speak to you again. And if circumstances weren't so dire I probably wouldn't have changed my mind, but I've reached the end my rope. And I remember what you told me, the last time we spoke.*

Harry, a little over a month ago I lost my job defending myself from the unwanted attentions of a seventh year student. Albus was sympathetic but unable to help at all. Professor Flitwick and I escaped the castle just a step ahead of the Aurors that were sent to arrest us; me, for not showing proper respect to a pure blood and being Muggle Born, Filius for being part goblin.

I thought about moving back in with my parents, but isn't possible at this time. My mother gave birth to another girl. Yes, that's right, I finally have a sister of my own.

Unfortunately, that means I can't move in with them. And therein lies my problem, Harry. I know we didn't part on the best of terms. I said many cruel things and I should have kept my mouth shut.

"No, you were so right, Hermione," Harry whispered quietly. "If you knew the truth of what I was becoming, you would have killed me and I would have let you."

I wish we hadn't parted but I remembered what you said before you left. It broke my heart when you said "I'll always be here when you need me, Hermione." Then you turned and walked out of my life and, shortly after, out of Britain.

I don't know where you are. I don't know if you're alive or if you'll even get this letter, let alone read it. Right now, Tom from the Leaky Cauldron has put me up in a back room in return for me working in his kitchen. He's trying to help, but the laws are becoming unreasonably oppressive. For the first time since the war I'm afraid, Harry, very afraid and I have no where to turn.

If you can find it in your heart to forgive me, I would ask if I might stay at your Godfather's house while I search for work in muggle London. I chased you out of my life, to my everlasting regret, so I won't ask more than that. You're my last hope, Harry. The Weasley's won't help, nor will Neville or any of our other old friends I'm still in contact with. They're afraid of getting in trouble with the Ministry.

I can't move to another country, as the International Confederation of Wizards is setting the tone for these laws everywhere. I know I have no right to ask for your help after everything I said to you, but I honestly have no one else I can turn to.

Hermione.

Harry closed his eyes and frowned. When he opened them, he read the letter again quickly. When he was done, he glanced at the clock. It was just going on noon, so that put it around late afternoon, early evening in London.

He stood and his clothing shimmered. Once they settled, he was left wearing dark slacks, a green turtleneck jumper and a midnight blue cloak.

He stood silent for a moment longer and then he was gone without a sound. His best friend was in trouble and he'd storm the gates of hell to save a friend, especially her. That was who Harry Potter was.

Leaky Cauldron, Diagon Alley, London, England...

Harry appeared in an alleyway behind what used to be Weasley Wizarding Wheezes. It was one of the few places in the alley where he could

appear unnoticed. He pulled up the hood of his cloak and cast a notice-me-not charm on himself. It would prevent the curious from taking notice of him, but it wouldn't keep him from holding a conversation.

Taking a deep breath, he stepped out of the alley into the main thoroughfare. His initial impression was one of surprise. Nearly every store held a sign in the window saying they won't serve mudbloods or half-bloods. Harry scowled and looked around.

Gringotts was open again, only this time under control of the Ministry. The Goblins had retreated deep into their caverns after the bank went belly up. Once in the caverns, they sealed themselves away, probably hoping to return sometime in the future. Harry had little love for the goblins after they aligned themselves with Voldemort in the final months of the war. His first action after Voldemort was dead was to empty all of his family vaults, Potter, Black, Malfoy and Gryffindor, transferring the money to the Bank of England.

From there, he moved his wealth to several countries and converted a sizable percentage of it into gold bullion. His gold now resided in a specially built vault sunk ten meters into the coral rock under his villa.

The closing of his account started a run on Gringotts when word of his transactions leaked out. Harry had been lucky. As the first one removing his money, he'd gotten all of it out, along with all of his family's possessions. The customers who came later ended up getting only a fraction of their money. The action nearly resulted in sending the Wizarding economy into a depression.

Ollivanders was still closed, but near the original location a sign proclaimed a new wand maker that he didn't recognize. Fortescue's Ice Cream Parlor was still closed, as well, but Madam Malkin's was open. There were a lot of new businesses that hadn't been there the last time he'd visited.

Another change he noted was the large number of red cloaked Aurors patrolling the street. They didn't seem to think there was anything wrong with stopping someone and demand to see their wand and identification.

Harry scowled at that and moved towards the exit. He knew the Aurors would leave him alone, but if he stood there long enough, he'd draw attention to himself even with his notice-me-not charm.

Walking towards the exit, it opened without Harry using his wand, which was a good thing because his wand was four thousand miles away in the Bahamas.

He stepped through the portal, entering the Leaky Cauldron, and nearly choked on the thick atmosphere inside. Several patrons glanced over, seeing the door open, but his charm kept them from becoming too curious.

Tom was in his usual spot, wiping down the bar. Harry pushed his way through the crowded pub until he leaned against the bar. Then he reached out and tugged on Tom's sleeve, catching his attention.

"Eh? Wot? Wotcha need?" Tom asked.

Harry leaned over the bar. "Miss Granger, where is she?"

Tom's expression suddenly became worried. "I don't know no..."

Harry pushed his hood back enough for Tom to see his face.

Tom stopped and stared. "Great Merlin's ghost! Harry?" he whispered.

Harry nodded and Tom broke into a big smile. "I've been praying you'd show up. You have no idea how long it took me to convince her to write you. I didn't want to put her to work, but I had to at least have her work off her meals."

Harry nodded and reached into his pocket. He pulled out a small metal box and undid the clasp, revealing a small number of high quality diamonds. He pulled one out and placed it on the counter.

"For your troubles, Tom. It's a good quality stone. I don't know what the conversion rate is, but it's worth nearly three thousand pounds in muggle money."

Tom's eyes widened and he carefully slid the stone in his pocket.

"Just a moment," he said.

"Oy! Nob, you lazy bum! Mind the bar and keep yer sticky fingers out of the till!" he shouted to his helper.

Nob scurried over to bar, his head bobbing up and down.

Tom stepped around him and motioned for Harry to follow him into the back room. Once the door was closed, he turned to Harry, grinning. "Damn, but you're a blessed sight for these poor eyes," he exclaimed, holding out his hand.

Harry smiled and shook the offered hand. "You look like you're doing well, Tom."

"Aye, we're doing alright. But it's a different class of people now, cruder and less polite. Not like it should be," he replied sadly.

Tom turned and led Harry down a darkened corridor to a set of doors. He pointed to one. "This is her room. She's in the kitchen, but I'll go send her to you."

Tom opened the door and started to back away when Harry stopped him.

"Is it really that bad, Tom? She said she was scared."

The man sighed and nodded. "There are rumors, lad. I don't know the right of it, but there's been talk of Aurors killing muggles and muggle born. I don't like it, but I don't rightly know what I can do about it, either. I'm just a lowly inn keeper."

Harry placed his hand on his shoulder. "You are much more than that, Tom. You are a righteous man, a good man and one I'm proud to call friend." He hesitated for a moment, then he came to a decision. "If you run into any more people like Miss Granger, send me a note, in care of Amos Jefferson Smith, Nassau, The Bahamas. It may take a while to reach me, but I'll send you instructions and money to help them escape to someplace safe."

Harry gestured with his hand and a slip of parchment appeared with the address on it. He also pulled out another diamond from his box and handed it to Tom. "I'll make sure you have enough money to help them, and enough to get yourself and your family away if things get dicey."

Tom's eyes moistened and he sniffled. "Yer a good man, Harry. I know some people already looking for a way out, so expect a letter soon."

Harry nodded. "I'll be taking Miss Granger from here, but you won't see us leave. Just send her back here and don't tell her why. Be safe, my friend."

Tom nodded, then turned and walked away. Harry stepped into the room and was immediately struck by the mess. He wondered how this could be Hermione's room. The mess was so uncharacteristic of her.

A soft meow from one corner caused him to turn sharply. He relaxed, seeing Crookshanks eying him.

Harry sat in a darkened corner and Crookshanks came over and jumped onto his lap. Crookshanks looked at Harry for a long moment as if to say 'you're late!'. Then he butted his head against Harry's hand. He scratched his ears and the orange fluff ball rumbled softly in contentment. "We've both come a long way, eh, Crooks?"

Crookshanks rubbed his hand for another minute, then he jumped down and walked over to the small cot and jumped up on that. A few seconds later the door opened and Hermione walked in. Harry couldn't believe his eyes.

Her hair was messier than normal, and her eyes had dark circles under them. Her cheeks were sunken and she looked as if she hadn't been eating well or bathing regularly.

Crookshanks meowed loudly and Hermione smiled at her familiar. "Shhh, Crooks, Tom says the Aurors are checking the main room again. He wants us out of sight."

"What he wants is for you to be safe," Harry said softly.

Hermione gasped and turned to see him sitting in the shadows.

"Harry?" she whispered. She paled and her hands began to tremble.

"Our time is short. Put Crooks in his carrier and gather what you can carry. I'll send an elf back for the rest."

Hermione's hands trembled violently. "Harry?" she asked again. "I didn't think you'd come."

"We don't have time for this, Hermione. Tom was making up a story about the Aurors, but Diagon Alley is crawling with them," Harry said a little sharper than he meant.

She nodded jerkily and looked around, confused and flustered.

Harry sighed and stood up. It wasn't her fault, really. The tension and now his presence had thrown her for a loop. He walked to her. "Somnus," he murmured and she closed her eyes, sagging into his arms. He held her and glanced over to Crookshanks who watched him carefully. Crookshanks then let out a loud meow and vanished from sight, two seconds later Harry and Hermione followed him.

Harry's Villa, Norman's Cay, The Bahamas...

Hermione stretched luxuriously, then she stopped and opened an eye. This wasn't her cot at Tom's! She had the strangest dream that Harry had come to rescue her. It was a dream, wasn't it? Crookshanks jumped up on the bed and walked over to sit next to her, looking mighty pleased with himself. If he could talk, he'd have been babbling about his breakfast of fresh fish.

She turned in the bed and blinked in surprise. The large ceiling to floor glass doors afforded her a wonderful view of a dock and a pristine white sand beach. The blue sky and the ocean only added to the effect. For one so used to dreary British weather and seasons, it was a breathtaking view.

Then a small green face popped into her view. "Dobby is so glad to see Miss Herry!" exclaimed the little elf. "Now is time for you to get up. Dobby has your bath ready, and once you is done I make you a big breakfast. Harry Potter Sir asked me to come help you get better."

Hermione sat up quickly. "Harry? He's here? Where is he?"

Dobby's ears drooped and he tugged on one nervously. "Dobby isn't sure. He called me last night to come take care of you and pussycat. Then he

slept on the beach. This morning he made a house next to his, then went off in his boat. Dobby is hoping you can help him.”

Hermione frowned at the little elf. “Help him? What do you mean, Dobby?”

Dobby shrugged. “He’s not the same, Miss Hermy. He barely eats, rarely sleeps and when he does he screams and cries. He’s living, yet he’s not, and he won’t let Dobby help him.”

