

## Wizards Fall:Puff and the Magic School Bus

### Standard Disclaimer:

Alyx nervously walked onto the stage to face the audience. Behind her were several dozen nearly naked midgets in loincloths. They were dancing around a fire with a huge cauldron in it's center. The cauldron bubbled and simmered softly.

Two spear carrying midgets ran up to escort Alyx to the center of the stage. She nearly squeaked in fright.

Reaching the center the midgets banged the butts of their spears on the stage, signaling for the audience to be silent. Another midget, wearing a voodoo mask gestured for Alyx to speak to the audience.

"Um... er... help?" she squeaked in a terrified falsetto.

"NO! NO! NO! CUT CUT!" shouted Bob from the wings, then he rode out onto the stage on a llama, waving a script.

She blinked and breathed a sigh of relief. Bob would save her from the midgets!

He stopped the llama in front of her and thrust the script under her nose. "Here, these are your lines," he said, then he glanced at the midgets. "Oi! Tippy mabbi muka balongo!"

Several midgets ran to the cauldron and thrust their spears into the bubbling liquid. A blond head shot to the surface gasping. "Someone help me," the blond woman moaned weakly.

Alyx frowned and stared at Bob. "Who is that?"

"She's just one of the props, don't worry about her. Now read your lines," Bob said imperiously. The llama, impressed by the scene promptly farted, causing the nearest midget to keel over.

Bob pulled on a gas mask, then he glared at Alyx who stepped back and realized she was in real trouble.

She glanced down at the script.

"Um, the authors of this story want everyone to realize that they make no claim of ownership to Harry Potter or anything else. It all belongs to JK Rowling who is starring in tonight's episode of Cannibal Mystery Meat!"

She blinked and glared up at Bob.

He ignored her glare. He nudged the llama on the flanks and it clip clopped off the stage.

Several midgets grabbed Alyx and started to drag her towards the cauldron. She struggled and thrashed about. "Bob!" she screamed.

"Alyx! Wake up!" Bob said, shaking her. "You were screaming in your sleep."

She blinked and looked around. She was in their bed! "Oh," she said in confusion. It had seemed so real.

"I'm thinking of hiring some midgets for the next disclaimer. What do you think?" Bob asked with a gleam in his eye.

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### Wizards Fall: Puff and the Magic School Bus

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#### Norman's Cay, the Bahamas (Five Years following Voldemort's death)...

"Will someone please tell me what the hell is going on?" a woman shouted in panic. In her arms she clutched a small child, who seemed less distraught than the woman holding her.

The child squirmed and Cassandra Granger, Hermione's mother, slowly let her slip from her grip. The woman was experiencing the physical effects of adrenalin and fear washing out of her system. Cassandra wasn't quite as tall as Hermione, but her wild hair and golden brown eyes were traits she'd passed on to both daughters.

Hermione flinched. Shouting around Harry was not a good thing, especially when he was still keyed up from their trip to Crawly. It had been a nerve wracking four minute experience and she knew Harry had been expecting a fight.

Not ten minutes earlier, Harry had appeared in the middle of their living room and told her there was trouble at her parents house. Before she could utter a sound, he'd grabbed her wrist. The next thing she knew, she was in her parent's house and Harry was shouting for everyone to form a circle and that it was time to go. It was a terrifying and confusing experience. Strange flashes of light flooded through the windows and the house shook. And then they were home again, in Norman's Cay, with two freaked out adults and a child who seemed to think the whole thing was a fun new game.

She turned to Harry and noted that his aura was flickering. Not good!

With a deft scoop, she picked up her little sister, Victoria, and deposited her in Harry's arms. "Here, take Victoria for a walk on the beach, while I talk with my parents," Hermione said firmly.

Harry froze for a second, then he looked at the little girl, who was barely three. His gaze immediately softened. Hermione, in miniature, gazed back at him. "Would you like to see the ocean?" he asked the child gently.

She nodded at him, her eyes huge. Normally she didn't easily trust strangers, but something told her this man was no stranger, and certainly no danger to her or her parents.

Ginning, Harry conjured a wide, floppy hat for the little girl and turned away from the others. Victoria grinned at her parents happily from under the large brim of the hat before Harry turned and walked out of the house, the child held securely in his arms.

Hermione watched them for a moment longer, then she turned to face her confused parents. "Mum, Dad, I'm so sorry about this."

"Don't waste time apologizing, Hermione. Just explain why you appeared so suddenly and dragged all three of us to... to... this place. Where the hell are we, anyway?" exclaimed Duncan Granger.

She gestured towards the couch and then took a seat opposite them. "You're in the Bahamas. Specifically, you're on an island, owned by my friend, Harry. The island is called Norman's Cay."

"Harry?" interrupted Cassandra Granger, looking very interested. Harry Potter was a name she was intimately familiar with from Hermione's letters. "Is that who he was? Harry Potter? I knew you'd made peace with him finally, but I didn't think you were living with him."

Hermione winced, but nodded. "Harry rescued me from England after I lost my job at Hogwarts. You know I've been living here since."

"Alright," Duncan said tensely, "that explains where we are. Now, how about why we're here?"

"I told you about the backlash that the Ministry was creating against people like myself in my letters, right?"

Duncan and Cassandra both nodded.

Hermione sighed and looked down. "I didn't tell you all of it. I told you how I lost my job, true. What I didn't tell you was that after I lost my job, I spent over a month hiding in a back room of the Leaky Cauldron, washing dishes to earn my keep. If I had been caught, I would have been arrested."

"For defending yourself against a sexual assault?" Cassandra exclaimed.

Hermione nodded. "That, and being the daughter of muggles," she said softly. "I never thought I'd be running from the law, Mum, but it's true. And it's so much worse now. Vicky is in terrible danger in Britain because she's a muggle born witch, like me. They're systematically stripping away the rights of muggle born and other people who aren't pure bloods."

"Like Germany in the thirties," murmured Duncan.

Hermione glanced at him and nodded approvingly. His analogy was very close to what was happening.

"And what happened tonight?" prompted Cassandra.

Hermione smiled. "It seems Harry is a little more cautious and more ingenious than I ever suspected."

The very first orb spell I sent to you was created by Harry. I hadn't mastered the spell at that point. The spell contained a series of self casting warning wards around the house.

"Basically, Harry set up several warning wards to warn him if anyone magical, other than Victoria or myself, approached the house. I wasn't aware of them until Harry came in a little while ago telling me the wards had been triggering, then grabbed my hand. The next thing I knew, we were in Crawly and he's yelling to grab Victoria.

"Even now I'm not entirely sure that's how he did it. I know he's become an expert on wards, and it's the only thing that makes sense to me. He hasn't visited you at all. The last time he was in Britain was to rescue me."

"But why?" asked Duncan. He still didn't understand what had happened.

"Because there were Aurors trying to break through the ward I threw up as soon as we arrived," Harry said from the doorway. He held Victoria's hand in his own and she clutched several seashells in her free hand. "With Hermione being wanted, I think they might have thought that you could tell them where she was hiding.

"Mr. Granger, Mrs. Granger, the wizarding world is in the process of tearing itself apart and hurting people who they have no right to hurt. You and

your daughters are here because of that. I wish I could help and say you'll be safe and happy, but I can't. Most likely, if I send you home, you'll be arrested and vanish. I don't know what they'd do to you, but it can't be good."

"So, we're stuck here? Prisoners?" asked Duncan incredulously. It wasn't hard to hear the anger in his voice.

Harry moved to stand behind Hermione's chair.

Victoria walked to her mother to share her treasure with her. Cassandra absently took the shells from the little girl and Victoria snuggled next to her. She had been napping when Harry and Hermione had arrived in their home. She blinked a few times and closed her eyes. She was a smart little girl and she knew people wouldn't yell if they thought she was asleep.

"No," replied Harry evenly, fighting the urge to tear out his hair in frustration. It was obvious to him where Hermione got her stubbornness from. "I can send you home, where your youngest daughter may be killed because you two are muggles. I would, of course, wipe your memory of this place beforehand, but I urge you to think of your daughters, Mr. Granger.

"Hermione's happiness and safety are very important to me. While I can protect you here, I cannot protect you in Britain. I know what your loss would do to her, and above all else, I will protect her."

Hermione sat with a small smile on her face. She knew Harry was protective of her and she was glad that, by proxy, that protection extended to her family.

Cassandra leaned over and touched Duncan's arm. "Dun, don't. He's not the one responsible for what's happening back home. Getting angry at him isn't helping matters," she said gently.

Duncan Granger looked down, his face flaming with shame. He nodded but refused to look up.

"It's not just happening back home, Mum," Hermione said softly. "It's part of a world wide movement. We haven't heard of a single country that isn't following the dictates of the International Confederation of Wizards."

"So, what happens now?" Cassandra asked, voicing the question on everyone's mind.

"I realize this is something of a shock to you both and we'll try to make this as easy as possible," Harry said. "You'll stay with us for the next few days. I need to make a house for you to live in. I'll do that tomorrow. As far as the interior is concerned, I'll give you some catalogs and have Amos order the items. Figure three or four days and you'll be able to move in. I'll also sneak back into your house in Crawly and pick up everything I can."

"Your Ministry can't reach us here? We're safe from them? Vicky's safe?"

Harry snorted. "I'd like to see them try." His eyes took on a light of their own and he gazed out the window. A halo of light flickered around him.

"Harry," Hermione said softly.

He blinked and looked down at her. "Sorry," he murmured with a bit of a grin. He enjoyed the idea of the Ministry trying to break through the wards he had erected. The results would have been humiliating...for the Ministry.

"Why don't you go check on the boats? I'll stay here and talk with my parents," Hermione suggested.

He searched her expression for a moment. Then, seeing what she was trying to convey, he nodded. He smiled at Hermione's parents. "I'll see you in a bit."

He turned and walked from the room. Victoria's head popped up from the spot on the couch where she was pretending to doze and watched Harry leave. "Outside?" she asked. Like Hermione at the same age, her vocabulary was still limited, but she was perfect in her pronunciation.

"It's alright, Mum. Harry won't let anything happen to her."

Cassandra Granger nodded and looked down at her youngest daughter. "Alright, Vicky, but you stay with Harry."

The little girl nodded solemnly and then bolted for the door. The Grangers didn't worry. They knew Hermione wouldn't have suggested it if she didn't trust Harry. And the fact that the wide glass doors provided an excellent view of where Harry was reassured them. They saw him stop and turn at Victoria's shout. His expression changed, breaking into a huge smile.

Cassandra Granger tore her eyes away from Vicky and faced her oldest daughter. "What is going on here, Hermione?"

Hermione shivered under her mother's gaze. "Have you ever done something that you later regretted with every fiber of your being?"

The two elder Grangers exchanged a worried look. "What do you mean?" asked Duncan. He was becoming alarmed.

"After the war, Harry and I parted under bad circumstances. I said some really cruel things, left him behind and moved on with my life. Then I got in trouble at the school and went into hiding. I contacted Harry, asking for help, even though, by rights, he should have refused.

"I was afraid to contact him. It took me nearly a month to work up the nerve to send that letter," she said.

She paused and her gaze turned to the black haired man who was kneeling in the sand with Victoria. He had conjured some buckets and small shovels and they looked to be building something.

“He didn't have to come, but he did,” she repeated softly, lost in remembrance. “He didn't have to help me, but he did. I never expected him to forgive me, but when he did, I was just selfish enough to accept it and vowed to never give him another reason to doubt me.”

She turned to look back at her parents. “That was when I learned exactly what my parting words had done to my best friend. He bought this island to get away from everything, including life. Then he spent the next three years alternating between trying to drink himself to death or trying to kill himself in other ways.”

“You let your little sister go with a man who's suicidal?” exclaimed Duncan angrily. He jumped to his feet, planning on going out and retrieving his daughter.

Hermione's head whipped around and glared at her father. “He's no longer suicidal. Victoria is perfectly safe, Daddy. He would lay down his own life to keep her safe. As far as his sanity is concerned, he's a little off at times, but he's a lot better than he was.”

“Dun, please! I want to know what's happening here and I can't find out if you and she are fighting,” Cassandra interjected. “Hermione would never risk the life of her sister by sending her off with someone who'd hurt her.”

Duncan winced and sat back down. He glared at his oldest daughter and motioned for her to continue. Every so often he glanced outside to watch his youngest daughter with a man he wasn't sure about.

Hermione leaned forward on her chair. “I'm not sure what else I can tell you. Harry wanted you to be safe. When he came in this morning, he just grabbed me and said there was a problem with the wards around your house. Then we were in Crawly. You heard what he said. We were inside gathering the three of you, while Aurors were trying to break through the warding he'd put in place.. You were probably about to be arrested.”

“So, this is all Harry's? Are we alone on this island?” asked her mother.

Hermione shook her head. “When I arrived, there were less than forty people living here. Now we have over a hundred. We have all sorts of people who are now considered outcasts in the magical world. Muggle born like me, or half bloods like Harry and half breeds.”

She sighed and looked pensive for a moment. “I don't think Harry ever expected this to happen. Somehow this island has become a refuge for people who would be in trouble on the outside. The Weasley twins are here, along with their girlfriends. Bill Weasley and his wife, Fleur, Hagrid from Hogwarts and Professor Maxime from Beauxbatons arrived not too long after I did. When Harry saved me, he told Tom at the Leaky Cauldron to send him word if he knew of others needing help. Ever since then, people have been trickling in from all over the wizarding world.”

Cassandra looked at her oldest daughter hard. “There's something else, isn't there?”

Hermione nodded, and now she smiled. She fingered a rather tasteful ring on her hand. “Harry's asked me to marry him. We were going to invite you here soon for the ceremony.”

Cassandra leaned back and looked at her husband smugly. “I told you,” she crowed. “I told you'd she'd get with him, once they got together again. Pay up!”

Duncan looked at her then looked away. “Yeah, yeah. I'll pay, but I seem to have left my wallet back in Crawly.”

“You bet on my love life?” Hermione exclaimed in outrage.