Hermione stared at the little elf for a moment, then she stepped out of the bed. “Let me take my bath, then we’ll be able to talk more, alright, Dobby? I want to help Harry too.”

The little elf nodded happily. It would be nice to have someone around who could help Harry. Maybe even let Dobby stay to help out around the house. He really didn’t like living alone at Grimmauld Place.

Nearly an hour later, after a heavenly bath, she stepped out of the bathroom and looked around for her clothing. She was shocked to discover a huge pile of new clothes laying on the bed. Dobby had popped back to Diagon Alley while she was in the bath and picked up everything from jeans and t-shirts to several dresses, robes and underwear, in her size.

Hermione glanced out the window and correctly surmised that light weight clothing would be better suited for this location, so she picked out a t-shirt, shorts and a rather attractive bra that was more lacy and translucent than she was accustomed to.

After she was dressed, she started by exploring the room she was in. It was obviously Harry’s, although he had vacated it for her. She checked the drawers on the nightstand out of curiosity and was alarmed by what she found. In the drawer was a loaded handgun, and several bottles of lethal poisons.

She glanced over at Dobby, who looked down and nodded. “I said Harry Potter Sir needs help, Miss Hermy.”

She nodded and chewed on her lower lip worriedly, then she walked out into the kitchen area where Dobby had a large English breakfast waiting for her. She sat down at the counter and started to eat, while her eyes roved over everything. Her eyes lit up when she spotted the table full of books and she was surprised to see several notebooks filled with equations and runes in Harry’s messy scrawl. In fact, nearly every surface in the living room was covered in notebooks.

She was nearly finished with her breakfast when a voice startled her.

“Well now, dis be a firs’. I neva foun’ a woman in Harreee’s place befo’. Harreee, he has good taste, I tink.”

Hermione sprang to her feet and reached for her wand. She whirled, aiming at the stranger, who held up his hands and smiled at her.

He was old and obviously a native islander. He wore a well worn captain’s hat and a baggy shirt and shorts. One leg had a old scar that must have been a terrible wound in its time.

“Peace girl, I mean no harm. I stopped by ta see Harreee, but he mus’ be gettin’ betta if you is here,” said the old man.

“Who are you?” Hermione finally managed to gasp out. Why did people seem to expect Harry would be better just because she was here?

“Amos. Amos Jefferson Smith, cap’n of de Mary Celeste. I sail dees watas, n’bring supplies ta de islanders from de big island,” Amos said with a toothy grin.

Hermione casually noted Amos had a front tooth made from gold. It was something a dentists daughter would notice.

She glanced around the room, noting the large number of empty and full bottles of bourbon and then she turned back to Amos. Dobby followed her gaze and managed to look embarrassed, but Harry had forbidden him to clean them up.

“Perhaps you would join me for a cup of tea, Captain Jefferson?”

Amos chuckled. “Jess Amos, girl. Mah cap’n papers expired nearly seventy years ago. I don’ drink dat tea like you English, but coffee would be a fine ting.”

Before Hermione could say anything, Dobby moved, handing Amos a large steaming mug of coffee, extra strong and black, just as he liked it.

“Tank ya, Dobby,” Amos said, then he took a deep drink of the hot liquid. Amos was well acquainted with Dobby, despite his hiding from Harry.

“Captain, I mean, Amos, could you tell me what’s going on? Where am I?”

“Ya be in de Bahamas, girl, off de coast of Florida, and dis be Norman’s Cay. Though some now be callin’ it Harreee’s Redoubt. Didn’ Harreee tell ya dis las’ night?”

Hermione shook her head. “No. Last night is a bit of a blur. I went into my bedroom in London and Harry was there. He told me we had to move quickly, but I was so shocked and surprised that I guess I didn’t move fast enough. He muttered something and I fell asleep and woke up here.”

Amos shook his head in dismay. “I gots ta talk wif Harreee. He cants be goin’ ’round kidnappin’ girls, no matta how lonely he gits.”

Hermione smiled. “I don’t think he kidnapped me, Amos,” she replied softly. “I sent him a letter asking for help. I didn’t really expect him to help and I

certainly never expected him to do this.”

Amos pointed a finger at her. “You be his Herminee, right? Ya gots de frizzy hair and pretty brown eyes like he says.”

Hermione nodded in confusion. *Why would Harry be talking to this man about her? And does Harry really think my eyes are pretty?* s he thought in confusion.

“Girl, he would go ta hell and back ta help ya. Told me dat hisself.”

Hermione stared at Amos for a moment. “Why would he do that? I called him terrible things the last time we were together.”

Amos shrugged. “One hundred and forty tree years I see and I haven' got all de answers. Harreee, he is a special kind o' mon. A good mon, but tough ta get by his walls, ya know? He don' talk often 'bout you, Ron and Ginny, but he loves da tree of you.” He paused for a moment, watching her. When he continued, his voice had dropped to a whisper. “Ron and Ginny be dead, and Harree, he woul'da joined dem, but sometin' been holdin' him back. You, I 'spect.”

Hermione gasped. Her thoughts drifted back to the drawer full of death next to his bed and her expression turned grim.

Amos nodded. “Ya unnerstan' now. He's willin' ta help anyone but hisself. But maybe now dat change,” he said, then he turned to look out the window.

Hermione followed his gaze. She could see the small speck on the horizon, slowly coming closer.

Amos stood. “Come, we go meet Harreee. Hopefully, he's got some gud fish.”

He pulled out a short wand, barely four inches long and he made a jabbing motion. A hat appeared in his hands, which he offered to her. “Neva go witout a hat 'round dees parts. Not 'less you wanna burn til you as black as ol' Amos,” he said, chortling.

Hermione accepted the wide brimmed hat and, feeling silly, put it on. Then she followed Amos out to the dock where he waited. Almost immediately she was grateful for the silly looking straw hat as she blinked in the blinding tropical sun. She cast a cooling charm on herself and a sun protection charm on her arms and shoulders. She could already feel the sun beating down on her.

She watched Harry pilot the small boat expertly towards the dock. She was surprised to see him sitting behind the wheel, with a pipe in his mouth, smoking. The way he handled the wheel spoke of a confidence in piloting the small craft. She was also worried about his reaction to her presence. He had seen her and for a brief moment his face lit up with a smile. Then, as quickly as it arrived, it was gone, leaving behind the neutral mask he tried to show the world.

“Ahoy, Harreee!” shouted Amos when he was about a hundred yards out. “I know ya didn' bring dis girl for ol' Amos, so ya betta have some gud fish!”

Hermione stopped and stared at Amos, not sure where she had been insulted or not.

Amos turned and grinned at her, to show he wasn't trying to hurt her feelings.

Harry reached down and pulled up a large parrot fish and then he lifted a large bucket, causing Amos' expression to light up.

“Harree caught' lobsta! Good eatin', dey are,” the old man proclaimed, grinning broadly at her and smacking his hands together happily.

Hermione smiled to herself. The strange old wizard had a peculiar kind of charm about him.

Harry guided the boat up to the dock and killed the engine, then tossed Amos the bow line. Amos tied off the bow, while Harry tied off the stern line. Then he bent over and tossed his dive bag onto the dock before lifting up the large bucket filled with lobster. He handed up the leader with several fish to Amos before climbing out of the boat.

“Hello, Hermione,” he said softly, his expression strangely mixed. He was relieved that she was safe, but also confused. Now that she was on the island, what was he supposed to do with her?

She felt very self conscious. They had argued the last time they were together and she had called him some very bad things. Things that she now deeply regretted.

“I see Dobby's been taking good care of you. A good nights sleep helped. You look better,” he said into the awkward silence.

“Harry,” she choked, then she grabbed him in a tight hug and began to cry.

Harry stiffened for a moment, then his arms seemed to wrap around her of their own volition. Amos watched for a moment, then he chuckled and took Harry's catch to the little shed on the shore where he could take his fish, and a few lobster for his own dinner.

He held her as she sobbed against him, the past months of tension finally finding an outlet.

“Shhh. You're safe here,” he whispered, then he tightened his grip a little and buried his face into her hair.

Minutes passed before she managed to get herself under control and Harry released her. She stepped back, feeling strangely lonely now that she was out of his arms.

Harry glanced up to see Amos wave, then he walked down the beach, whistling and carrying a bucket with some lobster and his fish.

"Let's go inside and we can talk," Harry said.

She nodded and watched him pick up the bag with his dive gear and a rather nasty looking spear gun. It was unloaded, but the spears were clipped to the outside of the barrel.

He paused at the shack to rinse off his equipment, then he stowed it and picked up his catch.

"Those don't look like lobster," she said.

Harry grinned. "They aren't, really. Real lobster have claws, these are called Spiny Lobster. But they taste almost as good as a Maine lobster. I know it's early still, but we'll cook these up for lunch and I'll make you a fish dish for dinner. I have a recipe Amos taught me. It's delicious."

Once inside, he put the fish on ice and the lobsters into a large tank, then he turned and gestured for her to sit in the large living room. Crookshanks sat near the tank, his tail whipping in anticipation of more fresh seafood.

She sat on the couch and he sat across from her on a comfortable, high backed chair.

"Hermione, we both said things to each other that we regret. If it's all the same to you, I would prefer to pretend that fight never happened. I can't begin to tell you how badly I felt afterwards, both for what I said and for what you said."

Hermione looked down, her face suddenly flaming. "I said some truly terrible things to you, Harry. I can't tell you how sorry I am."

He stood and moved to her side on the couch. Grasping her chin lightly in his hand, he turned her head so he could meet her eyes. "It's alright, Hermione. It's in the past. What matters is what happens from here on."

When her tears started, he leaned over and kissed her forehead. Of all the scenarios she could have envisioned, being forgiven so easily was not one she thought would happen.

Dobby appeared with a tray holding a large pitcher containing a red liquid and two glasses. Harry took the tray and placed it on the table, then he poured the drink into a glass and handed it to Hermione.

"Rule number one, drink plenty of liquids. Between the salt in the water, salt in the air and the heat, you can dehydrate fairly quickly."

She hesitated, looking at the blood red drink mixed with ice.

"It's just fruit juice, Hermione," he said with a reassuring grin.

She sipped cautiously and her eyes lit up with surprised pleasure.

Harry returned to his seat and pulled out his pipe. Ignoring her incredulous look, he lit it and raised an eyebrow. "So, why don't you tell me how one of the best and most qualified Professors Hogwarts has had since the founders got herself fired?"

She blushed and looked down at her glass for a moment, then she looked up at him. "How much of what's going on back home are you aware of?"

Harry shrugged. "I don't pay much attention to the Wizarding world anymore. Short of Dumbledore leading an assault force against the Cay, we're pretty safe here. We'll be safer still when I'm done. Until I got your letter, I was pretty much ignoring the world, hoping it would go away. I guess that'll change now."

His expression altered and he looked up at the ceiling thoughtfully. "Although, Dumbledore assaulting the wards would be amusing. Sooner or later I'm going to have to do something about that man," he mused aloud.

Hermione nodded, absently filing his comments away. They weren't relevant now.

"Over the past year the Ministry had enacted laws aimed at reducing the rights of muggle born and even half bloods, like yourself. The first law was the Racial Purity act," she said. "It made it illegal for most pure bloods to have anything to do with muggles or muggle society."

Harry nodded. "That explains why the twins showed up on my beach one night with a trunk of hastily packed stuff," he commented, mostly to himself.

Hermione started. "The twins? Fred and George are here?"

"Yes. Angelina and Alicia also arrived recently. And Lee Jordan, his wife, Anita, and their baby," he replied.

"Thank Merlin!" she exclaimed. "When they dropped out of sight I was afraid they'd been arrested."

She breathed a sigh of obvious relief before continuing. "I was mildly alarmed, but Albus kept assuring me that it was all temporary and would pass, once cooler heads prevailed. But the laws kept getting more and more restrictive. Professor Flitwick and I were practically prisoners in the castle near the end. We had to rely on Poppy and Minerva to get what we needed from Hogsmeade."

She shook her head, remembering. "I still don't understand it all. It makes no sense to me. Voldemort was a half blood, but all of his followers were pure blood, so they're focusing on the fact that Voldemort wasn't a pure blood and lashing out at all muggle born and half bloods. It's insane."

Her eyes teared up and she choked back a sob. A box of tissues appeared in her lap and she shot him a grateful look before pulling out a tissue.

"I was happy, teaching and doing a little research on the side. I even did some consulting work for the twins from time to time. But then the students started calling me Professor Mudblood and other names. A seventh year student, a Slytherin, accosted me in a corridor and tried to... he tried to..."

"You don't have to say it," Harry said, his expression mottled with anger. Had she named the student, he would have gleefully gone off to find the little pissant and tear him to pieces.

She nodded and refused to meet his gaze. "I stunned him. He was a student, I didn't want to hurt him. Next thing I know, Percy Weasley's in the castle, demanding that Dumbledore fire me for not showing proper respect for a pure blood and he had a dozen Aurors with him!"

"Dumbledore didn't do anything! He didn't defend me at all. Then someone slipped a hand in mine and tugged me towards the door. I followed, wondering why no one seemed to care about me walking out like that.

"At the bottom of the staircase, Professor Flitwick canceled his invisibility charm and told me that we both had to leave. He was leaving immediately, but I had to go get Crooks and my things. I gathered up Crooks and what I could easily carry, and ran for the Honeydukes tunnel. From Hogsmeade, I made my way to Diagon Alley, where Tom put me up.

"Tom later found that I was to be placed under Dumbledore's protective custody, indefinitely. I don't know how he talked them into that, but I didn't want to find out what that meant, either.

"Since then, this past month, I've spent my time writing letters to friends, trying to find someone who could help. Many are either afraid, or willingly falling in line with the Ministry position. Neville and Susan Longbottom, for example. Neville wanted to help, but they were afraid."

Harry frowned, hearing that. Neville, it seemed, had fallen far from the Gryffindor standard.

Crookshanks, hearing his human speak his name, tore himself away from watching the tank full of lobsters and joined her on the couch. She was upset and it was his job to keep her happy so she would keep feeding him and attending to his itchy places.

Harry nodded absently. "You're welcome to stay on the Cay, Hermione. I've built you a bungalow just up the beach, but we won't have it furnished for a few more days. Amos will need to run up to Nassau to get furniture and whatever else you need."

Hermione shook her head. "You're trying to get rid of me already?"

Harry sighed. "I live alone. Yes, the house has a lot of bedrooms, but only one has a bed in it. Besides, if you stay here, it'll give people the wrong impression."

She cocked her head, looking at him sideways. "People? What people? Harry, why are you here and who else is here? I hardly think you'd be concerned about what Fred and George would think. They've been living with their girlfriends for years."

Harry stood and walked over to a window, looking out. "This is my place, Hermione, all of it. I own the island. As to why I'm here, I thought it would be for the best if I were to leave the wizarding world. Unfortunately for me, it wasn't ready to let me go just yet."

Hermione placed her glass on the table and stood. She walked up behind him, stopping only a few feet away. "What's wrong?" she asked quietly.

Harry turned to her. "Why did you write me? Why me? I thought I'd managed to bury my past."

She looked around at the empty bourbon bottles littering the room. "Burying it? Drowning it is more like it. What's happened to you, Harry?"

Harry took a deep, shuddering breathe and closed his eyes. She could see he was trying to master his temper and she took a step backwards, alarmed by the amount of raw magic surrounding him.

He opened his eyes and smiled softly, though it was a cold smile that didn't reach his eyes. In a way it reminded her of Malfoy's smile.

"Please, Hermione. Let's not fight."

She could hear the plea in his voice, so she nodded. She didn't understand what was going through his mind and it worried her. Once, just a few years ago, she would have known instantly what was bothering him. But no longer. He was a stranger now, someone who looked a lot like a friend she'd once had.

He opened the sliding glass door and stepped out onto the veranda. She followed him quietly, unsure what to do.

He leaned against the railing and looked out over the ocean.

"It's beautiful," Hermione murmured, coming to stand next to him, also leaning on the railing.

"It's one of the reasons why I bought this place. Moving the few muggles off the island was fairly easy. Money in adequate amounts does wonders to convince people to your point of view. The only muggles left on the island know about the Wizarding world."

"How did you find this place?" she asked.

"After I left England I wandered anywhere I felt like going. I visited Australia, New Zealand, Tibet, Japan, South Africa, India, Polynesia. The Bahamas was one of the few places I liked, and it had something I couldn't get in those other places. Privacy. Did you know you can buy an island and, for the right price, declare your independence from any country?"

She shook her head, looking at him carefully. She didn't understand the tenseness that seemed to surround him like a living thing.

"I didn't see any need for that. I mean, I have other ways of declaring independence if I want to. Besides, the island is warded, unplottable, masked and under a *Fidelius* charm. And if I can figure out the last pieces to the puzzle, this island will be protected from the idiots in the Ministry, forever."

"Puzzle?" Hermione asked.

He looked at her for a moment. "Why don't we save that conversation for later? If I tell you all now, we'll have nothing to talk about over dinner."

Hermione nodded and turned back to face the beach. "So, this is where you're hiding? You and a few others?"

"Those 'others' now include you, Miss Granger," he reminded her gently.

She sighed and looked down. "All those plans I had," she whispered. "I was going to be Headmistress someday, and head of Gryffindor house before that."

Harry looked away for a moment. "I'm sorry," he replied turning back to her. "We all had plans that were ruined."

Hermione reached out and took his hand in hers. "I'm sorry I didn't want to believe you about Dumbledore. You were right all along. I didn't want to believe he could do those things."

"Some of us take longer to learn their lessons, Hermione. I'm sorry yours cost you so much, but you still have your family. He cost me my family and my life." He looked down at her joined hands and grinned a little, then he looked up. "It'll rain tomorrow. We'll have all day to talk. Do you want me to tell the twins you're here?"

"Let's wait a few days. But do you have an owl I can use? I'd like to send a message to my parents, letting them know I'm safe."

He frowned slightly. "Sending owls is a bit difficult, but I have a solution." Holding out a hand, he murmured, "Orbis."

A silvery orb appeared in front of him, hovering at head height.

"Where's your wand?" Hermione exclaimed.

He shrugged. "It's in one of my dresser drawers. I haven't used a wand in nearly four years, but I can teach you how to do this spell. It's pretty cool."

He held up a hand and a notebook came flying out of the house to land in it. Hermione watched incredulously while he thumbed through the pages.

"Ha! I knew I'd written that down," he said, pointing to the page. "I already explained this spell to the twins, but hadn't written it down well enough. So I went back and improved on my explanation."

Hermione took the book and looked down at the notes on the page describing the spell and it's wand movement. She frowned, then she relaxed. "Oh, I get it. If sent to a muggle or a squib, it's more like a recording, so I'd have to tell my parents in a regular note how to begin the playback.

"And to another witch or wizard, it's more like a telephone connection?" She peered at him suspiciously, then paged through his notebook. It was a book full of spells she'd never heard of before. "Harry, where did you get these spells?"

He shrugged his shoulders. "I've been doing some studying."

She looked up from the book, her eyes narrowing.

He backed up a bit. "Why don't you go write a note to your parents? Explain what's happened and explain how they can use the orbs to playback your messages. Amos will be going up to the big island on the *Mary Celeste*, so he'll be able to send your message from Nassau. He'll set you up with a owl drop so you can get mail also. I'd let you use Hedwig, but she wouldn't be able to find her way home.

"I have some work I need to do on my boat. Once I finish that, I'll come in and make us lunch. Alright?"

She crossed her arms and looked at him. She was annoyed. He was keeping secrets and she knew he wasn't about to give them up easily to her. "Alright, but you and I are going to have a long talk later," she muttered.

"I wouldn't miss it for all the world," he said with a mocking little bow, then he turned and jumped over the railing to the beach.

She watched him walk out to his boat and climb down to do something around the engine. She turned away, looking carefully around Harry's place. She frowned again at all the bourbon bottles and she pulled out her wand, banishing them all.

"Oh my god! Hermione?"

Hermione whirled, hearing the voice. Standing in the doorway was Angelina and Alicia. The two women rushed into the living room and embraced her.

"I was shocked when Amos said Harry had a woman in his house. But when he described you, I knew instantly who it was," Alicia said happily.

"Who else would it be? I told you it had to be her," admonished Angelina.

Hermione shook her head and looked between the two in confusion. "What..."

Alicia and Angelina exchanged a glance, then practically pushed Hermione over to the couch and sat her down.

"When did you get here?" she finally managed to blurt out.

"We've been here a couple months now," Alicia said. "The twins have been here for nearly a year. They asked us to come when they heard that Harry was going to increase the warding around the Cay."

"I still say it was the best move we ever made," Angelina added. It sounded like an old argument between them.

"Yes, yes. I agree," Alicia added with a sigh, then she turned back to Hermione. "So when did you get in?"

"Just last night. It's all been so confusing. I was hiding out in the Leaky Cauldron and Harry showed up. Next thing I know, I wake up in his bed."

Angelina grinned and leaned closer. "With Harry?" she asked eagerly.

"Of course not!" she said, her cheeks started to burn. "Dobby said something about him sleeping on the beach."

When Angelina and Alicia shared a disappointed look, Hermione leaned back and crossed her arms. "Alright, what is going on here? First Dobby, then Amos, and now you two?"

Alicia sighed. "I'm sorry, Hermione. I realize this must all come as a shock to you. But we've been dreadfully worried about Harry. He's been cutting back on the booze, but that's only made his other problems seem more pronounced. Then, when Amos said you were here, I told Angelina that you'd straighten him out."

"Do you know why he's doing this to himself?"

Angelina and Alicia shook their heads.

Finally Angelina broke the silence. "George thinks it's because of the war and how it ended. At first, I thought he meant what happened to Ginny and Ron. Now I'm not so sure. I mean, it was several months later, after Voldemort was gone, when he left."