Duncan snorted with mirth. “Pumpkin, except for that brief stint with that Weasley boy, every letter you wrote, every conversation you held, had some reference to Harry. I never understood what you saw in that redhead anyway. You never had anything good to say about him and all you did was complain about how lazy he was, or how bad your latest fight was.”

Hermione winced. She had complained a lot to her parents in her letters about Ron. She was certain now she had loved Ron, but it was different than the love she felt for Harry. She couldn't explain it, it was just different. Ron was her first love and she would always have feelings for him. But he was gone and she couldn't imagine a life without Harry.

“Honestly, I thought Harry was a phase you'd grow out of. But your mum was convinced that, even after your battle, you and Harry would find your way together. We had ten pounds riding on it.”

“So, when is the wedding?” asked Cassandra eagerly.

Hermione looked at her mother and smiled. “Harry wants to have it on the day after Halloween.”

“That's a strange date,” Duncan muttered.

“Yes, that's what I thought at first, too. But Halloween has always had bad connotations for Harry. I think he wants something good to think about during that time.”

“Then why not have it on Halloween?” Duncan asked curiously.

Hermione shrugged. “I'm not sure. Harry said he has plans for that evening that involve both of us. I gather it's something very special, but he won't say anything more about it.”

“What kind of service are you planning?” Cassandra asked eagerly.

“It's going to be fairly simple, Mum. It's not like any of us can return to Crawly to get married at St. Catherine's. We know a real ships captain who

Has said he'll do it if we can't find another way."

Duncan stood and stretched. "If no one minds, I think I'll take a walk outside, while you two discuss this."

Hermione and Cassandra nodded and fell silent while Duncan walked outside. He knew his wife well enough to know she was about to begin one of the more mysterious female conversations. The mother/daughter wedding plan conversation and, as a man, his only option was to escape while he could.

He blinked in the blinding sun. There was a stiff breeze coming in off the beach and the smell of the ocean was pungent in his nostrils. After Crawly, where it was overcast and drizzling, this was a great breath of fresh air. The sky was dotted with fluffy white clouds and it was surprising warm for mid September.

He stepped over to the railing and leaned against it. Below the deck, on the beach, Victoria directed Harry in building a sandcastle. Harry was cheating, of course, using magic and loaning her some of his. As a result, the castle was slowly reaching a height of nearly six feet.

He chuckled and watched his daughter line the moat around the castle with shells. "Nice castle," he said.

Victoria and Harry looked up at him and grinned. Harry turned to Victoria. "Do you see how it's done now?" he asked.

She nodded and made a gesture with one hand. Duncan gasped as a new tower rose above the main castle. It took less than ten seconds to raise the ten foot tall tower.

"Like that?" she asked.

Harry nodded, his smile gentle. "I'm going to go talk with your dad, but you work on your castle and we'll watch from the deck. Alright?"

When she nodded, he stood and climbed the stairs to the deck. Joining Duncan, he leaned against the deck and watched the child build her castle. "She's very magical, you know. I think she might be even more powerful than Hermione some day," Harry murmured.

"How can she do that? Hermione couldn't control her magic until she went to Hogwarts!" Duncan exclaimed.

"She's a Granger," Harry said simply.

Duncan turned to look at him. "What is that supposed to mean?"

Harry watched Victoria change the color of her castle to a shocking pink and his slips twitched. The turrets were a dayglow orange with blue stripes. He winced at the color scheme, but he had to admire the spellcrafting, nonetheless.

"She is the product of two very smart and very loving parents. She's also at an age where magic is more real to her," he replied, before turning to face Duncan. "Think about it. The monster in the closet, the Easter Bunny, Santa Claus. For Victoria, they're all very real. She's at a point in her life when the impossible is not only possible, but expected. She hasn't had time to learn the hard facts of life. To her, magic is as real as the air she breathes, and Peter Pan really does live in Never land.

"As much as I love Hermione, I know that her reliance on books holds her back. Victoria hasn't reached that point in life yet.

"She has a lot of potential and I'll admit I'm lending her power because her core isn't big enough yet to do a lot, but the control and what she does, is all her," he said seriously. Then he turned back to keep an eye on the child who was now happily playing around her castle.

Duncan turned to watch his daughter also. "I want to apologize...for what I said inside."

Harry waved a hand, dismissing it as unimportant. "It's alright. You were still shocked and somewhat confused."

Duncan snorted. "I think I still am." He looked out at the dock, noting the seventy foot long trimaran and the twenty eight foot dive boat that bobbed at the dock. "Those yours?" he asked.

Harry smiled. "Yes. I use the dive boat when I go fishing, which is at least three times a week. The Lily? Well, she's something special. A friend of mine showed me a picture of a trimaran and I fell in love with it. He purchased plans for one and I built it slowly, using a mix of magic and plain old muscle power. I built her and I take her out now and then, but your daughter uses her more than I do."

Duncan eyed the gleaming white triple hulled sailboat. He had never seen anything quite like it before and he said so.

"That's because you're used to the idea of a catamaran with its two hulls. The trimaran isn't quite as fast as a cat, but it's more stable. Your daughter much prefers the sedate pace set by the Lily than what I can do in the dive boat," Harry said with a chuckle. "Don't get me wrong. The Lily can move really well under a stiff breeze, but she's harder to capsize and provides a smoother ride. She's also built for Hermione and I to go on extended trips. Both boats are fairly new. When I brought Hermione here I had a twenty foot skiff with a small outboard engine. I was surprised she allowed me to buy the dive boat, and build the Lily."

"Yes, about that. She says you've asked her to marry you?"

Harry grinned and turned back to look at Duncan. "Is this where you grill me on my career choices and whether or not I can earn enough to make sure she and any children we have are well cared for?"

Duncan stood quite still for a moment before bursting into laughter. "You know, now that you mention it, it does seem silly," he said once he'd

managed to get control of himself. "Here we are, standing on the deck of a home that's worth a million pounds or more, looking at a hundred thousand pounds worth of boats, on an island you own. And I'm going to ask if you can afford to make sure she has food to eat and a roof over her head?"

Harry laughed, he couldn't help himself. It was just enough of a distraction that he didn't feel the hard tug on his magic. "I suppose I could feed her better," he said, still chuckling. "We usually eat what I catch a couple times a week. Amos brings in staples, mostly American fare, but it's tasty enough. One of our neighbors, up on the northern end of the island, is raising chickens and even some turkeys, so we have plenty of eggs and poultry at least once a week. We don't have enough room for beef cattle, but I suppose a few cows wouldn't hurt.

"Outside of that, we conjure the foodstuffs we need. I know that poses a bit of a problem for you and Mrs. Granger, but we can help keep your larder stocked. Dobby is especially handy for conjuring food. That's part of the magic elves possess. If you need a specialty item, we'll order it. Once I've gotten a good look at the item, I'll be able to conjure more of it for you."

Duncan nodded. He was feeling decidedly numb at this point. Finally, he couldn't take it anymore. "What about the weather?" he blurted, groping for a topic that approached normalcy.

Harry gestured towards the ocean. "When I first arrived here and the island wasn't hidden, we had a few hurricanes that caused a lot of damage. We don't have that problem now. There's a weather ward around the island that diverts most of the really bad weather away. I didn't want to divert it all, so the ward will allow tropical storms and regular storms through. The house is warded in a similar manner. Yours will be too, once I'm finished with it. You can sit on the deck in the middle of a rainstorm and not get wet."

Duncan blinked in shock. Even Hermione, with all her letters describing fantastic feats of magic, never spoke of things like diverting the weather.

Harry turned back to watch Victoria, who was busy using a pail to fill in the moat around her castle. He saw a flash of pink, but it moved out of his sight around the pink castle, blending with the sand structure. Dismissing it as his imagination, he turned back to Duncan.

"I know this is going to be a big change for you and Mrs. Granger, sir, but Hermione and I will do everything in our power to help you. I wish I could send you home, back to your lives, as if nothing bad were happening, but I can't. If I did, you'd probably be arrested and imprisoned before the week was out," he said softly. "I don't want to even think about how that would hurt Hermione."

Duncan grimaced and glanced down at his little girl play in the sand before turning back to Harry. "Our careers were important, but not as important as Vicky or Hermione. We'll adjust," he said with a bit of a sigh.

Harry nodded, then he turned as Dobby appeared, holding a tray. He picked up the bottle of Guinness Stout and handed it to Duncan, before he picked up his glass of fruit juice.

Duncan arched an eyebrow over his choice of drink and Harry smiled sheepishly. "I promised Hermione. I haven't touched a drop since."

"Do you miss it?" Duncan asked.

Harry shook his head. "I wasn't an alcoholic, although I probably came very close. I was drinking to forget."

"I'm sorry. That's personal and I shouldn't have pried."

"No, it's alright. I suppose you have a right to know, since I am planning on marrying your daughter."

Harry turned and walked over to a deck lounge to sit down. "When I heard from Hermione, I was in a bad state. I seriously thought about ignoring her letter... for about two seconds. Then I headed to Britain to rescue her. I only paused long enough to change my clothing into something more suitable for British weather.

"She wasn't here a full day when she started working on helping me out of the hole I had dug myself into."

He stopped speaking and looked down at his hands, which flared with magic. "I can do things that border on the miraculous or insane. But with all my power, I couldn't fight my own demons," he said softly.

Duncan watched him, realizing he was being totally open with him.

Harry's hands clenched his fists. "With my power I can tear down mountains or build them up. I can drain seas or make new ones. With magic, I can do something as mundane as building a house, or as whimsical as helping a child build a sandcastle. But be it mountains or sandcastles, it's all meaningless, all of it, without hope." He looked up at Hermione's father, his eyes bright. "That's what Hermione gave me, Mr. Granger. She gave me hope, and later, her love. I don't think you'll ever understand just how much I needed those two things from her."

Suddenly a pair of arms enveloped him from behind. "And you'll always have them. Don't you forget that, Mister Potter," Hermione whispered in his ear.

Hermione and her mother had come out to join them on the deck.

Harry leaned back against Hermione, while he watched her mother get her first look at the beach. "Never," he whispered. "You're *my* hero."

Hermione smiled to herself. It had taken him more than a month before he could control the urge to flinch when she touched him unexpectedly.

"What is that?" Cassandra asked in shock. She pointed down towards the sandcastle built by Harry and Victoria.

Harry followed her pointing finger down to the sandcastle built by her daughter. The castle was now nearly ten feet high, bright pink, had a moat and a small three foot tall pink and blue dragon prancing back and forth in front of the drawbridge. The dragon furled and unfurled tiny wings on its back.

Harry hadn't paid any attention to the extra pull Victoria had made on his magic to create the creature.

"Oh. Ah, oops?" Harry said hesitantly. He eyed the dragon with a great deal of interest.

Victoria squealed and clapped her hands as the dragon shot a small puff of smoke from its nostrils. Everyone turned to look at Harry, except for Victoria, who was playing with her new friend.

"I'm afraid that's my fault. I've been feeding her magic and she's been using it to shape what she wants. I didn't think she'd conjure a dragon though," he replied, scratching his chin sheepishly.

"Is she in danger?" Hermione whispered. Her eyes were huge as she watched the little dragon puff and snort and prance around Victoria.

Harry closed his eyes, concentrating on the little dragon. His eyes sprang open and he suddenly stood, startling Hermione. He stared at the little dragon intently.

"Harry?" Hermione said in alarm. His reaction was worrying her.

Rather than answering her, he vaulted over the deck railing, landing on one side of the castle. He walked around the large sandcastle and stopped when the little dragon spotted him.

"Puff?" he called. Somehow he intuitively knew the name of the dragon. Who else would a three year old girl wish for when she wanted a dragon for her castle?

The dragon snorted out a small puff of smoke and bounded over to him, nearly knocking him down. Victoria laughed and clapped her hands and the little dragon turned and bounded back over to her. The dragon stopped just shy of her and rubbed its head against her hand. The little beast was nearly as tall as she was and probably outweighed her by at least a hundred pounds. Harry was certain that being hit with that wagging tail would leave bruises.

"Harry!"

He turned to look up at the three adults and he grinned at them. "It's Puff," he said simply.

"You're kidding, aren't you?" Hermione asked dryly. She was having difficulty maintaining a straight face.

He shook his head. "Nope. She used my power to create herself the perfect companion. Ladies and gentleman, I give you Puff, the magic dragon." Then he threw back his head and laughed. Victoria giggled and the dragon turned toward the adults on the deck and fluttered his wings.

Harry, still grinning, finally shrugged. "I should have been more careful watching what she was doing with my magic, but I was talking with Mr. Granger and got distracted," he said apologetically.

The little dragon extended its wings again and they flapped vigorously like a hummingbird. She lifted off the beach and flew around Victoria before landing again. A small white cloud wafted up from her nostrils. Victoria laughed again and clapped her hands happily, then she threw her arms around the neck of the little beast, hugging it to her. Puff turned her long neck and buried her head in her hair.

He looked down at the dragon and shook his head. "Hagrid is going to love this," he muttered, then he looked up at Hermione. "It's not conjured."

Her eyes widened and she quickly left the railing and ran down the steps. She approached Harry and pulled out her wand. Puff noticed her approach and placed herself directly between Victoria and Hermione, as though protecting the child. She made a low growling sound and a small puff of smoke rose from her nostrils.

She cast a simple magic revealing charm and gasped at the results, then turned back to Harry. "What does this mean?"

Harry laughed. "It means your sister is the first witch to have her own dragon familiar."

Hermione stared at him for a moment, then she couldn't help but grin. *Vicky is going to be very popular with Hagrid*, she thought.

"Can't you cancel the spell?" asked Duncan from the deck. A puppy or a kitten was one thing. A dragon, however, might be a bit too much for a three year old.

"He can't," Hermione explained. "Unlike a normal live conjuration, which would ultimately fade, this dragon is real. There's no spell to cancel. Banishing, unfortunately, would probably kill it."

Harry sighed and cut his power link to Victoria.

She turned and looked at him. "More?" she asked. The look she gave him was enough to melt his heart. He was seriously tempted to let her have a little bit more, but not now, and not in front of her parents until they calmed down. "Later, sweetheart. For now, why don't you and Puff join your parents on the deck? It's going to be time for dinner soon," he replied.