Hermione shivered. "He left because we had a fight," she whispered.

The two women turned to stare at her.

Hermione stood and paced for a moment. "After Voldemort, we were all hurting so badly. Harry over Ginny and Ron, me over Ron, and Ginny. It was like someone had tore out our hearts and crushed them. But where I kept breaking out in tears, Harry... he became almost emotionless. Like stone. I yelled at him, called him a cold hearted bastard who didn't care that his best friend and girlfriend were dead. After their funeral, I refused to talk to him again."

"Oh, ouch," Alicia murmured.

"Harry rescued me last night and brought me here. How... how could he forgive me so easily? I don't understand it at all," she said, her expression pleading with them for answers. She simply couldn't understand how he could forgive her, when she couldn't forgive herself.

Alicia turned to Angelina. "Do you want to explain it or shall I?" she asked.

"I'll do it. You tend to be a little too blunt," Angelina said gently, then she turned to Hermione. "He forgave you because he loves you, you daft twit."

"And you call me blunt?" muttered Alicia incredulously.

Angelina grinned at her, then turned back to the shocked Hermione. "He loves you, not quite as a lover... yet, but a lot more than a sister. And I'm positive if you both gave each other a chance, you two would be very happy together."

Hermione stared at Angelina. "He can't think of me like that."

"Well no, not consciously he doesn't," Alicia admitted. "But he jumped four thousand miles to rescue you, despite your fight."

Alicia paused and stared thoughtfully at the younger woman. "Hermione, I didn't finish healer school because of the troubles back home. My mentor was arrested. But it doesn't take a healer to see he's hurting and refusing to face what's hurting him. You are part of what he has to face. He needs you, even if he won't admit it to anyone, including himself."

Hermione turned and looked out the large glass doors. She could see Harry sitting on the dock with pieces of the engine spread out around him. "Do you really think so?"

Alicia stood and gave her a brief hug. "I'm certain of it. He's a strong man, but he can't go it alone. You'll have to be just as strong."

Angelina joined Alicia standing by the door. "We need to get back to Fred and George or they'll burn down the house. But tell Harry that you're both invited to a luau this Sunday at our place."

Hermione blinked. "A luau?"

The two women laughed.

"Just come, Hermione," Alicia said. "You'll love it. Harry usually does most of the big cooking, and the boys provide the entertainment. We'll have everything ready for him."

Bewildered, Hermione could only nod as she watched the two women walk out of the house. They waved to Harry on the dock and he waved back, then they turned and walked up the beach.

Hermione's mind was reeling. Between Amos, Dobby and now Angelina and Alicia, they painted an image of a Harry that she hadn't seen before. Curious, she turned and walked over to the bedroom next to Harry's and opened the door.

She gasped when she saw the stacks of books that rose to just short of the ceiling. The room was full of books on magic, on science, and literature. There was no organization to the stacks. There had to be several thousand volumes in the room.

"Dobby?" she called. She turned when she heard a small pop next to her.

"You call, Miss Hermy?" asked the little elf.

"Are all the other bedrooms filled with books like this one?"

Dobby nodded and watched her with huge eyes. She nibbled on her lower lip thoughtfully. Her years in Hogwarts as a Professor had gotten her over her reluctance to command house elves. "Very well. I want you to move the books in this room to another for now. Then we'll make this my bedroom. After that, we'll see what we can do about organizing the books into a proper library setting with an index and catalog."

Dobby nodded happily. What she wanted would mean he'd be spending more time at the villa and be closer to his Harry Potter Sir.

She turned and frowned in Harry's direction. "Now to go explain to him," she muttered.

Dobby vanished, then reappeared with a tray containing two cold drinks. She smiled and took the drinks from the elf, then walked outside and down the short set of stairs to the dock.

She paused for a moment and grinned to herself. Harry was sitting on the dock cross legged, surrounded by engine parts and flipping through a manual, muttering to himself.

"Even in the wizarding world, talking to one's self is not a good sign, Harry," she said softly, smiling at him. She held the glass out for him to take.

He grinned up at her and took the glass. After a long, deep drink, he nodded towards the parts. "Unless you know how to repair a 1998 Mercury outboard, you'll have to put up with me talking to the repair manual."

He took another drink then peered up at her. "You forgot your hat," he said, then he conjured another hat for her.

She took the hat silently, wondering if everyone was hat crazy on the island. Even Angelina and Alicia wore hats. Harry was wearing an Australian bushmaster hat.

"I noticed the girls caught up with you."

"Yes. Amos told them you had a strange woman in your house so, being the typical females, they had to run down here to see. They also told me to tell you that there will be a luau at Fred and George's this weekend, on Sunday."

He nodded. "Alright. Just be careful around Fred and George. And whatever you do, don't let them show you the joke that got them chased out of Diagon Alley."

She looked at him strangely. "What was it?"

Even with his deep tan she could see him blushing. "An enchanted rubber chicken."

"Is that all?" she exclaimed.

"Disguised as a condom," Harry added quietly.

Hermione stared at him.

He nodded and she blushed as an image formed in her mind, then she started to giggle. Harry joined her, laughing. He thought the idea was funny, since the chicken only appeared once the condom was put on. It gave new meaning to the phrase 'choke the chicken'.

He waited for her laughter to die away before finding out what she wanted. "Alright, Hermione. I think I know you well enough. You have that look in your eye that says you have something you're planning on telling me," he said, placing his drink and repair manual on the dock.

She nibbled on her lip for a moment. "This isn't a temporary place for us, is it? You came here to hide from the world and it's becoming your fortress, your place of safety."

He sighed and nodded. "Yeah, you are probably right. I still can't believe what I told Tom yesterday."

She looked at him strangely.

He waved that away. "I'll tell you later. Now, why don't you tell me what you have in mind."

She sat down on the dock and leaned her back against one of the piling posts. "If I'm going to stay here, I'm going to need something to do, something to occupy my time. And while I think I'd like to learn more about living here, maybe even go fishing with you, that's not going to take that much time."

Harry nodded.

"I found your book collection," she suddenly blurted, then her expression darkened. "And you shouldn't be treating books so badly."

Harry blinked in surprise. "Erm... alright."

"I told Dobby to clean out the bedroom next to yours for me. Then he and I are going to organize and categorize your collection and turn it into a proper library. Dobby says you have thousands of books."

"But I conjured a house for you..." he began, pointing somewhere behind her.

"Do you have any idea just how silly that sounds? People can't just conjure a house..."

She stopped and followed his finger. Her mouth dropped open and she stared in amazement at the nearly identical villa next to his own. *He did call that a bungalow, didn't he?* she thought wildly, looking at what had to be a four or five bedroom villa.

She turned back to look at him. "Let someone else have it. After what I've been through, I don't think I want to be in a house by myself. Knowing you're nearby will make it easier and I'll be able to put your library in order," she finished with a bit of a huff.

Now she waited for his counter-argument.

"Alright," he said with a shrug. "If that's the way you want it."

"I'm not taking no for an answer, Harry. I don't want your house and... Did you just agree with me?"

He smirked. "It seemed easier than arguing with you over a point you were going to win anyway. If there's one thing I know, it's that when your mind is set, nothing but a rock solid argument will change it and I don't have a good enough argument. Besides, we lived together at Hogwarts for seven years, we can do it again."

He turned his gaze towards the other house. "Although what to do with that is now a problem. I can make it go away, but I can't bring back all the undergrowth and have it look natural."

"Just leave the house, Harry. I'm sure it'll get used sooner or later."

He peered up at her for a moment longer, then nodded and looked back down at the engine parts. Picking up a small, oddly shaped part, he glared at it. "Now, where do you go?" he asked it quietly. "You know, if I could charm you to talk, you could tell me where you go and I wouldn't have to put up with this silly manual business." With a sigh, he reached out, grabbed the manual and placed it in his lap.

The part stubbornly ignored him.

Hermione stood shocked silly for a moment. Not only had he dismissed her, but he was talking to the part in his hand!

She watched him for a moment longer before she realized that he had no idea that she was still standing there. It worried her. Turning, she headed back to the house wondering if Harry had any books on psychology.

Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry...

"Enter!"

Dumbledore smiled, seeing his deputy enter the room. His smile slipped a bit when he saw that she was followed by Professors Sprout and Vector.

"Minerva? Did someone call for a staff meeting and not tell me?" he asked teasingly.

She sat on one of his chairs stiffly and shook her head. "No, Headmaster. I am here to tender my resignation, as are Professors Sprout and Vector."

Dumbledore stared at her, dumbstruck. Finally, he shook away his shock and sat up straight. "What? Why?"

Minerva frowned at him and he suddenly felt like a fourth year caught trying to slip into the girl's changing rooms down at the Quidditch Pitch.

"I would have thought that was obvious, Headmaster. Since it's not, I'll explain," she said in clipped tones, signaling her anger.

"I recently heard from Filius," she said, then she held up a hand. "And no, I don't know where he is and if I did, I wouldn't tell you. In any event, he is safe, or so he says. He regrets his hasty departure, but I can understand why he did what he did."

"Between Filius and Hermione, you chased away some of the best teachers this school has seen. The Ministry hacks that replaced them do not know the subjects they are supposed to be experts in."

"So you're leaving because of the loss of two teachers?"

"Three teachers," Professor Sprout said softly.

"Three?" Dumbledore asked, looking worried.

"Yes, Albus," Minerva said coldly, "Three. Hagrid left late last night. He ran into spot of trouble in Hogsmeade and knew you wouldn't help him. Honestly, you used to be the most tolerant man I knew. Why you've changed is a mystery to me."

He blinked at her.

"Professor," Vector said. "You and your policies are ruining this school. Ever since you claimed credit for killing Voldemort, you've been letting the Ministry and the International Confederation of Wizards set a tone of racial bigotry that is intolerable. You have every Ministry in the world looking to ours to set the tone of their policies. They turned to us in gratitude for the killing of Voldemort and you're corrupting the entire world with your poison."

"And what you did to Hermione was reprehensible. You sat back and nodded your head while that fool Weasley talked himself into arresting Hermione for the crime of defending herself!

"Two things saved Hermione that day. Filius saw the writing on the wall and got her out. The fact that Weasley is so enamored with listening to himself speak helped enormously. It took everyone two bloody hours to realize she had slipped out of your office!"

Vector leaned back in her chair, her normally calm face twisted in anger. Sprout leaned over and patted her hand soothingly.

"Ladies, what is happening now is exactly why we need such qualified people such as yourselves to teach at Hogwarts," Dumbledore said in protest.

Minerva shook her head. "Albus, I've been angry with you since you faked your own death. In all my days I never would have thought a Gryffindor would have taken a cowardly path like that. What you did to Harry..." she stopped herself and sighed. Then she pulled out a parchment and laid it on his desk. "I can't speak for the others, but I refuse to support this policy of racial purity. It's bigotry, plain and simple, and I won't stand for it. Here is my letter of resignation."

Sprout and Vector leaned forward and laid their letters of resignation on the desk as well.

"The Ministry won't take your quitting well Minerva," Dumbledore warned ominously.

She snorted. "I don't care. Unlike you, I'm willing to die for what I believe in."

She stood and turned, walked from the office with Sprout and Vector on her heels.

Dumbledore looked at the three letters on his desk in anger. Why couldn't people see he was trying to preserve their way of life? Couldn't they understand how important that was?

He pulled out a piece of parchment and started to write down names. He'd need to hire Transfiguration, Herbology, Arithmancy and Care of Magical Creatures teachers and he'd need to do it fast, or the Ministry would assign those positions.

He was rather angry with his former professors. He had been trying to deal with the problems his great grandson was experiencing. The lad had been part of an Auror team who had been ambushed by hooligans in the Americas. The entire team had their memories wiped and their magic taken away. It was a puzzle he was still hoping to reverse.

Norman's Cay (Later that evening)...

Hermione sat up in Harry's bed reading. While she wouldn't call her first day in the Bahamas a rousing success, it was far better than hiding in a back room of the Leaky Cauldron.

Both Harry and Hermione had become so engrossed in what they were doing that lunch had been forgotten. Hermione wouldn't have noticed, except that Dobby appeared carrying a platter of food for her.

Harry skipped lunch entirely. It wasn't until late afternoon, when she heard the sound of the outboard engine starting, that she knew he was finishing up. The engine coughed roughly for a moment, then settled down into a regular roar. A minute later, the sound died away and a rather happy, albeit quite filthy, Harry entered the villa. He'd smiled at her from the doorway she was standing in, then he turned and went into one of the spare bathrooms instead of using the bath attached to his bedroom.

Dinner was a surprise. She had no idea that Harry was that capable in the kitchen. He served her a grilled fish fillet with wok fried vegetables and chilled fruits for dessert. While the meal was wonderful, she couldn't help feeling that something was off. Their conversation was stilted, sticking to safe territory. And when she noticed Harry was drinking heavily, she decided to keep her mouth shut until she knew better what was going on.

Now she lay in his bed, reading. Next to the bed was a night table with a drawer full of death. Harry's behavior perplexed her. She hadn't been around long enough to see it all, but something was off and that frightened her. Harry was always so practical, so solid and stable. At least, he used to be.

She heard a noise so she put down her book and put on the light weight Kimono that Dobby had provided for her. Padding silently out of the bedroom, she saw Harry standing on the very edge of the dock looking out over the water. The moon hung high in the sky, casting alternating patches of light and dark on the water that rippled hypnotically.

She returned to the bedroom and put a pair of slippers on, then glanced at the clock. It was nearly two in the morning! Stepping out of the house, she closed the door and hurried down the steps to the beach, then she walked out onto the dock. She scowled, seeing Harry lift a bottle to his lips.

She stopped a few feet behind him, suddenly unsure of herself.

"I take it by now you've discovered my wonderful drawer of goodies?" he said softly, then he took another drink. "A normal, single guy would fill his drawer with porn. Not me. I've got a drawer full of failures."

"Are you ready to talk to me now?" she asked, moving up to stand beside him.

"Are you sure you want to know what kind of monster I've become?"

"You're no monster, Harry," she replied, placing a hand on his arm.

He flinched away from her touch. "You don't know, Hermione. You didn't know after Voldemort, and you didn't seem to be all that interesting in listening to me then," he said, moving a step away.

She sighed and looked ashamed for a moment. "I was wrong then. I'd like to help you now if you'll let me."

He lifted the bottle to his lips, but she reached out, stopping him. "That isn't helping you either."

He lowered the bottle and looked at her for a moment, but she refused to back down. He nodded and capped the bottle, then he tossed it straight up. The bottle arced up and vanished. She raised an eyebrow and he pointed back towards the house.

"Let's at least be comfortable. There are some nice deck loungers we can relax on."

She followed him silently to the house, wondering what secret he had that was so terrible.

He lay back on one of the loungers while she sat on the edge of another, watching him.

"I've come to a realization. Voldemort was wrong to want immortality. There is something worse than wanting to be immortal. There's being unable to die."

She blinked at him, then it hit her. "Your drawer?"

"Failed attempts to shuffle off this mortal coil, to be with my family. And maybe, just maybe, find some peace." He turned to look at her, ignoring her gasp. "Perhaps it would be best if I explained from the beginning?"

She took a moment to regain her composure, then she nodded.

"Remember the line in the prophesy about 'the power he knows not'? After the war, did you ever wonder about what that line meant?"

"I don't know. I just assumed it would be the way you killed him. Maybe with some unique spell or something like that," she replied.

"You were unconscious and wounded before the end of the battle, and reports as to how he died were wrong. The first reports said I did it, but never said how. Then Dumbledore showed up, the day after the battle, and suddenly people were believing that somehow that old coward killed him. They actually bought his line about channeling his magic, using me as a conduit. I didn't care about the fame. He could have it up his arse sideways, for all I cared. But seriously, that lie was so outrageous, how could anyone believe it? But they did. They bought it lock, stock and barrel."

He paused and shook his head in dismay. "The truth is, I killed Voldemort with a simple reductor to the head. The spell blew through two shields like they were tissue paper trying to stop a bullet."

"But the reports said..."

"I said they were wrong," he growled.

When she flinched back from him, his expression softened. "I'm sorry," he said quietly.

"No, please, tell me. Help me understand."

Harry leaned back on his lounge and looked up at the star filled sky. "Voldemort made a classic error. He wanted to wait until I'd exhausted myself against his forces before facing me. Had he faced me right off, we could have been equal, we would have had the same level of power. But he didn't do that. He threw his army at Diagon Alley first, even though he knew I was there. That was his mistake.

"I went into that battle filled with rage and grief over Ginny and what had happened to her. I went into it with the power unleashed and working for me. Haven't you wondered why I don't need a wand and how I was able to apparate thousands of miles with you and Crookshanks?"

"I have," she admitted.

I have an ability that I've since learned to control, but there was no control on that battlefield. Every time I killed that day, I absorbed the magical potential of my victim. By the time I faced Voldemort, my core had expanded with the energy from over twenty Death Eaters. Voldemort was no match for me then. He didn't stand a chance. He was just another core for me to consume and his was the biggest on the battlefield, other than mine.

"I walked up to him, batting away his curses like they were gnats and fired off a single *Reducto* r while he shrieked about being the greatest and most powerful wizard ever. He held a metal shield, which he had conjured, and his magical shield. My reductor sliced through both, hitting him in the head.

"His death effectively ended the battle and I stumbled around, looking for you and Ron. I found him not far from you, but he was already gone. I don't know what happened to him, but seeing him lying there was like flipping a switch in me.

"After the battle, I felt so disconnected, like I was watching as someone else went through the motions of being Harry Potter. I was appalled at the power I had and the ability to take it from others. I was afraid people would find out and shun me, or lock me up. Then you and I fought... We fought over..."

"I know what we fought over, Harry," Hermione said a little too sharply. After all these years it still surprised her how painful the loss of Ron and Ginny were to her.

Harry bounded out of the lounge and turned to look at her. She sucked in a breath, suddenly frightened. His eyes glowed as if lit from within.

"You're doing it again," he hissed. "You didn't let me explain then and you're not letting me explain now. Why are we even talking?"

She crossed her arms and glared at him. "Fine, then explain it," she said sharply. She didn't want to dredge this up. It hurt too much.

He moved back to sit on the lounge across from her. "In all the years we spent at Hogwarts, and the times at the Burrow or at Grimmauld Place, have you ever seen me cry? Really cry?"

His question threw her. "What? What does this... No, come to think on it, I don't recall you ever crying. Harry, if this is about some machismo male..."

"It's not, dammit," he snapped. "I can't cry. End of Story. You called me cold hearted and cruel because I never shed a tear for Ginny or Ron and you didn't see how much I was hurting. If only I could have cried, we never would have fought. We probably would have been able to help each other."

Hermione stared at his figure in the darkness, aghast at what he was saying. "But surely..."

"I last time I cried, I was seven. As usual, it resulted in more punishment from my loving family. More special treatment for the family freak," he said bitterly. "I didn't cry for Cedric, or for Sirius. I couldn't cry for Ginny and Ron. I wanted to. I wanted to throw myself on her casket and wail like a banshee, but I couldn't. A piece of me died with her. And then you and I fought. When you left, another piece of me died.

"Not long after, the twins, Bill, Charlie, Remus and myself managed to hunt down Snape. The twins were able to talk me out of killing him. It's small satisfaction to know he's serving life without possibility of parole in Azkaban. I still think I should have killed him.

"After that, there was nothing for me in Britain. Dumbledore was acting like a fool and Scrimgeour's only concern was getting me to endorse his positions. I was numb and wanted to feel something, anything, even if it was only pain. So I left.

"I traveled for a while, visiting all sorts of places. But none of them really moved me. I was empty, a freak without a home or family. Finally, I found this island and settled down. Here, at least, it was pretty and comfortable. It was as good a place as any to wait."

He looked down at his hands. "Since then, it's been a slow, steady decline."

He fell silent and she was grateful that the darkness hid the tears falling down her cheeks. "And the drawer full of poisons and the gun?" she asked in a whisper.

"More failures," he muttered. "Did you know that if you get powerful enough, your magic reaches a point where it starts to protect itself?"

She shook her head mutely. He lay back on the lounge again, not wanting to look at her while he spoke. He didn't think he could handle her expression, her revulsion when she learned the truth.

"I took that handgun and, like an idiot, I tried to shoot myself with it. The bullet hit a shield that I didn't cast and fell to the floor. I tried again with the gun pressed to my temple and, near as I can figure, my magic protected me by vanishing the bullet before it even left the barrel.

"Similar things happened with the poisons," he said, then he chuckled. She shivered at the bitterness she could hear in his voice. "I even tried hanging myself once. It took me three days to learn how to tie that hangman's noose and the damn rope broke before it ever pulled taut. New rope too."

"Oh, my god, Harry, why?" she asked in a choked whisper.

He looked at her, his eyes shining in the darkness. "Because I'm not human anymore. I'm not a wizard, I'm not a muggle. My family was right. I'm a freak, some kind of magical vampire capable of sucking power from people. And the nightmares."

"Nightmares?"

"Every night. I see their faces, their eyes accusing me. Why didn't I save them, why didn't I act sooner? Why did I waste my early years at Hogwarts

screwing around? Every night I relive the fight that took away from me and every night I see myself conquering the world.”

“I could ,you know,” he said in a conversational tone, as if he were discussing the price of beans. “Voldemort was nothing compared to what I can do.”

“You wouldn't really do that, Harry. I know you wouldn't.”

“Yeah, well, tell that to my subconscious. It thinks it's necessary to torture me every damn night. You don't know what I'm capable of doing anymore. Only a short time before I came for you I wiped out a ten man auror team that attacked me up in Nassau. I stole their magic and wiped all their memories so they couldn't endanger those living here.”