Victoria pouted for a moment, then turned her attention back to her new pet. Puff moved to her side and rubbed against her hand, nearly pushing her over in an attempt to get her head scratched.

"Mum wasn't thrilled with Crookshanks. I can't imagine how she'll be with a dragon," she murmured to Harry.

"Well, at least Puff won't shed. Burning down the house might be an issue, however. A dragon for a pet is kind of cool. I wonder..."

"No, Harry," she said firmly.

"But," he began.

"No."

He sighed. "I guess you're right. My luck, I'd summon an Emperor Horntail. Besides, while she used my magic, I don't know what she did. Trying to repeat it would be...dangerous." He shrugged. "Let's go see what Dobby's cooked up for us."

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### **Minister's Residence, Britain...**

Rufus Scrimgeour bolted upright in his bed, his face covered in sweat. He tried to reach for his wand, but his hands felt strangely numb and his arms refused to move. He tried to cry for help, but he couldn't. His chest felt heavy and it was hard to breathe.

A figure came into view and he looked up at the person pleadingly.

"Ah, Rufus, you're awake. No matter, you won't be for long," said Albus Dumbledore.

Scrimgeour gasped and stared at the old headmaster.

Dumbledore conjured a chair for himself and sat down. "I suppose you want an explanation?"

Scrimgeour struggled to catch his breath and nod at the same time.

"I suppose it's only fair to explain why I had to murder you. You see, I tried to steer you in the right direction, but you just wouldn't listen. No, you had to risk everything by trying to siphon funds from the Bank of England into Ministry coffers to cover your cost overruns."

Scrimgeour's eyes widened and he tried to shake his head in denial. His chest burned and his limbs felt like lead. With each passing second his chest felt heavier and it was harder for him to breathe.

"Oh, don't try to deny it, Rufus. It's far too late for that. You see, muggles and Wizards aren't meant to mix. The muggle born might have had their uses in fighting Voldemort, but now we need to make sure the two worlds are kept apart. Your actions, I'm afraid, have jeopardized that. You see, Voldemort wanted to conquer the muggles. I just want to keep us apart from them. We don't need their ideas contaminating our society.

"And you risked that by trying to steal from them. I've had a hard enough time convincing people that muggle born are a danger to our way of life and I couldn't allow you to bring attention to our world. So I'm afraid I've had to kill you."

Scrimgeour flopped back on the bed, his lips were turning blue and his eyes were wild with fear.

Dumbledore stood and leaned over him. "I'm afraid I've had to kill your family, as well. But it's a painless curse, I think. It will look like you've been poisoned with curare, a muggle poison. Don't be bitter, my dear Minister. This is for the greater good."

Albus smiled down at the man. "Goodbye, Rufus. I will see that you and your family are given a wonderful state funeral, and I think I'll recommend Percival Weasley as your replacement. Such a nice, pliable young man, so easily impressed and guided."

Rufus tried to thrash around on the bed, but the paralysis was asphyxiating him. Slowly the light in his eyes faded and his body twitched. Scrimgeour's eyes glazed over with death and Dumbledore dispelled his chair, then he turned and left the room. Around him, in six other bedrooms, lie the Scrimgeour family, dead at his hand and he was already planning the next phase in pulling away from the muggle world. The only survivor of the Scrimgeour massacre, as it would come to be called, was the oldest daughter, a former Auror, who had been sent away for being a squib.

The Minister's assassination would be blamed on muggle born renegades once the old headmaster pointed out that the way they died reminded him of a muggle poison. And Percival Weasley was just the narrow minded man needed to lead the purging of the wizarding world, with judicious help from one Albus Dumbledore.

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### **The Grangers, Norman's Cay, The Bahamas...**

Cassandra Granger smiled. She stood in the living room of her new house, a luxurious five bedroom home that came with unlimited hot water and a cooling charm that never needed to be replenished. The appliances were different than what she was used to, but Hermione had spent the morning showing her how to use them. It helped that Harry had conjured everything in her kitchen in a gleaming chrome and steel style. It was, in her opinion, her dream kitchen, even if she had to use an enchanted stick to start the stove.

They didn't have to replace much, as Harry had quietly returned to their house in Crawly to gather as many of their possessions as possible. At first, the Grangers had been dubious of his promise to retrieve their belongings, but Hermione assured them he would be bringing most of it. Some things, however, were rather inappropriate for this climate and would end up in storage.

For the life of her, Cassandra couldn't see the possibility of using the heavy quilts and winter coats again.



So far, they still only had a few chairs in the living room, and that was the sum total of their furniture.

The last few days seemed to her like some sort of surrealistic dream, starting with the hurried rescue from their home in Britain.

She was home alone with Hermione, while Duncan, Victoria and Puff helped Harry unload the Mary Celeste of its cargo of furniture for them.

She nodded her thanks absently when Hermione handed her a cup of tea. Hermione had already stocked their larder with foodstuffs, most from the island warehouse and some she had conjured with Dobby's help. They had arranged for Dobby to restock their larder every week, and he'd check with Cassandra to see if she required any special items.

At first Dobby had wanted to cook for Miss Hermy's parents and little Miss Vicky, but Harry and Hermione had managed to persuade him to let Cassandra do her own cooking. On the other hand, he was always willing to watch Victoria for them. She had managed, in the course of only a few days, to completely wrap Dobby around her finger.

The only bump, and it was a minor one, came when Victoria discovered that Dobby couldn't read her favorite stories to her. So she decided that Dobby would learn to read with her. It took Harry nearly a whole day to calm the little elf and tell him it would be alright for him to learn to read and no, the Ministry would not execute him for 'attempting to rise above his station'.

"Something on your mind, Mum?" Hermione asked.

Cassandra turned to look at her daughter. "Tell me about Harry. Are you happy? Is he really alright?"

Hermione leaned back on her chair and sighed heavily. She knew what her mother was asking. Harry was...well, not always there. That wasn't to say he was mad, but he certainly wasn't strictly sane, either.

"He's not crazy, Mum," she said in protest. "He's changed some from Hogwarts, but I think that's to be expected. In a way, for Harry, the war never ended. He struggles daily to control his darker side."

She stood and walked over to the large bay window and looked out. Cassandra watched her silently, saying nothing. She knew instinctively that her daughter had more to say.

"He has more power than any wizard I've ever met, heard about or read about. And he struggles with that almost daily. He could go back to the wizarding world and utterly destroy it. That is his greatest fear, that something will happen that will force him to do just that. He's terrified that something will happen to me and push him into that choice."

She turned and crossed her arms. "He is a kind and gentle soul, but he's also a warrior who gives no quarter. He'll do anything to protect this place, and us. I've witnessed that first hand."

"One time, we went up to Nassau and everything was wonderful. We did our shopping and played the part of the tourist couple in love. It was quite romantic. After dinner, we still had a few hours to kill until the tide turned and Amos was ready to sail, so we walked through the old quarter, just enjoying each other's company, holding hands and laughing a lot. We were walking back to the ship when we were attacked by an auror capture team sent by the Bahamian Ministry."

Hermione shivered and looked at her mother. "I've never seen anything like it. One moment we're surrounded and stunners are flying at us, the next, all six aurors are on the ground, unconscious. Harry stripped them of their memories and their magic and sent each of them to six different muggle cities, where they would be picked up by the muggles and treated as amnesia victims. He did that to protect me, and the people on this island."

"He didn't go looking for that fight, Mum. And while it was taking place, he made sure I was behind him at all times, shielding me with his own body."

Hermione sat down next to her mother and shakily drank from her tea. It felt good to get this off her chest.

"That night I woke up hearing him cry out. He was having a nightmare. I went to his bedroom and spent the rest of the night holding him, while he agonized over what he had been forced to do."

Cassandra arched an eyebrow.

Hermione recognized the look and nearly groaned. "No, Mother, we do not yet share a bed. The room you and Dad slept in while staying at Harry's was my room. I slept in Harry's room with Victoria and Harry slept on the Lily. I'm working on it, but we haven't reached that point quite yet."

She looked at Hermione incredulously and leaned closer to her. "Is he gay?" she asked.

Hermione blushed furiously. While she and Harry hadn't been fully intimate, she knew for a fact that Harry was most definitely not gay. "No!"

Cassandra smiled sweetly at her daughter and calmly sipped her tea.

"We haven't made love, if that is what you're fishing for. Strangely enough, I've fallen for a man with a strong sense of morality when it comes to sex. He wants to wait, but even now I know his resistance is crumbling. I don't think he needs to wait for the wedding, but he does want to wait for the right time." She looked down at her cup. *Yes, it's crumbling, but he's not quite ready,* she thought.

"And he knows about you and Ron?" Cassandra asked. Hermione's relationship with Ron wasn't a secret from her mother. In fact, they'd spoken extensively about the relationship before she slept with Ron.

Hermione played with her tea cup and nodded. "I think he was a little disappointed, at first, but we're past that now. We haven't made love, but we've

done enough for me to know he'll be gentle and kind. He's exactly what I need, and I can give him what he needs."

She paused for a moment, thinking. "I've been fortunate to know and love two very astounding men. I lost one because of the war and nearly lost the other due to stupidity on my part. I don't regret what Ron and I had and I certainly don't regret what Harry and I now have. The only thing I really regret is that I let my own remorse hurt my best friend and drive him away for four years."

Cassandra remained silent and Hermione began to worry. She fidgeted slightly, then looked up at her mother. Seeing the gentle smile on the older woman's face, she relaxed.

"Sweetheart, I'm not ever going to try to talk you out of it. I thought you and Harry belonged together. I was rather surprised when you began a relationship with Ron, though I kept my thoughts to myself."

Hermione blinked and looked at her mother in astonishment. "Why didn't you ever say anything to me about it?" she demanded.

Cassandra shrugged. "My mother told me a long time ago never to interfere in the love life of my children. A parent's role is to be supportive and to help pick up the pieces if or when you crash, but not to interfere. She didn't interfere with Duncan and I wasn't about to do so with you and Ron. Remember that when your child falls in love.

"Honestly, I thought Ronald was a mistake, but he was your choice and you seemed happy with it. Had your war not happened, who knows how things would have turned out?"

Hermione stared at her mother, who smiled benignly back at her and sipped her tea.

"So," Cassandra said, breaking the silence, "is Harry violent often?"

Hermione scowled and shook her head. "Of course not. What he did to those aurors wasn't violent compared to what he could have done, or what they would have done to us," she replied, then she stood abruptly and paced a few steps before swinging back around.

"Do you know how many fugitives live on this island? How many of us are wanted by the Ministry?"

Cassandra blinked at the sudden change of topic and shook her head mutely.

"There are over one hundred of us, Mum, including nearly forty children, most newly created orphans, ranging in age from eleven to seventeen! Nearly every person on this island is wanted by the British Ministry or the International Confederation of Wizards. All the Ministries are folding into one super world government, led by the ICW and Albus Dumbledore. I swear that man must be senile! He was never like this until Voldemort was killed. The year and a half he spent in hiding must have driven him insane."

Hermione glared hard at her mother. "This island, and everyone on it, is what Harry was protecting, including you, Dad and Victoria. Every week someone new shows up here. He could have killed those Aurors. Instead, he used them to distract the ministries. When their aurors are found, they won't have a clue what happened to them, or even where it happened. They won't even know where to start looking.

"I saw Harry on the battlefield during the war. There, he killed without mercy because he had to. But on Nassau, he wasn't the same man."

Cassandra leaned forward on her chair and captured her daughter's hand. "Sweetheart, I believe you. I just want to make sure you knew what you were doing. The Harry I see shows no signs of the depression you speak of, or of the violence. And it's very obvious he loves you. But marriage is a special commitment. Are you two ready for that?"

"Yes," Hermione replied firmly. "And I know Harry is, too."

The sound of the back door opening distracted both women and they turned to face the noise. Puff came bounding into the room, followed by Victoria, who firmly believed that if one had to go somewhere, running was the only way to get there.

Hermione smiled at the dragon. Hagrid and Madame Maxime had been by earlier in the week to examine the little creature. It was definitely a dragon, but it seemed to be adult sized and was of no species that Hagrid could recognize. Over the next few days, everyone had come to realize that dragons might be fierce creatures, but this one had the disposition of a Labrador Retriever, unless Victoria was in danger.

Harry walked in next, followed by several large items of furniture, following him obediently. "Where do you want these?" he asked.

Cassandra blinked at the hovering wardrobes and beds, bobbing silently in the air behind him. She was still getting used to Hermione's blatant use of magic, but Harry took it to a whole new level.

"B-Bedrooms," she stammered in reply.

Harry nodded and stepped aside. The furniture hovered past him, heading for the appropriate rooms.

Duncan entered next, proudly carrying a miniature couch in his arms. Cassandra stared at her prize hardwood antique couch. It had taken four men to move it into their house in Crawly, and yet her husband was carrying it as if it weighed nothing.

Several hours later, the Grangers were settled in to their new home and everyone was clustered around a BBQ pit that Harry had built for Duncan just off the beach.

Harry sipped a tall glass of fruit juice and relaxed in the breeze coming off the ocean. "We were later than I expected. Amos brought in another family today. Three kids, all magical, a witch and her squib husband. We turned them over to Madame Maxime for a few days to get oriented," he

said, frowning.

"Something is bothering you, Harry. What is it?" asked Hermione.

He shook his head and smiled ruefully. "I can't hide anything from you anymore, can I?"

She grinned back at him. "Not if you know what's good for you."

"Get with the program, Harry. Nine times out of ten Cassandra has solutions to my problems and the tenth time I fake it. Badly, I might add," Duncan said, standing next to the grill. He was busy breaking in his new BBQ with the traditional fare of chicken and burgers.

Victoria ran back and forth on the beach under the watchful eyes of a four legged dragon and Dobby, who had taken a liking to the smallest witch.

"Hush, Duncan," chided Cassandra. "Let Harry talk."

Harry nodded and eyed Hermione speculatively. "Well, word out of Nassau is that the effort to make a world wide Ministry is probably going to go through. Madame Maxime wants to set up temporary housing so any incoming people can have a place to stay until something can be made for them. She's worried that with the British controlling the ICW, the number of refugees could shoot up tremendously."

Hermione leaned back on her chair, thinking hard. She and Harry had put up incoming refugees several times. Everyone on the island had, at one time or another. "It makes sense, Harry. And with Madame Maxime working on building her school, she would have the bed space. But that isn't all of it, is it?"

"Not hardly. I'm going to need to expand the island. Maybe lift and drain the lagoon," he replied. "I think things are turning very bad on the outside. Rumor has it that a group of renegade muggle born broke into the Minister's mansion and killed Minister Scrimgeour and his family. Percy Weasley's been promoted to Minister."

Hermione flinched. "Scrimgeour's dead and Percy's Minister?" she exclaimed in dismay.

Harry nodded unhappily, then turned to her parents. "Ordinarily, the death of Scrimgeour would have left us with the chance to see a more moderate Minister put into power. But that didn't happen. The new Minister is more conservative, and more interested in controlling our lives than the last one. Hermione and I went to school with Percy Weasley. He was a couple years ahead of us and he used to delight in enforcing the most obscure rules he could find on the books," he explained.

The hope that had been building in Cassandra's expression fled quickly. She still wanted to go home, if possible.

Duncan looked up from pulling chicken off of the grill. "Are we really safe here?" he asked.

"Do you know what wards are?" Harry asked.

"Hermione explained them as a kind of fence," Cassandra replied.

"A fence is a good analogy, but it's not quite accurate. I prefer to think of them like a dome. I remember watching a show on the telly a long time ago about people living on the moon. They had this huge glass dome over their city."

"I've seen shows like that," Duncan said.

"Right. So, think of the island as having a series of domes around it. Each dome does something different. For example, the outer most dome just warns us that people are approaching. Other domes hide us from muggles, or hide us from the Ministry. The closer you get to the island, the more violent the domes become."

"Violent?" asked Cassandra worriedly.

"Think of it like an electric fence, Mum," Hermione said.

Cassandra nodded and looked thoughtful.

"That's right," Harry agreed. "In order to get to those wards, however, you have to tear down the others. If someone starts trying to tear down the wards, or domes, we know they're not here by accident, but are trying to assault the island."

Duncan handed Cassandra a plate of food, then turned to look at Harry. "What are your plans?"

Harry blinked and looked at him in confusion. "Mr. Granger?"

Duncan shook his head and smiled. "Harry, you rescued my daughter from certain death on several occasions. You've rescued the rest of my family and given us this magnificent home. In a couple of weeks, you're going to marry Hermione and that will make you Victoria's uncle and our son-in-law. Don't you think by now you can call me Duncan?"

"And I'm Cassandra," Hermione's mother added.

Hermione snickered at his discomfort. This part of Harry hadn't changed. He still hated when people made a big deal about his accomplishments.

Harry fought down a blush over Duncan's words. "Alright, Duncan, but what do you mean plans?"

This new family that came in, are they British?" asked Duncan.

Harry frowned and shook his head. "No. In fact, Amos commented about the fact that they were from British Columbia in Canada."

Duncan walked over to the picnic table they'd set up. Grabbing a chair, he turned it around to face Harry and sat down. "Right. So, what will you do when the number of people coming in jumps from five to five hundred in a week?"

Harry sucked in his breath and stared at the man. "You don't think that would happen, do you?"

Duncan shrugged his shoulders. "It could, very easily. You've built this refuge for yourself and you made it safe. That should have been enough for most men, but it wasn't for you. You left a way in. That sort of information will spread. People will actively seek this place out. Think about it, Harry. How did a family from Canada learn about this place?"

He shook his head, trying to deny the possibilities. "I didn't... I'm not going to..."

He stood abruptly and walked down to the water's edge, leaving Hermione and her parents staring after him.

He stood, staring out over the ocean for a while. When he felt her standing behind him, he sighed. "I really mucked up again, didn't I?"

"What do you mean?" Hermione asked softly. She wanted to touch him, to tell him it would be alright, but she knew all she could do was be there for him. Later, once he had worked it through in his mind, he'd accept her touch gladly. Now, though, it would only distract him.

"It's that damn people saving thing again, Hermione. I'm doing it again, aren't I?" he asked bitterly.

She moved to stand next to him. "Yes, but it's the right thing to do. You know that, Harry. You've always known that. One of the reasons why I love you is because no matter what happens, you do the right thing, no matter how hard it is. It would be so easy to close the island, to run away. You were trying to do that when you saved me and it was killing you."

His shoulders slumped and he dug a toe into the wet sand. "I don't want to be a savior again. Look where it got me the last time. I know what your father was leading up to, some sort of formal leadership role."

"You do own the island," she gently reminded him, then she slipped her hand in his. "He's right, though. We need to organize, but you don't have to be the leader, love. There are other things we can do. There's still a lot of work to be done on your library, and then there's the Avalonian equations. Let my parents organize things. As muggles, they have little else to do."

He looked at her for a moment, then he shook his head in amusement. "I take it you still want me to conjure a library building for the books?"

She nodded, although the idea of someone conjuring a permanent structure still boggled her mind. "And for the ones you're going to buy."

He blinked and looked at her. "I'm buying books?" he asked with a smile.

"Well, we'll want things to read, and even with your collection, we'll need more books," she said sheepishly. "Besides, you want to keep me happy. You told my Mum that."

He laughed softly and pulled her into a gentle hug. She wrapped her arms around him and sighed contentedly.

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### Office of the Minister of Magic, Britain...

"... and so I offer this bill up to the Wizengamot. It will provide protection and preserve the sanctity of our race from contaminating elements. Sign it, Percival Ignatius Weasley, Minister of Magic," Percy Weasley said pompously.

Percy leaned back in his chair and looked at his secretary, while her quill scribbled furiously. He had only been the Minister for matter of weeks and already he was making his presence felt throughout the Ministry.

One of his first acts as Minister was the simplest. He broke off his engagement with Penelope Clearwater. He'd had her family investigated and discovered she had a squib relative who'd married a muggle seventy years ago. She wasn't pure, in his eyes. That she had been devastated and needed to be checked into St. Mungos at the time was of no importance. He couldn't afford to be seen with someone whose bloodline was less than pure.

His old headmaster, Dumbledore, stopped by frequently to offer advice, which he gratefully took. Dumbledore was making his career soar. Only last week his name had been thrown into the arena for the position of World Minister for the ICW. It was a position he coveted greatly and Dumbledore seemed to think he'd be perfect for the job, despite his young age. It still shocked him that the ICW seemed to be seriously considering his candidacy.

His secretary examined the scroll for a moment, then she looked up. "Looks good, Minister Weasley. I'll get this cleaned up in time for your four o'clock meeting with the Chief Warlock," she said, then she glanced at her watch. "Your ten o'clock meeting with the new Head of the DMLE is about to begin."

Percy nodded. "Bring us some tea before we begin."

The woman nodded with a slight scowl and quickly left the room. She was back a few minutes later, carrying a tray with a pot of tea, some biscuits and several cups.

Percy looked up as Maurice O'Connell, his new DMLE Head, and Shane Ives, senior division auror, entered the room.

"Good morning, Minister," O'Connell said.

Percy waved them in, while his secretary bustled around serving tea. The three men waited until she left before starting their conversation.

Percy waved his wand precisely, muttering the incantation to secure the room with a privacy charm.

"What's our first order of business?" he asked as he tucked his wand away.

"Fugitive status, Minister," replied O'Connell.

Percy leaned back in his chair and nodded for O'Connell to begin.

The older man cleared his throat. "As you know, we have several status levels that basically outline the degree of urgency for the fugitive."

O'Connell looked down at his notes before looking up again. "Currently, we have two hundred and seventy seven wanted felons on the run. This included a number of muggle born who have gone to ground in the muggle community, as well as known radicals and dissidents. Mind you, this only covers our own particular felons at the moment. The ICW is still working to integrate all of the Auror departments under one umbrella, but I don't have access to the total figures.

"We also have a small group of people who are wanted for questioning, but no charges have been leveled against them," O'Connell said, before pausing for a moment. "The man on the top of that particular list is Harry Potter. Minister, it would be to our benefit if you would allow us to move him to the wanted felon list. I see from his file that there are several charges pending that have been listed as confidential."

Percy sat up straight. "Out of the question, O'Connell. I know you've only been at this posting for a month, but Potter is to be left alone. We've sent out teams to find him before and they've either come up empty handed or been a total disaster."

"Forgive me, Minister," Ives said, interrupting him.

Percy turned to look at him. "You have something to add, Senior Auror?"

Ives swallowed nervously. "Yes, sir. Mr. O'Connell is unaware of certain facts, having come up through our Hong Kong office."

Percy thought for a moment, then he nodded for Ives to continue.

Ives turned to O'Connell who looked at him curiously. "Sir, the common belief that Albus Dumbledore was behind the killing of Voldemort is, in fact, a fabrication of the previous administration and Albus Dumbledore. The Minister felt that, politically, it would be more expedient to support Albus Dumbledore over Harry Potter, who was known to harbor ill will towards the government. Dumbledore continues to be a solid supporter of the Ministry, which is why we allowed this idea to continue," Ives told him.

O'Connell glanced between Ives and Percy. Both nodded at him and he cleared his throat nervously. "And this is..."

"Classified information, Mr. O'Connell. If we put a warrant out for Harry Potter, he is quite likely to turn around and become what he killed. Oh, we still try to find him every now and then, only because we do want to question him in regard to finding my brothers, as well as that mudblood woman, Granger."

O'Connell shook his head in dismay. "It's a pity. He probably knows the location of all of those felons. St. Mungo's still wants Granger to reverse the curse on Lucius Malfoy."

"And that is precisely why we can't charge him. The best charge we have is withholding information. And given his resources, he'd have that laughed out of court in ten minutes," Percy said, looking thoughtful.

Straightening in his chair, the Minister leaned forward. "It is a pity about the Malfoys. Such a good family with an impeccable pedigree. With Draco dead and Lucius incapacitated, I suppose the fortune went to Narcissa."

Ives shook his head. "Oh, no, Minister. The Malfoy family is strictly patriarchal. Narcissa couldn't inherit. The family fortune went to the closest living male relative in the days following the death of Voldemort."

Percy eyed the man with interest. "Who got the fortune, then? I must make a note to make sure they're added to the Ministry invitation lists."

Ives suddenly looked uncomfortable. "I'm sorry, Minister, but the closest living male relative is the head of the Black family."

"Harry Potter," Percy whispered, blanching.

Ives nodded unhappily.

Percy sighed at the thought of that fortune forever out of his reach. Harry had gone to Gringotts as soon as he was healed from his fight and forced them to transfer all of his money to a muggle bank. From there, the fortune was dispersed to multiple overseas muggle accounts, placing it forever out of reach of the Ministry.

They had tried to recover the money when they realized that Harry had been responsible for starting the run that ultimately caused the bank's collapse. The problem was they couldn't afford to bring back his money. By that point, a single British pound was already worth seven galleons and

Potter had liquidated nearly a billion galleons into muggle banks when the money was still worth five pounds sterling per galleon.

Percy had been one of the Ministry employees in charge of finding out what happened after the economic crash of 1999. He knew full well just how far out of reach Harry had put his money.

He looked down at his desk for a moment. "Alright, what else do we have?"

"The talks to consolidate the Auror divisions under the ICW are still underway, Minister. I'll be returning to the Paris conference this evening. Things seem to be moving smoothly, although the Yanks and several others are baulking at the idea of one world wide Ministry. Key people in their governments are holding things up," O'Connell said.

Percy nodded and made a note to talk to the black ops department about some selective assassinations.

The explosion that rocked the room a moment later had both aurors rolling out of their chairs and springing to their feet, wands drawn and ready to fight.

Percy was nowhere to be seen.

"Minister?" shouted Ives in a panic.

"Here," a voice called from under the desk. Slowly, Percy peeked out, then climbed out from under the furniture.

"What the devil was that?" demanded O'Connell.

"The Ministry poltergeist," Percy replied angrily. "Apparently it started sometime during the Scrimgeour administration and they haven't been able to exorcise the beast. The Department of Mysteries have tried everything, including moving the office, but the blasts always find the new office. There's never any damage, just a sudden, unexpected explosion."

With a shaking hand, Percy opened a drawer on his desk and pulled out a bottle of Ogden's. "I think that will be all for now, gentlemen," he said tersely.

O'Connell and Ives nodded and turned for the door, while Percy poured himself a large drink to steady his nerves. Other than the Poltergeist, it really was an enjoyable job.

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### **Norman's Cay, The Bahamas...**

Hermione sipped her drink and watched Harry from the deck of their home. He was in the water, swimming around the Lily, trying to see what sort of damage he had caused when he hit a sandbar the day before. From her vantage point she could barely see his snorkel and every so often, the splash from his fins as he circled the hulls, examining the damage.

*They had taken a trip up to Highbourne Cay, which was the nearest large island like their own. Highbourne had a pristine beach and a small enclosed anchorage that made it an ideal stopover spot for the small tourist boats that plied the waters.*

*On the way back, they stopped and dropped anchor along the northern tip of Norman's Cay, then Harry produced a picnic basket. After their late lunch, Hermione laid out on the expansive deck and allowed herself the luxury of sunbathing.*

*Harry had laid down next to her and together they talked about her plans for the library building he was going to make.*

She smiled contentedly. Yesterday had been a surprise for her. They had been together for nearly six months now. They'd been intimate, but until yesterday, they had never made love. That it happened in the open, on the deck of the Lily, was something that surprised Hermione and aroused her. She never would have believed she had an exhibitionist nature until yesterday.

Finally, after they had gotten back home and Harry was sure the Lily was reasonably safe, they retired to his bedroom. She had intended to return to her own bed that night, but Harry had shyly asked her to stay with him. It had been one of the best nights she had ever experienced. Even though their wedding was still a few weeks away, she had every intention of spending that her nights in his arms and in his bed.