He paused and his voice dropped to a whisper. “So now you know why I've been experimenting with poisons. Sooner or later, I'll succeed. I have to. I've become a monster, just like him.”

She stood and walked over to the lounge he lay upon. With a deft flick of her wand, it expanded to nearly double its width, then she laid down next to him. “No, you won't succeed because I'm here now and I'm going to help you,” she said, as calmly as she could. “I'm sorry we fought, and even more sorry that I wasn't there for you when you needed me. But I'm here now and I'm going to help you.”

He eyed her warily. “And if I don't want help anymore?”

She sniffed once. “Tough. I walked away from you once and I'm not doing it again,” she whispered. She reached out and ran her fingers through his hair.

He nodded, then yawned sleepily. “I never could win an argument with you,” he said softly.

She smiled to herself. “Sleep, Harry. I'll watch over you.”

He closed his eyes and his breathing evened out. She continued combing his hair with her fingers, while looking out over the water lit by a quarter moon. Eventually, she also drifted off, snuggling closer to him, seeking his warmth in the cool night air.

A few minutes later, a small figure appeared with a quiet pop. He smiled at the sleeping pair, then he snapped his fingers and nodded in satisfaction as a blanket appeared and covered them both.

With a quiet sigh, Dobby vanished back to his room.

Norman's Cay, (The next morning)...

Hermione awoke to an unusual sight. As Harry had predicted, a storm system had moved in and a heavy rain was pelting the beach. The wind was whipping up the surf and she could see Harry's little boat bouncing wildly in the water. For a brief moment, she hoped that it wouldn't sink before she had a chance to ride in it.

Then it dawned on her. They were laying on a lounge, on an open deck surrounding the house and yet not a drop of rain hit them. It was then that she noticed the shield that surrounded the house. It was barely visible and she could only see hints of it using her peripheral vision. Harry had shielded the house from the weather!

It was only after she started to move that she realized that she was wrapped around Harry and he was holding her against him. Blushing furiously, she moved slowly away, not wanting to wake him. When she managed to free herself, she sat up and slid off the lounge.

A small pop signaled the arrival of Dobby, who looked at Harry, still sleeping, then at Hermione with admiration in his gaze. She had managed something no one else had. She had gotten Harry to sleep. He handed her a steaming mug of tea, then vanished as quietly as he could.

She sat on the other lounge, sipping her tea and watching Harry. He was still deeply asleep and she wasn't going to wake him. The girl's comments from yesterday bothered her. So far, if Harry was in love with her, he hadn't been very demonstrative about it. In fact, at points he was so cold he was frightening.

Standing, she walked into the house and over to the table where Harry kept his books. She started leafing through his notebooks, her brow furrowing in surprise and confusion. Harry had a stack of muggle notebooks nearly six inches high and they were filled with spells that she never heard of!

She eyed the Avalonian Grimoires suspiciously. She owned a set herself, but Harry's copies looked different, older and more used. She picked up one of the Grimoires and opened it. Inside her copies was a number indicating which registered copy it was. There was no number, no copyright, no mention of the Ministry Press that produced the copies inside the volume she held.

She shook her head in denial. These couldn't be the originals, could they? The originals are kept safe in a theft proof display at the British Museum!

“In case you're wondering, those aren't copies,” said a voice behind her.

She turned in her chair to see him standing there, sipping a large cup of coffee.

“Where did you get these?” Her eyes narrowed suspiciously. “You stole them, didn't you?”

“Of course. The museum was selling inaccurate copies,” he replied, shrugging. “I bought myself a copy of the set and noticed right away that they

weren't the same books. So I replaced my copies with the originals. Besides, do you really think I care about something the Ministry owns?"

She glared. Stealing books? In her mind there could be no greater crime. Suddenly something he said clicked and she looked at him hard. "What do you mean the copies aren't the same as these books? These say the same thing as my set!"

He frowned, staring at her for a moment. Then he grinned and sat down across from her. "I now know one of your secrets, Miss Granger," he said, wagging a finger at her. He made a chortling sound, which only increased while she stared at him.

Stifling his laughter, he leaned across the table slightly. "All those years at school and you couldn't tell us that you have eidetic memory?"

She blushed and looked down at her cup. "I didn't want anyone to think I was..."

"A freak?" he said softly.

She glanced at him and seeing his stricken look, she nodded, feeling suddenly guilty.

"I don't think anyone would have thought that. Certainly not me," he said, his voice dropping to a whisper. He turned away from her and wrapped his arms about himself. "Never me," he muttered.

"I know. I'm sorry. But that doesn't answer my question. How did you know?" she asked gently. She wanted to draw him out of the funk sliding into.

He released himself and looked up from the table. "Simple. I watched from the doorway. You flipped through two of the Grimoires as if you were scanning them, and yet you were certain they weren't the same as your own. How else could you know unless you had them memorized?"

"Well, they do say the same thing," she said in protest.

Harry reached around her, pulled out the first volume and opened it. "Do you ever wonder why there's so much spacing between the lines in these?"

She looked down at the page, then back up to him. "I assumed it was so that corrections could be applied, if necessary."

Harry nodded. "A good answer. Wrong, but your answer is the generally accepted one. Next question. According to legend, these books predate Merlin, although he supposedly owned them and, after him, Godric Gryffindor. Since then, not a single piece of magic can be attributed to what is written in these books. They contain tantalizing hints of astounding pieces of magic, but no real information. Given that fact, why have people taken the trouble to preserve these worthless documents? And mind you, Miss Granger, these books once belonged to Gryffindor. As the sole living heir of Gryffindor, I could simply say these are mine by birthright," he said with a grin. "But it's more fun to admit to stealing them. The twins were most impressed."

"The books are a piece of history, even if they serve no useful purpose," she replied. He had her thoroughly confused now.

Shaking his head, he flipped to the beginning of the book in front of him and looked at her carefully. "Do you trust me?"

"What?"

"Do you trust me?" he said again.

She nodded, albeit a bit reluctantly.

Harry grinned and reached up with his hand. He poked her on the forehead, hard. "DOINK!" he cried.

She looked at him angrily. "That's not funny!" she fumed, rubbing her forehead angrily.

"No? Well, I thought it was. Besides, I just helped you learn to read between the lines," he replied. He wiggled his eyebrows at her for a moment, then stood and waded into the kitchen, humming a tune, off key.

She blinked and glared at his retreating back. Before she could open her mouth to lambaste him, something caught her eye. Looking down at the open Grimoire, she gasped. Between the lines were glowing letters.

"Harry!" she gasped.

He laughed and walked out of the kitchen, carrying two bowls, one of which he handed to her, before sitting down once more. "I had the same reaction when I first noticed.. Each book in the Grimoire set is really two books. The first book describes the magic, without going into a lot of detail. The second book, the hidden, glowing lines of text, goes into greater detail, including the runes and arithmantic equations.

"The only variation from that scenario is when you get to book five, which details the Avalon Equations, but doesn't explain them in sufficient detail. The second book does that... I think. I still haven't worked out all the details. It's frightfully complex," he said, looking unhappy with himself.

He pushed several notebooks at her. "These contain the second books for the first eight secondary books in the set. I haven't finished the others yet. As it stands, that spell will only last you a few hours, so you should probably read from my handmade copies."

She looked at one of his notebooks, then back to the first volume. "You could have just shown me the books without poking me in the forehead you know. And what kind of incantation is DOINK?"

He grinned. "It's a Harry-cantation. I could have pinched your bum, or had you pull my finger," he replied. He tilted his head slightly in thought. "No, pulling the finger sometimes does other things. The poke in the forehead really was for the best, I think."

"Harry, what's happened to you?" she exclaimed. She never could recall him being like this.

Almost instantly his amused expression dropped away, replaced with a blank mask. Standing, he turned without a word and walked into his bedroom, closing the door quietly behind him.

She sat, stunned for a minute, then she stood and followed him. Opening the door, she found him sitting on the floor, his back up against the corner of the room and his head in his hands. She knelt by his side.

"You don't have to do this, Hermione," he said, his voice muffled by his hands.

"Do what?" she asked quietly

"Pretend you care. I know I wouldn't, if I were you," he said. Lifting his head, he looked at her. "I'm crazy, aren't I?" he whispered.

She shook her head and smiled at him sadly. "I don't think you are, but I do think you're holding back too much for one person and you need someone to help you. You need me to help you. You needed me in school and you need me again. I'm going to be here for you."

He eyed her warily, then his shoulders hitched. For a brief moment, she thought he was crying, then she realized he was doing the closest thing he could to crying. There were no tears, no sound. He took great, gasping breaths and his shoulders shook. Understanding what was happening, she moved closer and wrapped her arms around him, murmuring gently.

After several minutes he pulled away from her and gave her a wan smile. "Thank you," he whispered. "I'd forgotten what it's like to have someone around who cares."

She returned his smile and reached out to caressed his hair. "Come on, then. We have all day to talk and I still want to discuss the Grimoires. Do you have any other surprises I should know about?"

He looked down at his hands and mumbled something.

"What was that?"

He looked up at her sheepishly. "Some of the books in my collection are like the Grimoires."

She arched an eyebrow at him. "Stolen?"

He nodded. "But I only did that if they wouldn't sell or at least let me make a copy," he said softly as if that excuse was good enough to justify stealing.

She sighed heavily. "Alright, Mr. Potter. Two changes I want you to make, starting today. No more booze and no more stealing books!" He looked suitably chastened, so she smiled again. "Now, let's have breakfast and we can talk about what you discovered in the Grimoires."

They discussed a variety of topics the rest of the day. Harry explained how he had been working on the Avalon Equations, hoping to invoke them on Norman's Cay, or at least have that option available to him. She was suitably impressed with his work, despite the fact that he never took Ancient Runes or Arithmancy. He had done some astounding work in taking information from the Grimoires and crafting new spells.

They didn't realize it then, but a turning point had been reached in Harry's downward spiral. In accepting that Hermione was there to help him, he made the first significant step towards recovering from the depression that had been plaguing him since Voldemort's death.

In the end, Hermione decided that once she had the library set up, she would see if she could build upon the work that Harry had started. He had laid a solid foundation, but lacked the formal training to take it further.

St. André, the French Alps...

Bill watched the small nondescript owl wing towards him and he couldn't help feel a surge of fear shoot through him. Few knew where he was, or who he was with, and fewer still would want to send him an owl these days.

Bill had been staying with his wife, Fleur, not far from Beauvilliers where she was taking some additional courses on curse breaking. Almost overnight things changed radically as the French Ministry, at the urging of the International Confederation of Wizards, enacted a Purity Protection Act, making it illegal to teach all muggle born or half bloods.

French Aurors were sweeping the towns and catching all of the known non-pure bloods. Bill arrived at the school in time to help Madame Maxime erect a temporary ward to keep out the Aurors. Once that was done, she assembled all the non-pure bloods and explained the situation. She offered them each an option to try to return home, or they could go into hiding in a refugee camp often used by the giant tribes not far from a small French village in the Alps.