She waved when Harry broke the surface and looked towards the house. At Hogwarts she had never expected him to become so handy. However, his time on his own and living alone on the island had taught him a number of interesting skills. When they woke, they had made love again before eating breakfast, cooked by Dobby. The little elf seemed to be almost beside himself with happiness for the pair.

She watched Harry surface and clear his snorkel, then he reached up on the deck of the boat and pulled a mesh bag into the water. She knew it contained tools for working on the boat. With his bag in hand, he slipped beneath the surface again.

The Lily had been damaged when they were coming home. They had been distracted by a pod of dolphins and didn't see the sandbar until just before they hit it.

Thinking of it, she grinned to herself. In all fairness, she had to admit that the dolphins were not the only distraction. She had been feeling a bit naughty and rather bold, so she had removed her bikini top and laid on the deck, soaking up the sun, while Harry piloted the boat home. The poor boy had been doubly distracted and thoroughly bemused. She couldn't blame him.

He had turned out to be a better lover than she thought he would be. He was considerate and very concerned that she receive as much pleasure as

he did, if not more. So he was completely and totally distracted when they weighed anchor and headed home. He wasn't the only one, either. When they hit the sandbar, Hermione had been deep in plans for a repeat performance in the comfort of Harry's bed.

When the Lily ground to a grinding halt, he immediately jumped overboard to examine the boat. He surfaced a minute later, looking upset. Hermione was worried that the boat might sink, although they were in very shallow water, less than a quarter mile from the island. At worst they could easily swim to shore, if necessary.

Harry had found an open seam in the center hull, which he sealed with magic. He'd used a bit more of his power to back the Lily off of the sandbar, before climbing back on board. The dolphins watched the whole process as if it were a most amusing spectacle for their entertainment. Even Hermione couldn't help smiling at their antics.

Out by the dock, Harry surfaced again. Pushing the bag of tools onto the deck of the Lily, he peeled off his mask and snorkel, then swam to shore before taking off his fins.

He smiled when he saw Hermione walking down to him.

"How bad was it?"

"Not too bad. I've permanently sealed the seam and then warded the leading bow edges of all three hulls with an impervious charm," he replied, then he paused and thought for a moment. "I might do the same for the aft edges, now that I think about it." He grinned at her and gestured for her to climb the stairs to the deck around the house.

Hermione nodded happily, then went up to the deck. Even though Harry had lovingly built the Lily by himself, the shapely craft was more Hermione's boat than his. Harry enjoyed sailing the Lily now and then, and it was great for overnight or extended trips, but he much preferred the power and speed of his dive boat.

Harry suspected she liked the Lily so much because she could find a secluded anchorage and lay on the deck to read.

"Amos orbed. He said he heard from Seth Jones up at Nassau. He said he finally managed to get that steerage outboard for the Lily," she told him. Docking the Lily without a motor of any sort was a difficult task. One had to rely on the wind to help, or use magic. Harry used his magic, and so did Hermione, but she didn't have the power to do it easily and it tired her sometimes if she had to fight the wind. The small steerage motor would enable her to easily dock the boat, no matter which way the wind was blowing.

"I'll give Amos a bank draft," he replied.

She nodded and nibbled on her lower lip worriedly for a moment. He sighed and steered her over to the deck and pushed her gently onto a lounge.

"What's bothering you, Hermione?"

"I'm sorry. Maybe I'm just being silly," she replied.

"What is it?"

Dobby appeared and handed them both a cold drink. Harry nodded absently to Dobby, who smiled and vanished with another pop.

"I've been looking over the book list I made up. I've got nearly twenty thousand pounds of Muggle books listed on it and another five thousand galleons worth of magical books! And Dad! He's got a list of building supplies, tents, generators, radios. You set him organizing and he's doing it with a vengeance. I suppose some of the stuff we can conjure, but things like the wizarding tents? We have to buy them, or make them ourselves from real tents. We're spending an awful lot of money and have nothing coming in."

Harry chuckled. "Relax, Hermione. I've got it covered."

She stared at him for a moment, then shook her head. She had been worried about breaking his bank account, but apparently he wasn't. He hadn't yet told her about his vault under the villa with most of his gold, or his account with the First Centaur Bank of Miami. He had rejected the Goblin Gold Trust depository of America because he no longer trusted goblins. But the Centaurs were reliable and they provided interesting horoscopes with his monthly statements.

He sighed when he saw she wasn't about to be put off so easily.

"Hermione, it's not as bad as you think. My parents left me quite a lot of money, and on top of that, I have both the Black and Malfoy fortunes. Granted, I pulled all my money out of Gringotts, but we still have plenty. The Bank of England account has nearly fifty million pounds in it, and the Centaur Bank in Miami has nearly the same amount in galleons. And that isn't even the bulk of what I have."

She stared at him in astonishment and he started to laugh. "Why is this a surprise to you?"

"I knew you were wealthy, Harry, but I never suspected."

He shrugged. "It really doesn't matter, does it? What value will that money have if we invoke the Avalon Equations?"

Her eyes widened with that realization. If they invoked the equations, his fortune would probably end up being worthless. She finally nodded and sat back on the lounge. It was an odd thought to her. He was very wealthy, yet here he was, working on something that would reduce its value to zero.

He touched her hand and she looked over at him. "Don't worry about it. After dinner I'll sit down with you and describe exactly what we have," he

said softly. "Now, tell me what else is going on."

"Mum's working with the twins, turning their business contacts into a bona fide rescue network. Oh, and we found out about that Canadian family. They were on the run when they came to the Bahamas and Amos stumbled upon them over on Eleuthera Island. He probably wouldn't have noticed them, except one of the children performed some accidental magic right under his nose," she replied.

"So they hadn't heard about our island, then?"

She shook her head. "No, all they had heard was a vague rumor that there was someplace safe to be found in the Bahamas. Mind you, that same rumor also listed several other places, so we might not be the only ones setting up enclaves like this."

"So there are now people passing along information about how to find us?" he asked warily.

"Sort of."

He looked at her questioningly and she smiled back at him. "Mum felt it would be too dangerous to tell people there was a refuge here in the Bahamas. She's working with Fred and George to set up intermediate points that have no particular connection to us at all."

Harry frowned. "I don't understand."

"Say you live in North America...Canada, the U.S., Mexico, it doesn't really matter. You don't know about us and we don't want you to. The Bahamas isn't that big and the ICW could flood the area with Aurors until they find the wards and start breaking them down. No, we want each person to think they're going to a refuge much closer to home. For example, an enclave in Texas for people in North America.

"Once they arrive there, they're sent on by people who do not know the final destination. We test them under Veritaserum when they arrive here. If they pass, we find them a place to live. If they fail, they get obliterated and sent home."

Harry nodded and scratched his head. "Alright, I can see how that would work. But what is this going to do to Weasley Wizarding Wheezes?"

"The twins are shutting it down," she said softly.

He looked up sharply. "What? Why?"

"Honestly, Harry, how can you expect them to be making jokes when we're all working to protect this place?" she asked huffily.

He looked chagrined and dropped his gaze. "I haven't been helping very much, have I?"

Hermione climbed out of the lounge and walked over to him. She lifted her hand and cupped his cheek gently. "You have, Harry. All of the wards are yours. Most of the housing is conjured by you. Everyone knows that if things get dicey, you'll be there rolling up your sleeves and helping along with the rest of us. No one is asking you to get more involved than that."

He leaned into her touch. "I know. I guess I just feel guilty for dumping all this into the laps of others," he whispered.

She reached around with her free arm and pulled herself closer. "You don't have to do everything. And your work on the Grimoires has the twins in an orgy of spell crafting ecstasy. The follow up book you wrote to the Book of Wards contains some of the best magical theory I've ever seen. And when you think you never took Arithmancy, it's doubly amazing. It makes me feel good to know the man I'm going to marry is almost as smart as I am."

She grinned at him and he smiled back, knowing she was only teasing.

"I think the twins want to show you that they can be serious and do something important. They love you like a brother, you know."

He shook his head, marveling at the idea. She pulled him close and kissed his cheek. "My poor Harry. Someday you'll get used to the idea that people care about you."

"I know you do," he said huskily. She melted under his hot gaze and hoped he'd never learn just how much like putty he could make her feel with a single glance.

"Will --- will you stay with me tonight?" he asked softly.

It wasn't hard for her to see the hope in his expression, the hope, and the hunger.

"I'll stay with you forever," she whispered.

Dobby glanced out the glass doors to see Hermione and Harry holding each other on the deck. He smiled to himself and turned back to work on dinner. For now, all was well on Norman's Cay.

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## **Drummond Montana, USA..**

Angela Lightfoot pressed down hard on the ancient clutch and worked the stick awkwardly. The gears ground for a moment, then caught, and the ancient school bus lurched forward. She angrily wiped away her tears. Now was not the time to be crying like a sissy!



They had been attending services and strange garbed men broke into the little quonset building that her husband had built with their retirement money and starting killing people. Vinny, her husband of forty four years, fell, struck in the head with a strange green light.

Frannie, one of their oldest and most powerful members, had summoned a Marid and yelled to Angela to get the children out. She'd herded them out the back door, along with six other adults, and into the old school bus they used for outings.

Angela tore her eyes away from the bumpy dirt road she was driving on. She hadn't any real thought except to escape from the strange and powerful magicians bent on dealing death to her coven. Leaving the building, she'd bypassed Interstate 90 and opted for a back road, heading nearly due north.

She took the offered tissue from the little girl. "Goddess bless you, child," she murmured, wiping away her tears quickly. The road leading into the Rockies was treacherous and difficult. She needed to keep her eyes on the road if she was going to lead her flock. *Lead them, yes, but to where?* she wondered. *Is there any place safe from those people?*

"Mother?"

She slowed slightly and glanced up to see Cindy Ferguson. She was one of the newer members, a newly wed, and pregnant. There had been great joy when she and her husband moved to Drummond and joined the coven. The coven kept a very low profile, meeting once a week for the few locals and once a month for people from the outlying areas. That meeting held far more members than the locals. Unfortunately for them the dark men had attacked during their monthly meeting.

"Cindy, dear, I'm still not sure what we're doing, but I expect you can call me Angie. Most others do," she replied.

Cindy nodded and grabbed an overhead bar when the bus lurched suddenly. Angie slewed the bus and turned the wheel, muttering under her breath. Once the bus was rolling forward smoothly again, she glanced over at Cindy. "What do you need, child?"

"Some of the little ones need to go to the bathroom, and they're frightened, Mother, I mean, Angie."

"I'll pull off at the next turn out I spot. Maybe with the Goddess's help, we'll get lucky," Angela replied, smiling to reassure the young woman.

Five minutes later, she was able to edge the large bus into the access for a logging road. It wasn't much, just a large cleared area that allowed the logging trucks to turn around for the trip back to civilization and the mill. Shutting off the engine, she opened the door and stood up.

"Children! Listen, please. I know you're frightened, but we're all together and we'll make sure you're safe. Cindy, please help those needing to go to the bathroom. Janet, rummage through the boxes in the back. I think we left some kool-aid and chips in them from our last picnic."

Angie stepped out of the bus and held up both hands.

"Goddess's might, heed our plight, give us sprites to guard the night," she muttered.

Four tiny specks of light appeared to hover in her hands, then scattered away from her.

Another adult slowly climbed out of the bus. Michael Surefire was one of the older coven members, and like Angie and her husband, he was mostly of Native American descent.

"Mike, you alright?" she asked him worriedly.

"I think so," he replied, looking around. "I don't think we can stay here long."

"What do you think we should do?"

Mike was silent for a moment, then he picked up a stick. He scratched some marks in the dirt. "We're here, on Edwards Gulch Road. I say we wait here for a couple hours, maybe til morning, then back track towards Drummond. We can hop on the interstate towards Missoula and hopefully find refuge at Mother Abigail's. Maybe contact the state police from there."

"And tell them what? A group of people busted down our door and started killing people using sticks and strange lights?" she asked angrily.

"Getting to Abby's is still the best bet, Angie," he repeated. "We certainly can't stay on the Gulch road. You know it dead ends in the middle of nowhere."

Angie leaned against the cooling bus and nodded. It made sense. The road they were on would peter out in the wilderness and they didn't have a bottomless tank. "Alright, let all the children out to stretch their legs, and see if one of the adults has a cell phone. Hopefully we can call Abbie and make sure she's alright with us coming in like this."

Mike nodded and patted her on the shoulder. He knew she was barely holding it together. He and her husband, Vince, had grown up together on the reservation and had been buddies ever since. If he wanted to cry, she must be close to breaking.

Angie wiped her eyes and pasted a smile on her face as the children piled from the bus. Some of them were too young to understand what had happened. She turned away and watched the road back to town as if a monster might appear any moment.

Janet stepped out next. She had a large bag of potato chips, and two, one gallon containers of kool-aid. Cindy and her husband followed her, carrying cups and some other snacks they could give to the children.

## Norman's Cay, the Bahamas...

Harry relaxed on a lounge. Next to him, on her own lounge, lay Hermione, a book in her hands. Dobby had served them an excellent dinner, and after a walk on the beach, they were relaxing as they usually did each evening. It was a quiet time they used to talk, read or just enjoy being together.

Dobby sat uncomfortably in a chair nearby. Harry had gotten him a few first grade readers and he was slowly going through each book. Every so often he'd stop and ask Hermione for help with a word.

Harry and Hermione sat close together and every so often one of them would reach out and touch the hand of the other.

"Uh, oh. Trouble's coming," Harry murmured after glancing down the beach.

Hermione looked up from her notes on the library and looked in the direction Harry was gazing. In the distance she could see the twins and their girlfriends frolicking along the beach towards their house.

She carefully put away her notes. "I wonder what they want?"

Harry grinned. "Knowing the twins, it's probably something sneaky, evil and fun."

"Oy! Harry! Hermione!" called one of the twins.