Roughly half of her students opted for returning home, despite the warnings that they may not have a home to return to. That left Madame Maxime with herself, Bill and Fleur as the only adults, and thirty seven students ranging from third year to seventh, including Fleur's sister, Gabrielle.

With the temporary wards falling, Madame Maxime handed out portkeys to the students wishing to return home, then she made a large rope portkey for everyone else. They barely managed to get out in time, as the wards fell only seconds after the last student had portkeyed away.

Bill removed the letter from the owl only after he had checked it for traps and tracking charms. He smiled, seeing it was from his friend, Tom, who ran the Leaky Cauldron. Bill had gone to school with one of Tom's sons and knew the older man well, having done work for him in the past. One of the advantages of being a curse breaker, even if he was unemployed, was that he was thoroughly intimate with wards. Some of Tom's dealings were less than legal and he paid Bill to ward several rooms in the back of his pub so that they couldn't be found.

He read the letter and his eyes widened. Then he turned and dashed back up the hill to the little house that Madam Maxime used. For the first time in nearly six months he had good news to share!

Luau gone awry...

It had been a strange week for Hermione. Starting with her rescue from the Leaky Cauldron and her arrival on Norman's Cay, some four thousand miles away in the tropics. It had been a week of discoveries, some wonderful and some heart wrenching.

She had finally made peace with her childhood friend. Harry was strangely altered by the years they had been apart. He was more studious and responsible, but he had a darker side which tormented him remorselessly. He was also prone to extreme mood swings. It didn't take her long to understand that her friend had reached the end of his rope and only the power of his magic prevented him from killing himself.

She made it a point to get him talking about his feelings. He hated it, but he couldn't refuse anything she asked of him. And that was another issue she still had to deal with. Harry's feelings for her were blatantly obvious, although he never once acted upon them. It flattered her, and awoke feelings she thought she had suppressed long ago. He had been a perfect gentleman, but she was sure he hoped it would become more someday. She finally admitted to herself that she wouldn't be upset if it did become more. She hoped it would. In the meantime, Harry had stopped drinking, at her request. And twice so far he had awoken her in the middle of the night so she could help talk him through the nightmares.

Amos finally delivered furniture for her bedroom, which allowed Harry to move back into his old room. When she asked why he hadn't just conjured furniture, he explained he could conjure all sorts of stuff, but when it came to things like chairs, beds and the like, they always came out lumpy. That sent her into a fit of laughter that lasted too long for Harry's comfort.

She sat up in her bed and rubbed her eyes sleepily. A small pop signaled the arrival of Dobby.

"Miss Hermy, Harry Potter Sir said to tell you that he'd meet you here in time to go to the party. He said you need to be there around six, but he had to leave early to get the food started."

Dobby tugged on one ear and she could see he looked unhappy.

"What's wrong, Dobby?"

"Harry Potter Sir didn't want Dobby to help him cook today," the little elf said with a quivering lower lip.

Hermione fought off the urge to laugh, seeing how unhappy he was. "Dobby, it's not that Harry doesn't want your help, but he's cooking something special today. You're used to British cooking and, if I understand rightly, this isn't a British meal. But if you want to help, why don't you ask Harry if you can watch him? That way, the next time he has a luau, you'll know how to help."

Dobby blinked his huge eyes and looked at Hermione in shock. "Harry Potter Sir would let Dobby watch and learn?"

"I'm sure of it," she said with a firm nod.

Dobby grinned and vanished with a pop.

She dressed and went back to work on the Grimoires, content that when the time came, Harry or Dobby would come fetch her.

The hours passed quietly while she worked on his copies, cleaning them up and making them more legible. He had relented and taught her a spell that would allow her to read the glowing letters, although she almost killed him over the incantation. She felt it was beneath her to say 'Yippee Ki Yay'. It was then that she started to realize what Harry was really teaching her. The words didn't matter, nor did the movement. Both were merely aids to help a wizard remember the spell.

She heard the door open and turned around.

Harry walked in, smiling at her. "I need to take a shower before we go. I've had Dobby lay out some clothes for you. You'll have a choice. Traditional clothing or something more comfortable. If you don't mind my suggesting, I'd say take the long skirt instead of the shorts. We'll be sitting on the beach on straw mats, but you don't want sand getting into your bits." Realizing what he'd just said, he looked away and cursed the blush he felt climbing his cheeks.

"And what will you be wearing?" she asked calmly.

Harry grinned but didn't reply. Instead, he walked into his bedroom, shutting the door behind him.

She sat there for a moment, staring at the closed door. With a shake of her head, she stood up and walked into her bedroom. On the bed she found a grass skirt and a bikini top. She snorted and placed them off to the side. Then she picked up the pale blue skirt and a lightweight white blouse. The shorts were no different than what she had been wearing all week. Deciding to take Harry's advice, she slipped out of her shorts and put the skirt on, then the blouse. A pair of flats rounded out her ensemble.

Dressed, she went back out into the dining room to wait for Harry.

Another half hour passed before Harry showed up. Hermione looked at his outfit and blinked. He wore a print shirt that depicted a beach scene with a palm tree. The waves crashed against the beach and the palm swayed in a gentle breeze. And if that weren't bad enough, his shorts were fluorescent yellow.

"You expect me to be seen in public with you wearing that?" she asked.

He looked down at his clothes. "What's wrong with what I'm wearing?"

She shook her head in dismay. "Harry, don't you think those shorts are a little bright?"

He grinned at her. "That's the point. This is a Luau. We're supposed to wear bright clothing."

"If that's the case, why didn't you tell Dobby to leave out something brighter for me?" she asked suspiciously.

He shrugged. "I could have, but I thought you'd look better as you are. You just need two little things to complete the outfit."

"Oh, really?"

Harry gestured and a Lei appeared in his hand, which he placed over her head. Then he gestured again, conjuring a single orchid. He placed the flower behind her ear. "Now you look perfect," he proclaimed.

She lifted the lei to her nose and sniffed gently at the aromatic flowers, then she smiled.

He glanced down at his watch. "Merlin! We better hurry. I'm supposed to open the imi soon!" he exclaimed, reaching for her hand.

"Wait," she cried. "What's an imi?"

And with that, they vanished.

A moment later she shook her hand free from his and glared at him.

"That's an imi," he said, pointing to a gently smoking mound of sand and dirt.

She blinked and then the smell hit her, causing her mouth to water.

Harry walked over to a shovel and leaned on it. "An imi is a traditional Hawaiian dirt oven. I dug the hole this morning and started the coals. When it was ready, we put in a pig to roast and layered the dirt and rocks around it."

Dobby appeared and Hermione had to hold back a laugh. It seemed he enjoyed the idea of Hawaiian leis so much he was wearing nearly a dozen of them. "Is it ready Harry Potter Sir?" he asked.

Harry checked his watch, then nodded. "Nearly, Dobby. A few more minutes to go."

"This different from English cooking, Harry Potter Sir," observed Dobby, looking down at the sand covered mound.

"It is, yes, but it's a great way to hold a party," Harry replied. His eyes sparkled in the waning sunlight.

"How did you learn about this?" asked Hermione.

"On the return leg of my trip around the world, I stopped in French Polynesia and Hawaii. While the modern cultures didn't attract me all that much, I found the native cultures of Polynesia and Hawaii interesting. The native bushmen in Australia were downright fascinating, but I don't think anyone is interested in eating Goanna tonight."

"Goanna?" Hermione questioned, looking at him.

He smiled. "Lizard. It's like an Iguana, only larger."

She shivered. Pork was better than lizard any day in her book.

"Oy! Harry!"

Harry turned and waved to Fred and George, who were approaching. Angelina and Alicia were right behind the twins.

"We about ready, Harry?" asked Fred.

"Almost. Has Amos shown up?"

Fred shook his head. "No, he said he would be late. He was making a run up to Nassau to pick up gasoline for that generator of his."

Harry frowned and shook his head. "Damn. I meant to enchant the his tank to be refilling."

"Harry, mate, he's too old to change his ways and you can't talk him out of it," George said quietly.

"I know, I just worry about him. He may be annoying and a bit of a mooch, but he's really a good guy," Harry replied, then he looked at the others. "Is everything prepared?"

"Just about. Lee and Anita have been mixing Mai Tais by the gallon," Alicia announced, standing next to Fred.

Harry blinked and looked down for a moment. "Erm... I think I'll stick with fruit juice tonight," he muttered.

Everyone except Hermione looked shocked, then the two girls looked at her and smiled seeing her smug grin. He had promised her to lay off the liquor and he intended to keep that promise.

He glanced at his watch. "Take Hermione to the point. Dobby and I need to extract the Kalua Pork from the pit and bring it in."

Angelina and Alicia nodded and guided Hermione away, despite her protests. The twins followed them closely, they still had food of their own to bring to the luau.

Harry knelt by Dobby, looking at him for a moment. The elf stared nervously back at him.

"Dobby, I'm sorry. I haven't been very appreciative of your help these past few years," he said softly.

"Harry Potter Sir shouldn't worry about Dobby," the little elf replied.

"But I do. I've been pushing you away when you've only been trying to help me. That was wrong and I'm sorry," he said, then he paused. "I know you'd like to be bonded, but I'd like to offer you something different. Would you be willing to become family with me Dobby? Would you be willing to be Dobby Potter?"

Dobby looked up at Harry with huge eyes. "Harry Potter Sir would do that for Dobby?"

"I need family and friends, Dobby, not slaves. I'd pay you to continue working, but you'd be part of the family. Is that agreeable?"

The little elf nearly bowled Harry over, hugging his legs and nodded frantically. He swayed for a moment and chuckled, then he placed his hand on Dobby's head. "Dobby Potter, welcome to the family."

His hand glowed for a split second and Dobby shook as Harry's magic coursed through him. When it was done, he released Harry's leg and stood up, straighter and taller than ever before. He looked up at Harry in wonder and Harry nodded. "It's better to be part of a family than to be a mere servant to it. Now let's get that pig out of the ground and into our bellies," he said, standing up straight.

Dobby nodded, while Harry began to shovel away the sand and dirt covering the imi.

Angelina led Hermione to where she would be sitting with Harry. "Don't worry, Hermione. He'll be along presently with the main course."

She looked at the older woman. "I take it you've done this before?"

Alicia nodded. "This will be our third Luau. Harry introduced us to them shortly after we arrived. Although, to be honest, it's not really a traditional Hawaiian Luau. It's more of a mix of Polynesian and Caribbean.

"Harry cooks the big pig, which takes all day, but that's about the only Hawaiian dish we have. Amos usually brings a lot of rum and a chicken-rice dish that is just yummy. We bring the greens and Fred and George usually catch lobster for a cold salad dish and Lee makes the Mai Tais. Anita brings a homemade bread."

Hermione nodded and looked around. The sun was just starting to sink below the horizon and she pulled out her wand, planning on lighting the Tiki torches scattered around the area. Angelina grabbed her hand and shook her head. "Just wait," she said.

A minute later the torches all flared to life and a wild drum beat started. Harry and Dobby came running up the beach carrying the roast pig on what looked like a wooden stretcher. As they arrived, the drums softened into calypso steel drum music.

"Ladies and Gentlemen," Harry announced proudly. "Kalua Pork, courtesy of Harry Potter and his esteemed relative, Dobby Potter."

Dobby looked up at Harry for the briefest of moments and then he looked at the others and nodded with a proud smile.

"Bravo!" shouted Fred and George.

Alicia smiled and conjured another place setting next to Harry's.

"Since this is Dobby's first attempt to cook the pig, I'm going to give him the first slice," Harry announced, then he steered the little elf to the setting Alicia had conjured and made Dobby sit. After that, he turned and began to carve up the pork, placing a large piece on Dobby's plate.

Hermione looked at the plate she was handed and then looked around for silverware, but didn't see any except for the serving flatware.

Angelina looked over at her and sniggered. "It's mostly finger food, Hermione, but no one will complain if you conjure a fork for yourself. Besides, you have a whole ocean behind you to rinse your hands in."

She slowly relaxed, trying dishes she had never had before. Fred and George entertained with tales of some of their pranks played at Hogwarts and elsewhere. She noted that Harry was making an extra effort to make Dobby feel at ease. The little elf was not used to eating with them, or being

treated as one of them.

Lee and Anita traded off their baby so the other could eat. Then Alicia took little Annette from Anita, giving both of them a break. The baby was just starting the toddler stage and it was amusing to watch her crawl for a bit, then stand shakily and take a few steps. To everyone's amusement, Harry conjured some brightly glowing bubbles for Annette to play with. Each bubble had a little treat inside for her and made a pretty tinkling sound.

As the evening deepened, Hermione could see the lights of a ship at sea. They were on the eastern part of the Cay, overlooking the Atlantic ocean. Fred and George called it Party Point. It was close to their home and workshop and well suited for their luaus. The ship in the distance seemed to make their position all the more secure. It was as if there was a world out there, and then there was Norman's Cay, untouchable and safe.

Midway through their feast, Amos arrived. He paused just inside the pool of light cast by the torches and waited for Harry to spot him. Once he did, Amos motioned to him. Once Harry had joined him, he handed the younger man a piece of parchment.

Harry glanced down at it and he seemed to stiffen. Hermione watched him worriedly. He glance over at the others, sighed, then motioned for Amos to join the others.

Harry walked over to a spot where everyone could see him. "Can I have your attention please?" he called.

Anita scooped up Annette and held her while Alicia and Angelina nudged the twins into paying attention.

"Amos delivered a letter that, I suppose, in retrospect, I should have been expecting," Harry said, then he shook his head. "Even if this didn't involve family, I couldn't really turn them down, but it's not my decision alone to make."

"Merlin, Harry, will you just spit it out and stop beating yourself over it?" Angelina exclaimed in exasperation.

Fred and George exchanged a glance and both broke into a fit of laughter.

"Harry's beating himself!" chortled George.

"Oy, Harry! Ask Hermione, I'm sure she'd help!" shouted Fred with a saucy wink in Hermione's direction.

Alicia rolled her eyes and pulled out her wand. Both twins went still almost instantly.

Hermione's blush rivaled Harry's and they could only stare at each other for a moment.

Alicia motioned for Harry to keep talking.

He nodded and ran a hand through his hair, trying to fight down the image of Hermione... *Well, that's not an appropriate image at the moment, is it?* he thought, trying to push it aside.

"When I brought Hermione here, I told Tom, the owner of the Leaky Cauldron, that if he knew others who needed the same kind of help that Hermione needed, to contact me through Amos. Tom said he knew of several people. I accepted that and figured he was talking about a family or two.

"It turns out that we talking about family alright. Bill, Fleur and Gabrielle are hiding out with Madame Maxime and Hagrid in the French Alps. She also has more than thirty students from Beauxbatons with her, students who no longer have families to return home to.

"This would double our population, and most of it would be underage, magical children."

Harry stopped and looked expectantly at everyone.

Fred looked around for moment, then scratched his head thoughtfully. "I don't see what the problem is, Harry. Let them come. We have the room, we just need to make places for them to sleep and stay."

"George?" asked Harry.

"No argument from me, mate. Even if Bill and Fleur weren't family, I'd be saying yes."

"Angelina? Alicia?"

Both girls nodded in agreement with their boyfriends. "You own the island," Alicia gently reminded him.

"I know, and it's been my refuge, my place to hide. But the world is changing and people are getting hurt," he replied.

"That's what makes you all the more special, Harry," Lee answered for everyone. He gestured around to the group. "We came here because you offered to share your private place with us. I think each of us knows what that has cost you. You were trying to hide from everyone and this will take that away from you."

Harry looked down at the ground for a moment, then he looked up again. "Hermione?"

She smiled at him gently. She could see how much this was costing him. "You forgave me when I didn't deserve it, Harry. Perhaps not everyone is as bad as you think they are," she said softly.

He nodded and looked at Fred and George. "You know what this means, don't you?"

They nodded soberly. "Yeah, it means that we may lose Weasley Wizarding Wheezes if people become too curious about the Cay. But this is family, Harry. That's more important," answered Fred.

"Amos?"

Amos looked to Harry and grinned. "More people ta run supplies fo'. Dis is a good ting, Harreee. Dem Ministry types be nasty fellas. If ya can protec' family and more, den it's a good ting."

Harry nodded. "Dobby?" he asked.

Dobby looked up at Harry, adoration in his eyes. "Harry Potter Sir wants to know what Dobby thinks?"

"Of course."

"Dobby thinks more people here would be good for Harry Potter Sir and his Hermy. Dobby thinks more people would change this place from houses to homes," the little elf said firmly.

"Peepuls?" asked little Annette.

Harry smiled, while Anita talked with her baby, making her laugh. It was a strange sound in his ears, a purifying sound, sweet and innocent. Annette had done nothing to earn the enmity of the Ministry. The simple fact that she had been born to Anita, a muggle born, was enough for her rights as a human and, someday, a witch, to be savagely curtailed, or worse. She was an innocent in this mess. And so were the others.

Dobby's comments were equally profound and thought provoking. More people would change the nature of life on the Cay and maybe that was a good thing.

"I'll send an owl to Tom with a reply and a timed portkey. Figure we'll have company in a week to ten days, so we'll need to get ready," he said finally.

With that announcement, Fred and George jumped to their feet and transformed their clothing into grass skirts. Then they proceeded to show the others their idea of a genuine Hawaiian Hula dance. Naturally, it wasn't even close, but no one cared.

Harry's Villa, Norman's Cay...

As the luau wound down, Harry knew it was getting on time to leave. Amos had turned in an hour earlier and Lee and his wife vanished around nine, needing to put Annette down for the night. The twins were already getting a little frisky, much to the amusement of their girlfriends.

Harry stood and offered a hand to Hermione. She wasn't drunk, but the three drinks Lee had given her had given her a pleasant buzz. She accepted his offer of help and stood. Dobby stood and bowed to the others before popping back to wherever he slept.

Rather than apparating back home, Harry wanted to walk the beach, which didn't bother Hermione in the least. She walked silently next to him for a while, the sounds of the luau still coming from Party Point.

"They're still at it," she said softly.

Harry grunted. "Yeah, they'll be at it for a while. I made the mistake of staying too late one time."

"Oh? What happened?" She glanced at him in the darkness, but she couldn't make out much detail. She couldn't know he was blushing heavily.

"Let's just say that the twins and their girlfriends have an interesting relationship, and they wanted to know if I wanted to join them."

She fought back a laugh. "What did you do?"

"What do you think I did? I ran, as quickly as possible. Oh, they apologized the next day, but that wasn't the point. I wasn't really mad about it. It was just embarrassing."

"Why was it embarrassing?"

He paused mid-step and turned to face her. "It just was. Can't we leave it at that?" he said, then he turned and started walking quickly away.

She ran to catch up with him, grabbing onto his arm to make him stop.

"No, I don't think we can leave it," she replied.

He sighed heavily. "I don't have any experience in that particular endeavor. There? Happy?" he said angrily.

She winced and held onto his arm tightly. "I'm not trying to make you angry, Harry, I just want to understand. Didn't you and Ginny...?"

The idea that he could still be a virgin astounded her. Even with Dumbledore the credit for killing Voldemort, he was still wealthy and famous. He could have had dozens of women. That he was still a virgin only increased her respect for him.

No, we... wanted to wait until after Voldemort was gone," he said in a stricken tone.

She eased her grip on his arm, lightly caressed it now, trying to sooth the pain he had to be feeling.

"What about you and Ron?" he asked suddenly.

It was the question she was afraid he'd ask, but considering his honesty, she felt obligated to be honest in return. "We did, fairly often, until that day. Since then, there's been no one," she replied in a whisper.

"Oh," he said. She couldn't tell whether he sounded disappointed or not.

He turned and started walking again at a normal pace. She walked alongside him.

"What's happening to us, Hermione?" he asked finally.

She was silent for a moment. "I think we're putting our ghosts to rest."

"And then?"

"I don't know. Are we becoming more than just two friends? Is there an 'us', Harry? Do you want there to be?"

He was silent long enough for her heart to sink.

"I'm afraid," he whispered, finally breaking the heavy silence that had been growing between them.

"Of?" she asked, moving closer to him.

"I can't lose another. I think if I do, I'll no longer be human. I think if I do, I'll become worse than Riddle ever was. That scares me. I want you. I think I always have and I want to say let's try it, but I don't think I could live through that hurt again."

Her heart pounded in her chest. She understood all too well the pain he was talking about, even though she had weathered the storm better than he had. He was stuck, still hurting, from that day.

She stopped him and walked around to face him. "We risk being hurt every day. Every time you go fishing you risk an accident. You came here to the Cay to hide and the world won't let you, Harry. Not because the world is out to get you or fate is cruel. But because living means just that, living with others. We're not meant to live alone. That's part of what's been killing you. You've been alone since Voldemort, but I'm not going to let you be alone any longer."

She stood on her toes and kissed his cheek softly. "I would like there to be an us. I left you once when you needed me and I intend to spend the rest of my life making up for that mistake."

He slipped his hand into her, intertwining fingers. She moved closer so she could lean against him and smiled to herself when his free arm wrapped around her.

"I guess it's a new Quidditch game from here on," he said softly. "It will be nice to be part of a team again, but it's going to take some getting used to."

Hermione smiled broadly in the darkness.

"Do you think Ron and Ginny would approve?" he asked.

She looked up at him in the darkness, still held against him with one arm. "I think they'll be happy that we could find happiness again. Neither of them would have wanted us to mourn forever."

She wrapped her arms around him. They held each other, watching the restless waves caress the shore in the moonlight.

On a small island, thousands of miles from Britain, two restless souls found each other. Two wounded hearts found solace and the beginnings of peace, while around them the world turned cruel and hard. It didn't matter. They were safe and would work together to make their little piece of paradise safe for all who lived there.

FINI

(For now)