Harry sat up and climbed out of the lounge. He walked over to the railing, leaned against it and pulled his pipe out of his pocket. Initially, Hermione had been surprised and a little shocked that he had taken up smoking, but he only smoked a few times a day. She was a little more accepting of that because her father also smoked a pipe now and then. Besides, she wanted to make sure the booze was well behind him before she started working on that habit.

"Hey, you four, what brings you to this end of the island?"

"Harry, mate," said Fred.

"Old buddy," added George.

"Esteemed investor," they both said.

"Suck ups," muttered Alicia. "Just ask him."

The two Weasleys grinned at Alicia, then turned back to Harry. "It's like this."

"Weasley Wizarding Wheezes is having a going out of business sale."

"Well, not really a sale. Actually, we're giving the stuff away."

"Only the people we're giving it to don't know it yet. Lucky bastards!"

"And that's where you come in, Harry!"

The twins paused and looked at him excitedly.

Harry shook his head and glanced over his shoulder to Hermione. "I feel a headache coming on," he told her with a grin.

She stood and walked over to stand next to him.

"Harry, it's simple. We have some excess inventory and some items we held back from the market because they were too dangerous," Fred said.

"Way too dangerous," added George with a grin.

"We thought we'd give them to Percy. Sort of a 'Congratulations on becoming the Minister of Idiots' gift."

Harry glanced over to Hermione, who shrugged. She didn't really like the twin's jokes, but she did admire their ingenuity and even she'd admit, privately, of course, that the Ministry must pay for their crimes sooner or later. The Ministry's actions against her and her family had eroded her faith in the rule of law.

Harry nodded and walked down the stairs to the beach. He sat on the bottom stair and drew a circle in the sand, then he looked up at Fred and George, who appeared to be baffled by his actions. The circle was roughly a foot and a half wide.

"What's that, mate?"

Harry grinned up at them. "Trust me," he said, then he motioned for Hermione to join him on the steps. "Love, draw a box in the sand about a meter from my circle and then connect the two with a line. Make the box at least a meter or two wide and high."

She smiled and eagerly complied. She loved watching him perform magic. It was like watching a master craftsman at work.

The twins and their girlfriends knelt in the sand, watching Harry. He lifted one eyebrow and Fred fished a box out of his pocket and quickly expanded it to nearly trunk size. He lifted the lid and brought out a small blue cube roughly three inches on a side. It pulsed with a soft blue light.

"What is that?" exclaimed Hermione. She was familiar with many of the twin's products, but this was new to her.

"I said we had stuff we never marketed," Fred said reproachfully. "This is one of them. A portable pool."

"That doesn't sound all that dangerous," Harry mused.

"Oh, no, you have it all wrong. Right now this cube is fifty thousand gallons of compressed water," George replied. "Just drop it on the ground and the compression charm will end. Instant pool. Problem is, we never could get the pool to work. As a result, we ended up with five of these cubes of water and nothing to use them in. You could kill someone with one of these."

"Hmmm. Alright, let's try this," Harry said, then he turned to his circle in the sand. "Ministry Death Chamber," he muttered, followed by a long string of high Latin.

The square that Hermione had drawn shimmered and the sand fading away, revealing an image that was burned into Harry's memory, the place where Sirius had died. Harry glanced at the circle in the sand. The sand was gone and in its place stood a shimmering pool of liquid silver.

"Fred, drop that cube into the circle," Harry said. His eyes were glowing with power and little sparks of magic jumped from his fingertips.

Fred broke away from the sight. This was magic on a scale he didn't believe possible. Nodding, he leaned closer to the circle and dropped the cube in.

The effects were obvious. In the square, the glowing cube could be seen falling from the ceiling of the room. Instantly, the room filled with water. There was a booming sound and the water level started to drop as the doors to the room exploded outwards under the force of the water.

"Drop another cube, Fred," Harry commanded.

Fred grinned and pulled another out of the box. One by one he dropped cubes into the circle until the water level remained constant. The Department of Mysteries, the lowest, deepest, most secret level of the Ministry building, was totally flooded. It would take months, even with magical pumps, to remove all the water.

Harry grinned and looked to Fred, who still had one more cube in his hand.

"Hold that cube for now. What else have you got? Maybe something that goes well with water?" Harry asked.

George leaped up to rummage through the crate of dangerous pranks. "AH! Pyropiranha!" he exclaimed, holding up a jar of what looked like glowing fireflies suspended in water.

"They bite and burn. It was one of those things we invented and then wondered why," murmured Fred to Hermione, who stomped on the urge to roll her eyes and nodded instead.

"It seemed like a good idea at the time," George added.

"Dump them in, George," Harry said.

Once the strange fish had been sent to the Ministry, the square saw the tiny pin pricks of light expanded into whole schools of nasty looking glowing fish. The water temperature around them instantly turned hot.

Harry glanced over at Fred, who still had a portable pool in his hand. He grinned and turned back to the circle. "The Great Hall, Hogwarts," he muttered, followed by the long Latin incantation.

"Sirius once told me that he and my dad had discovered that the Great Hall is nearly waterproof. They managed a prank that went wrong and they covered the hall in an inch of water," Harry said.

Hermione choked on her laughter. The portable pool ought to fill the hall to waist height.

"Toss the cube, Fred."

George started laughing so hard he knocked into Alicia, who shrieked with laughter. Fred dropped the cube, then he tossed a small pouch in after it.

They watched the water appear until it was nearly four feet deep, then it turned a light green and solidified.

"Lime Jello," Fred said with a grin.

Harry started laughing, causing both the circle and the square to ripple and bulge ominously.

Fred looked at Harry worriedly. "Hold long can you hold this spell, mate?"

Harry shook his head and grinned. "I'm fine, I just need to concentrate on it. I'll release it for now and we'll go through your box of goodies to figure out what we're going to do with it."

He relaxed and the two magical portals vanished, leaving nothing but sand behind.

Hermione stood. "Judging from the size of that box, we'll be here for a while. I'm going to ask Dobby to get us some drinks and some snacks," she said.

"We'll come help," Angelina offered.

Hermione nodded and waved for them to follow while George conjured a table and started to lay pranks out. Fred conjured some chairs, while Harry enjoyed listening to them explain each prank. He could close his eyes and almost envision all of them being back in the Gryffindor common room.

For the next several hours they spent an enjoyable evening, depositing pranks all across Wizarding Britain.

Hermione turned out to have a vicious sense of justice as she offered possible uses for some of the more obscure pranks. And what surprised the twins more was that she could do that at the same time as she conjuring a fire so she could introduce the Harry and the others to that time honored, fun fireside food, S'mores.

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

Albus Dumbledore sat tiredly at his desk and absently stirred his tea. He had gotten up earlier than usual and he already felt the fatigue piling at him.

Filch had woken him early to explain there was a problem in the Great Hall.

Following the old caretaker down to the Great Hall, he'd found a large crowd of laughing students and most of the staff, frowning at the chortling children. The doors were jammed shut, and there was a green ooze slowly leaking out under them.

It had taken him, most of the staff and all of the Hogwarts House Elves nearly three hours to clean up the mess in the Great Hall and put things to right. Because of the mess, all morning classes had to be canceled. Dumbledore had announced dire consequences for the pranksters when he identified them.

Now he was sitting at his desk, finally able to relax. A small pop signified the arrival of an elf, who offered him a copy of the day's Daily Prophet. He grunted in acknowledgment and opened the paper.

### ***Fugitive Weasley Brothers Attack Ministry! Minister of Magic disavows is own kin!***

*The Ministry was in a state of panic this morning as workers arriving in the building discovered many key areas of the Ministry wrecked, some beyond repair. An anonymous source at the Ministry told this reporter that arriving in the atrium revealed a gigantic firework display congratulating Percy Weasley on his rise to Minister. The fireworks claimed to be the work of the Minister's brothers, Fredrick and George Weasley, both of whom are wanted for conspiring to pollute our society with muggle items and ideas.*

*An attempt to dispel the fireworks resulted in the near total destruction of the Ministry Atrium. The fountain of Magical Friends was said to be obliterated, except for the statue of the House Elf, which now bears a striking resemblance to Minister Weasley.*

*A Ministry spokesman made the following statement on behalf of the Minister. "Mr. Weasley regrets the inconvenience imposed by his brothers and wants to assure the public that the Ministry is working diligently to capture these dangerous fugitives. The Minister further states that these fugitives are no brothers of his any longer.*

*"In the meantime, all apparation testing is hereby suspended until we can determine how to remove the explosive splinching hex on the testing area. Also, Department of Mysteries employees are urged to set up shop in the Ministry cafeteria until the lower levels of the building are pumped dry."*

*Other damaged areas in the building included Floo Control. All owners of Floo points are urged to shut down network access until further notice. The Department of Magical Law Enforcement is setting up offices in courtroom nine. The bathrooms on the third floor have been rendered inoperable and declared a dangerous health hazard.*

*The Prophet has learned that the Ministry is offering a ten thousand galleon reward for information leading to the arrest of Fredrick and George Weasley, and another five thousand galleon reward for anyone who knows the location all of the furniture from the Minister's office.*

*Stacy Bigmouth, reporting.*

Dumbledore laid the paper on his desk and shook his head in dismay. *Things must be truly bad at the Ministry if they're not able to exercise proper control over the Prophet,* he thought. *I wonder if the twins had anything to do with the mess in the Great Hall?*

With that thought, he went back to reading the paper.

It would take another week before anyone discovered the Daily Prophet's printing presses had been charmed to print only the truth.

It was three days later before anyone noticed that the stands in the Quidditch Pitch were sinking into a Weasley Wizarding Wheeze Portable

Swamp. By then, it was too late. The Slytherin stands collapsed, crashing into the southern goal posts, knocking them down.

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### **West of Drummond Montana...**

Angela jockeyed the ancient bus back down the road towards Drummond. It was nearly six in the morning and she had tried to be quiet about the move. The ancient bus, however, had refused to start without several loud backfires, which woke up the children, scaring them.

Everyone turned to look sleepily at Angie in the driver's seat. "Don't worry. I just thought we'd get an early start," she said loudly over the noise of the engine.

They had spent an uneasy night sleeping in the bus. Angie hadn't wanted to risk driving back down the Gulch road in the dark. There were several steep grades that made the road dangerous at night. Going up them in the dark was easy, but it would be suicide to attempt going down at night.

Michael came up the aisle to sit behind her. "What are you thinking, Angie?"

"I'm thinking you're right about making it to Missoula, but we need to stop to gas up."

"Do you have enough money? We all sort of ran out of the building in a hurry, you know."

Angie chuckled. It was impossible to not hear the bitterness in her laugh. "Oh, I have the next best thing, Mike. Vince's credit card. We almost never used it, so it's got nearly a full ten grand on it."

Michael leaned forward and patted her shoulder sympathetically. "Can I do anything?"

She worked the clutch and the bus slewed dangerously for a moment, the rear end swinging wide on the narrow road. "Yeah," she replied, catching her breath and reefing hard on the steering wheel. "Find out who has a cell phone and the moment you get a signal, call Mother Abigail's. Tell her what's happened and that we're coming. Also, organize Cindy and the others to herd the little ones to the bathroom. We'll stop at the Citgo in Drummond before jumping on I90."

Michael nodded. "When we stop, I'll pick up food from the minimart."

He moved to stand when Angie stopped him again. "Mike."

"Yes?"

"Tell the others we might need to do a summoning. Maybe involve some of the children, as well."

His eyes widened. "But they aren't ready," he protested.

Angie grimaced. "I know that, but what choice do we have? If those people come back, a summoning may be the only thing that keeps us alive."

Mike frowned, but nodded reluctantly. "Katie is thirteen, she could help. And Josie's boy, Tony. He's thirteen, also. But the rest of them are too young."

Angie's mouth tightened. He was right, and she knew it.

Mike gripped her shoulder for a moment, then grabbed for the overhead bar when bus hit a bad patch of washboard.

Angie stomped down hard on the clutch and down shifted. The up coming downgrade was bad enough on the logging trucks, it would be hell on the old bus. Through the window in the doors she could see the steep drop off on the edge of the road. One wrong turn and they'd plummet down the mountainside.

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### **Harry's Villa, Norman's Cay, the Bahamas...**

Hermione read the headline of the paper and chuckled to herself. Dobby had popped back to Diagon Alley to pick up the noon edition of the Daily Prophet. She placed the paper on the table and moved to open it when she paused and looked at her hand. It still made her grin, seeing her engagement ring.

Harry had given her the ring barely a week before they had rescued her parents and sister from Crawly. The diamond wasn't overly large, barely over a carat, but it was perfect. It was surrounded by emeralds and sapphires, giving the ring the effect of being a flower surrounded by petals.

Poor Harry. The look on his face when he'd asked her had been amusing, though she'd never tell him that. They had talked about it on several occasions and Hermione was sure he was going to ask her any day. When he did, she couldn't get over the sheer terror in his eyes. As if she'd turn him down!

She chuckled again and shook her head, remembering how sweet his proposal was and how his hands had trembled when he'd slid the ring on her finger. The ring was special, but she wasn't sure how. It tested as enchanted, but he wouldn't say exactly what he had done to it. She only started to get some hints of it's ability after they'd started making love. And they hadn't been doing that long enough for her to be sure if her suspicions were correct or if she was imaging things.

She picked up a fresh breakfast bun baked by Dobby and nibbled on it while continuing to read about the mishaps at the Ministry of Magic. It

amazed her that in less than a year she had lost all respect for their rules. Becoming a wanted and presumed felon sure could change one's outlook on a lot of things.

She put the bun down and leaned back in her chair. *Their rules?* she thought. *Yes, Harry was right about one thing. Living here on the island is like a separation between us and them. They have their way of thinking and their rules and I find I can no longer respect that.*

A pair of arms encircled her from behind and Harry kissed the top of her head. "Good morning," he said.

She smiled. "Good morning. Did you sleep well?"

He nodded and moved to his own seat. Dobby appeared and handed him a large mug of black coffee. "Yes, although I'm not sure if it's because you tired me out, or you were just close by," he replied, grinning.

"You weren't the only one tired from last night," she said, smirking.

She looked down at the table. She had been surprised by the intensity of the emotions she felt from him during their love making. It exceeded anything she experienced with Ron. But she also knew no matter how tired he was, he had several episodes each night involving nightmares. Usually, she'd wake enough to touch him and he'd quiet down again, so it wasn't really bothering either of them.

"So what do you have planned today?" she asked.

"Amos asked me to help him at the old airstrip. There's a two hundred gallon tank that he wants to fill with diesel oil and enchanted to be ever filling. Do you want to come along?"

Hermione nodded. "Sure. Mum asked about it yesterday. She thought the strip would be a good place to put temporary housing, since we wouldn't have to clear any underbrush."

"The infamous rescue committee," he murmured with a bit of a grin.

She looked at him crossly. "I'll remind you that you didn't want to be on the committee, Harry. That's why only Amos, Bill, Maxime and Dad are on it now."

He held up his hands placatingly. "I know, I know. I'm not making fun of them. I know I'm going to get dragged in sooner or later. Amos has been harping on it since your parents organized the committee. Heck, what he has me doing today is committee work."

Hermione sipped her tea and looked at him. "Just what is he going to do with two hundred gallons of diesel oil, anyway?"

Harry leaned across the table. "It's your dad's pet project. Electrification."

"He wants to bring in electric power?" she asked incredulously. "Why? We can power most things with magic."

He waved a hand dismissively. "Sure we can, within reason. Think about it, love. We can power lights, and even some electronics with magic. But the really complex stuff, like radios and computers, needs real electricity. Amos thinks we can install a couple windmills with a backup generator. The generator would run on the diesel, and only when the wind isn't blowing, which on this island is about six days a year."

"A computer would make indexing and cataloging the library so much easier," she said wistfully. "And it would be nice to be able to sit and watch a movie once in a while."

He reached over and squeezed her hand. "Now you know why he's got me enchanting the tank."

She folded the paper and passed it over to him, then she stood up and walked around to his side of the table. He turned on his chair and she straddled his lap. His mouth suddenly went dry. It hadn't occurred to him just how little she was wearing. She was dressed in one of his t-shirts, and nothing else.

She pulled him into a tight embrace and he nestled his head between her breasts. "Can you put up a warning ward around the house?"

He looked up at her. She was nibbling on her lower lip, a sure sign that she was nervous about something.

"Why do we need a warning ward around the house?" It didn't make sense to him. The island had more wards on it than Hogwarts. Why add one on the house?

She blushed heavily. "Do you remember when we made love on the Lily that day?"

He smiled and slid his hands up under her shirt, caressing her. "How could I forget that?" he asked huskily. Despite running aground with the boat, that day was forever engraved in his memory as the best day ever.

She shivered and her breathing deepened. "It seemed so naughty, doing that out on the deck in broad daylight."

"And?" he asked intently, his voice low and gravelly. He wrapped his hands around her bare bum and pulled her closer to him.

She leaned against him and moaned slightly. "I liked it," she whispered. "I thought if we had a ward, I could dress... you know... less. Maybe even sunbathe like that."

He nuzzled against her neck and she moaned again. "I'll put a ward up as soon as we get back from the airstrip," he replied. "I might even join you sunbathing."

She closed her eyes and shivered deliciously. "This doesn't make me... I don't know... seem wanton, indecent?"

"Indecent? Why would you think that?"

"It would mean we'd make love more often --- that I want you to make love to me more often."

He smiled at her. "That sounds just fine to me. I don't see any shame in loving someone, Hermione. Sometimes I think our ideas about sex seem almost barbaric. The Japanese and other Pacific cultures don't place the stigma on it that we do. It seems it's only the so called western civilized cultures that think it's something dirty."

She thought about his reply for a moment, then she leaned back in his embrace. "How many children do you want?"

He grinned at her. "Well, let's put your mind to rest right now. I do not want to father my own Quidditch team. You're not Molly Weasley, thank Merlin, and I'm not forcing anyone into that role. It would be nice to have a boy and a girl, especially a bushy brown haired girl with green eyes, but I'll be happy with any number, as long as you, and they, are happy and healthy."

She grinned, very satisfied with his answer. Her breathing deepened and she almost purred when his hands started roaming to more adventurous places. They'd be a little late in meeting with Amos, but she didn't care.

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### **Interstate 90, heading west to Missoula, Montana...**

It was mid morning when Angie brought the bus back into Drummond. She skirted the edges of town, hitting the gas station, where they took another hour between trips to the bathroom, refueling the bus and feeding ten hungry and frightened children. If the six other adults were like Angie, then they were as frightened and exhausted as the children.

As small as Drummond was, the gas station was frequented by mostly interstate traffic. They were able to reduce the possibility of being recognized, but not totally eliminate it. It never occurred to them that their vehicle had been noted when they escaped yesterday.

By eleven, they were on the road again. Mike reported that they had a cell signal, but were unable to contact Mother Abigail's. All they got was the answering machine.

Angie pulled out onto the interstate for the fifty mile trip. At their best speed, it would still take more than an hour to nurse the old bus over the distance. She muttered a prayer to the Goddess and stomped on the clutch and worked the old stick shift. The bus jerked forward, gaining speed.

Mike moved forward on the bus and sat down on the seat behind her. "I've got the adults ready to do a prayer circle for an intervention. Cindy is coaching Josie and Tony, but even with them, it's only eight, Angie. That's not enough for a full summoning."

"We don't have many members like Frannie, who could summon a full sized Marid to protect us. But intervention might work," she replied worriedly.

"You can summon one, Angie. I always thought you were stronger than Frannie was."

She glanced up at him. "Maybe," she muttered. "But I'm the only one who knows how to drive this beast and Goddess knows it's going to be a rough ride to Missoula."

Mike suddenly leaned down, looking out the windows. "Where are all the other cars?"

Angie frowned. "I don't know," she replied worriedly. "Go back to the others and have them keep an eye out. They'll need to form a circle the moment we run into trouble."

Mike nodded grimly, then he turned and smiled for the children that were looking at him anxiously.

Angie grew increasingly nervous. There were no vehicles in the westbound lanes and she still hadn't seen a single eastbound car or truck. Considering the fact that I90 was an important road, this was a near impossibility.

"Angie!" Mike screamed from the back of the bus.

She glanced in her mirror, then immediately cut across the Interstate to the inner lane. An explosion rocked the bus and cracked a few windows. Many of the children screamed and began to cry. She stomped down on the accelerator, forcing the old bus to use every bit of horsepower it could muster.

The bus shuddered and the temperature gauge began to rise ominously.

"Form the circle!" yelled Angie.

Mike and the other adults immediately joined hands. Cindy gestured to the two oldest children to join them.

Another explosion rocked the bus and Angie swerved again. She looked out her rear view mirror and did a double take. There were those strange red cloaked people again, but they were flying brooms!

In the back of the bus, the circle began their prayer. It was the only option they had available to them.

*Goddess of Light, hear our plight,  
Help your children survive this fight.*

Over and over they chanted while Angie careened from one side of the road to the other. The old bus was pushing nearly eighty miles an hour and it was complaining mightily about it. Steam started wafting up from under the hood and she could clearly smell something electrical burning behind the dashboard.

Bolts of light whizzed past her window as she swerved erratically. Then she pulled too hard on the wheel.

"Oh, Goddess," she muttered, realizing her mistake. "Hang on everyone!"

*Goddess of Light, hear our plight,  
Help your children survive this fight.*

The right front wheel guard smashed into the guard railing. The bus scrapped along the side of the railing and Angie cringed. Sparks flew like fireflies while the bus pressed up against the railing, metal against metal screeched loudly inside the bus. Several children screamed and Angie pulled hard on the wheel. She didn't want to go over the edge! This stretch of road ran along the river and the river was at least twenty feet below the road.

*Goddess of Light, hear our plight,  
Help your children survive this fight.*

The bus lurched away from the railing and immediately Angie knew they were doomed. The right front tire was flat and she was having trouble controlling the bus. Pieces of shredded tire shot past the windows. Soon they'd be down to the rim.

*Goddess of Light, hear our plight,  
Help your children survive this fight.*

A blast of green light hit Angie's side window and it exploded inwards, showering her with glass fragments. She yelled in fear and momentarily released the steering wheel. The rear end of the bus fishtailed wildly, while she blinked, trying to clear her vision, then the bus turned into the railing at nearly a right angle. It angled dangerously, and for a brief second, two sets of wheels lifted from the pavement as it threatened to tip over, then it crashed down again and barreled forward, aiming for the railing.

*Goddess of Light, hear our plight,  
Help your children survive this fight.*

The bus burst through the railing and the nose of the bus pitched upwards as it arced out over the embankment. The men chasing the bus slowed and turned to watch. The bus sailed out over the side of the small hill and pitched nose down. The surface of the river shimmered strangely as the old bus hurtled downwards. The bus dove into that strange shimmer and vanished from sight, leaving no trace, not even a ripple in the water to mark its passage.

Puzzled, the men on the brooms moved over to where the bus should have been and examined the river. There was no sign of it, and no sign of any magic. The bus and its occupants had vanished. Angered, the aurors knew they had no choice but to return to headquarters and informed their superiors that they had failed to stop a bunch of magic-less muggles.

Privately, they were a bit afraid. This had to be magic, but it was a type they had never seen or heard about before.

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### **The Airstrip, Norman's Cay, the Bahamas...**

Harry stood with a group of his friends at one end of the airstrip. He had just finished enchanting the large tanks that held the diesel oil. Now they were clearing some of the underbrush so that there would be room to install a generator. Amos already knew where he wanted to place the wind turbines.

"It's strange that this island has an airstrip on it," commented Duncan Granger.

"Not really," Harry replied, looking towards the south end of the runway. "In the late seventies a famous drug lord used the island to smuggle drugs into Miami. In fact, not too far from here there's an old drug smuggling plane sitting in about twenty feet of water. I can show it to you, if you want?"

"A sunken plane? Really?" said Cassandra intrigued by the idea.

Harry grinned. "We'll go on the Lily. Unlike the muggles, we won't run out of fuel short of the runway."

"It would make a nice outing on the Lily," Hermione offered with a grin. She loved taking out her sailboat. She had taken her parents out several times.

Fred, George, Alicia and Angelina walked up to the group. They'd been checking out the buildings along the runway. Harry knew the runway existed, but never bothered to worry about them until today.

"The buildings need to be cleaned, but they seem to be in good shape, Harry," Alicia offered.



Harry looked at Duncan. "It's your call. The committee can use them."

Duncan turned to Alicia. "How big are they?"

She shrugged. "They're large and tall, mostly big and empty."

"Must be an airplane hangar, then," Cassandra added.

"Maybe we can turn one into an island infirmary?" Alicia asked hopefully. She had nearly finished her healer training when she and Angelina fled Britain and unless it was a major emergency, she was the island healer. For major emergencies, they still relied on Mother Marie, the island hopping healer.

Amos had arranged for Marie and Alicia to meet. They were hoping they could convince Marie to help Alicia finish her training. She didn't need much to get her certificate.

"George, Fred, why don't you put your heads together with Alicia..." Harry paused and frowned at the grinning red heads. "Get your minds out of the gutter. Besides, you know how lonely Angelina feels when you ignore her."

"Harry!" shouted Angelina. Despite her color, she managed to darken even more. Alicia was holding her sides, trying to contain her laughter.

"I can't believe you said that!" exclaimed Hermione.

Harry turned to reply to her when a weird warbling sound rang through the air. Harry's head snapped upwards. "Something powerful is punching through the wards. Cassandra, Duncan, take Victoria, find a building and hide!"

Everyone else pulled their wands, while Harry raised his hands. Both of his hands exploded with an aura as he desperately tried to feed more power into the wards. Puff appeared hovering overhead, her wings humming furiously, then she dove after the fleeing Grangers.

"Harry?" asked Hermione worriedly. He was visibly wilting under the effort.

"Can't... hold... it..." he gasped, then he pitched to his knees and heaved up his breakfast. Hermione knelt beside him, holding him, while he fought against the spasms, his back arching over and over. Despite his power, he didn't have enough strength to stop this assault!

"LOOK!" shouted George.

A shimmering appeared about halfway down the runway. It looked almost like a heat mirage. With a bright flash of orange light, an ancient bus appeared out of the heat wave. The vehicle nosed onto the runway, then bounced up. The hood lock broke and the hood flew up, exposing the engine, while blocking the driver's view.

The Grangers, having seen the bus, stopped and gaped in shock. Cassandra lifted Victoria into her arms, ready to run if need be. Duncan stood in front of them protectively.

The bus careened wildly down the runway towards the startled spectators, then it veered heavily to the right. Hermione gasped. She could see someone struggling to keep the bus from tipping over. The bus ran off the runway and smashed into a large palm tree, nearly knocking it over before it came to a stop.

Smoke and steam rose from the engine and they could clearly hear the sounds of very frightened people and children crying. Flames appeared from under the engine compartment.

Fred and George took off running towards the bus. Someone on the inside was struggling to open the emergency back door. Fred stopped only feet from the door and opened it with his wand. George ran around to the front of the bus and showered it with a fire suppression charm.

Someone screamed inside the bus, seeing Fred's wand. That caused another panic and everyone tried to run to the front door, which was still closed, the frame bent out of shape.

Duncan stepped past the astounded red heads and hoisted himself up into the bus.

"QUIET!" he yelled.

That startled everyone into turning to look at him. He scowled, seeing the large number of small children and it quickly made him change his mind about how to approach this.

"Alright, no one is going to hurt you here. If you can all come to the back of the bus, we'll get you out and someplace safe. I promise you, no one will hurt you," he said soothingly.

By that time, Hermione, and a rather wobbly and tired Harry, made it to the bus to join the twins. Cassandra and the other girls were right behind them. Already Alicia was opening the small bag she carried full of potions. Puff stood off to one side, obviously ready to protect Victoria and her mother if necessary.

Duncan jumped down from the bus, then he turned and lifted up his arms. A young pregnant woman stepped up to the exit, looking around uncertainly, then she turned around and grabbed a small child. She hesitated for only a moment before handing the little girl down to Duncan.

"Fred, George, we're going to need blankets and cots. Run to that airplace hang thing and start making them," snapped Alicia. She took the little

girl from Duncan pulled out a large flask. "Here, sweetheart, take a little sip of this."

"Dobby," Harry called.

The little elf appeared with a pop, startling the woman standing in the bus exit, she nearly dropped the child she was handing down to Duncan.

Dobby looked expectantly up at Harry. "Find Bill and Fleur. Tell them they're needed at the runway right away. Then bring food and drink to the first building over there. Help Fred and George as best you can, please."

Dobby nodded and vanished.

"What was that thing?" exclaimed the woman standing in the doorway. Fortunately, she hadn't spotted Puff who, like so many other dragon species, was capable of being invisible to non-magical humans.

Hermione handed Harry a drink she had conjured and he sipped gratefully from it.

"Just a friend, Miss. Now, please, let's get you people off of the bus and into someplace out of the sun for now," Hermione offered.

Harry ignored the arrival of Bill, Fleur and Gabrielle. He was more interested in the bus. Bill and his wife took one look at the sniffing, frightened children and immediately pitched in.

The drink Hermione gave him rid him of the foul taste in his mouth and had contained a small amount of pepper up potion to give him some energy. He walked over to a hole in the side of the bus, just above the left rear wheel well. "That is a reductor shot," he murmured to Hermione. She was following him closely now that the other adults were taking care of the children from the bus.

"They were running from Wizards, then. Did you notice they seemed terrified of Fred's wand? If they're muggle born, why would they be afraid of a wand?"

Harry walked the length of the bus, inspecting the damage, then he turned to Hermione. "Wanded magic is only one kind of magic. In my year traveling I saw magics that would take your breath away and they weren't always performed using a wand. Even I don't need a wand anymore and I suspect someday you'll be the same."

She shook her head. "I doubt that. I don't have anywhere near your power."

He sighed and shook his head, then he turned and leaned against the bus. "Why do you think I keep giving you nonsense incantations, love?"

She frowned at him. "Like that last one? Really, Harry, Yaba Daba Doo is not something any respectable witch would get caught dead saying."

He grinned. "Think, Hermione. Put that wonderful brain of yours into gear. My incantations are silly because they aren't needed. You know that. You knew that the first time I poked you on the forehead and yelled 'doink'. I'm trying to show you that you use your magic like a tool you pull from the box when you should be using it like a hand. It's something that should be second nature to you and I'm going to keep giving you silly incantations until you get that idea down."

Her frown deepened. He had been giving her nonsense incantations for spells she never heard of since she arrived on the island, but the worst, in her opinion, was a spell designed to alleviate her menstrual cramps. She felt foolish pointing a wand at herself and incanting "Be nice, kitty!"

She knew what he was trying to do and she even agreed with it, it just frustrated her. So far her total wandless magic capability was limited to levitating a piece of paper, and even then she said the *Wingardium Leviosa* in her head. She was sure Harry had long since lost the need to say the spell incantation silently.

Harry walked over to her and put his arm around her shoulders. "Don't worry about the magic. It will come, in time. Now, let's go welcome our newest guests."

She nodded and leaned against him, letting him walk her towards the hangar.

Angie sat on a cot holding a cold compress to a bump on her head. She had been knocked unconscious when the bus hit the tree, but other than a bump, she was relatively unhurt. She watched the young blond woman move from person to person, healing cuts and mending broken bones. It bothered her. The woman was using similar magic to the people who had attacked them, but she was trying to help them. Most of the children had been given a light sleeping draught after they had been healed and fed. Only Angie and the adults were still awake.

The blond healer had just finished up with Cindy and now she was walking over to her bed.

"My name is Alicia Spinnet," she said in a very thick British accent. Then she reached up and gently removed Angie's hand from the cold compress and peeled it back. "That's quite a nasty bump you have, but we'll fix you right up."

She watched fearfully as Alicia aimed her wand at her forehead. The tip glowed a soft blue and she felt a cold sensation in her forehead as the swelling shrank.

Alicia moved back and sat on an empty cot just across from her and handed her a small goblet, which she filled from a silver flask. "I'm sorry that it won't taste good, but this potion will help finish healing that bump," she said.

Angie took the goblet and sniffed carefully. Her nose wrinkled in disgust. It smelled like Vinny's socks after a three week hunting trip. Closing her eyes, she tossed the noxious concoction down in as few swallows as possible. Then Alicia handed her another glass, this time, thankfully, filled with

a fruit juice to wash away the ugly taste of the potion. Almost instantly the pain receded until she barely knew it was there.

"Thank the Goddess," she murmured in relief, then she smiled at Alicia. "Bless you, child. You are truly gifted."

Alicia smiled and stood. "I'm sure someone will be by to answer your questions soon."

Angie nodded and for the first time in nearly twenty four hours she began to relax. These stick based magic users had different powers, but unlike the broom riders, these seemed to be helpful, nice people. Her eyes flickered to the large opening when a young couple entered the hangar and she sucked in her breath. She'd never known anyone who exuded that kind of power.

He wasn't a physically imposing figure, although he was well formed. But the intensity of his gaze and his piercing emerald green eyes conveyed an impression of authority and power that she couldn't ignore.

The couple talked to Alicia for a moment and she pointed back to where Angie sat. He nodded and walked toward her. The young brunette followed, holding his hand.

The young man held out his hand. She knew instinctively that her first impression of this man was wrong. He was even more powerful than she initially thought.

"Hello, I'm Harry Potter, and this is my fiancée, Hermione Granger," he said in a mellow baritone. He smiled at her. He didn't know anything about this old woman, except that she seemed have an aura of peace about her.

She shook his hand and smiled back, grateful that she had remembered to put her teeth in before she had gone to the celebration yesterday. He was a handsome man, even if he was engaged.

"Your people are all being taken care of and I want to assure you that you're safe here. You're all welcome to stay as long you need. Permanently, if you wish. Also, I apologize for your rough landing. When I felt you crashing through our wards, I put more power behind them. I thought we were being attacked, so I tried to reinforce the wards to prevent your passage."

"You couldn't know, Harry," Hermione said softly.

He patted her hand and smiled at her before turning back to face Angie.

The old woman grinned back at the pair. They were obviously very much in love. It reassured her.

"I'm Angela Lightfoot, but most folk call me Angie, or Mother. Until yesterday, I s'pose I was one of the elders of our coven. Some would say my husband and I were the high priest and priestess."

"Coven?" exclaimed Hermione in surprise.

Harry reached over and stilled her with a touch, then he motioned for Angie to continue.

"We were having a celebration of our congregation. One of our members, Cindy, is pregnant and we were gathered to pray for her and the baby. Then, these people in red kimonos broke in and started killing everyone. Vinny, my husband was killed, then Frannie, yelled for me to get the children out, and that's what we did, while Frannie held them off with a summoned Marid."

Harry nodded knowingly and waited patiently for Angie to continue. She had choked up. Hermione pulled her wand and conjured a box of tissues, which she handed to the old woman.

"Take your time, Angie," Harry said gently. "No one is going to pressure you into talking about anything painful."

He saw Hermione flick her wand, then stare at in confusion. A single glowing zero hovered over the tip. She had been casting a Hammerstein Magical Index, a standard diagnostic spell for measuring the magical core of an individual. A zero was an unusual reading, even for a muggle.

"Not all magic comes from within, love," he said quietly. "I remember a bushman shaman I met in Warumpi, Australia. He didn't have an ounce of magic, but was able to draw magic into himself from his surroundings." He grinned. "He was a nice old man who liked his beer and thought I was great because of my core. I was like a walking battery for him."

"The Goddess aids those who believe," murmured Angie.

Harry looked at her and nodded. "Maybe she does. Was that how you made it here?"

Angie frowned. "Where is here? Last thing I knew, we were plunging into the river, east of Missoula."

"You're on an island in the Bahamas called Norman's Cay. From your description, you were attacked by wizards and witches. They're called Aurors and they work for the Ministry of Magic. We could spend several hours detailing what we know about the Ministry and why you were attacked, but that conversation would be better held off until we have everyone settled."

Angie nodded reluctantly.

Harry looked around. There were several nearby buildings near the north end of the runway that could be converted into living space for these people.

Angie," he said quietly. "I suppose you would like to see all of your people to stay together, if possible? I know I'm only guessing, but I figure most of these children are now orphans?"

She nodded unhappily. "I would like to keep us together, but I don't honestly know if the others want to take care of the little ones. If they don't, I will."

"Alright, here's what we'll do for the moment. This hangar will do as a temporary place for a day or two. Tomorrow, you and I will inspect some of the nearby buildings to see what we can do to make them comfortable for you and your people. Tonight, I think we'll hold a BBQ right out here on the runway," he said, looking down at her. "We'll talk more later. Perhaps tomorrow, after we get you set up, we'll be able to discuss in more detail what brought you here and how."

She nodded and watched the young man reach into the pocket of his pants. He pulled out a fist full of lollipops and handed them to her. "For the children," he murmured with a shy smile.

Angie's eyes moistened and she tried to stammer a thank you, but he waved it off, embarrassed by her reaction. With that, he turned and walked over to the pair of red heads to speak to them.

"I'm sorry about that," Hermione said softly. "Harry's an orphan himself and once he realized that about the children, he reordered his priorities. By tomorrow I'm sure you'll be living in much better conditions."

"Orbis!" Harry said, summoning a silver sphere. It hovered for a moment in front of him, then shot off at an incredible speed, heading north.

Angie blinked in shock and tore her eyes away to look at Hermione. "What was that?"

"He used a spell to send a message to someone, probably Captain Amos, who is up in Nassau today."

"A spell? Are you witches?"

Hermione laughed softly and nodded. "Yes. I can even fly on a broom, though badly. To be honest, heights scare me. And Harry is a wizard."

"So you all use these sticks?"

Hermione watched Harry for a moment, then looked back to Angie. She pulled her own wand from its holster and held it up for the woman to see. "We call them wands, and most of us use them to perform magic, but not all of us need them. Harry is the only one on the island that doesn't need a wand and he's teaching me to work magic without one."

Angie stopped to stare when the sphere reappeared in front of Harry and he spoke quietly with the floating head inside it. Then the head nodded and the sphere vanished.

"It all comes so easy for you," Angie whispered.

"I'm sorry?" asked Hermione, perplexed by the comment.

Angie looked at her. "The magic. You don't use prayers, like we do. The Goddess provides for us and answers our prayers, but sometimes the answer is no," Angie said.

"It didn't come easy for any of us, Ma'am. Harry and I spent seven years in school learning what we needed to know. And I had an easy school life compared to Harry's."

Angie leaned forward and smiled. "Just Angie, child. I don't care much for formalities. I'm just saying that your magic seems to happen so much easier than ours." She stopped and stared at Fred, who was conjuring a large BBQ grill, complete with smoking coals.

There was a loud popping sound and she jumped. There, standing in the mouth of the hanger, were two of the tallest people she'd ever seen.,

"Don't be alarmed, Angie. Madame Maxime and Hagrid wouldn't hurt a fly. Like you, they were trying to escape the Aurors. Harry found out about them and brought them here. Madame Maxime and Hagrid are building the school for the island. They probably arrived to let us know they were bringing the students here."

"Here? Why?"

Hermione smiled. "New arrivals to the island are always a cause for celebration. The more we can save, the better," she said, then she stopped, seeing Alicia approach. Alicia held a goblet that was smoking slightly.

"Excuse me, Hermione," she said, then she turned to Angie. "I couldn't help noticing you were wearing false teeth. Are they easily removed?"

Angie nodded, perplexed.

Alicia held out the goblet and sprinkled some dust in it from a pouch at her belt. She stirred the cup with a swish of her wand, then handed it to Angie.

"Remove your teeth before you drink that. I noticed a number of easily correctable problems, including your teeth. This should clear them all up."

"You can do that?" Angie asked incredulously.

Alicia nodded and Angie quickly removed her dentures. She gulped down the foul smelling potion, then sat, shuddering. Steam whistled from her

ears and her fingernails turned pale orange. Finally, she released a massive belch that caused many of the now awake children to laugh. When her vision cleared and the effects ended, she reached up in wonder, touching new teeth in a mouth that hadn't had real teeth in almost twenty years.

Alicia took the goblet and patted her shoulder. "Sit for a few more minutes. I'm giving similar potions to all the adults in your group. You might be a bit dizzy for five minutes or so, but it will pass."

Angie nodded and relaxed. It was still hard for her to believe, but she was finally coming to realize that the Goddess, in her wisdom, had brought them to a place of safety.

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### **Office of the Minister for Magic, London...**

"Minister, Maurice O'Connell is here asking to speak with you." said Percy's secretary. The woman stood in the doorway, blocking O'Connell from entering.

"Send him in," Percy said, importantly.

He straightened the papers on his desk and looked up expectantly, waiting for his chief of the Department of Magical Law Enforcement.

O'Connell entered and took a seat opposite Percy. "Thank you for seeing me on such short notice, Minister."

Percy nodded. "Nonsense. What can I do for you, O'Connell?"

"We have a request from the investigative branch of the ICW, Minister. It turns out that someone discovered a colony of muggle born and half bloods hiding in Patagonia, just outside a small city named Rio Gallegos. They're asking all member nations to begin checking to see if similar hiding places might exist."

Percy sniffed disdainfully. "I doubt we have such a place, O'Connell, but let's be diligent and investigate the matter. Did they catch many people?"

O'Connell frowned and checked his notes. "Unfortunately no, Minister. It seems that the bulk of them escaped via portkey. Tracing suggested they headed west over the pacific. The ICW is concerned that they may be finding sanctuary in Shangri-La."

Percy frowned. "I thought the valley had been sealed years ago."

O'Connell shrugged. "It's hard to say. Even when I was working the Hong Kong office there were persistent rumors of Chinese and Tibetan wizards escaping to the valley. They always had an open door policy and the protections on that place are formidable. Given the political climate of the muggle Chinese Government, it's no surprise that they're used to offering sanctuary to people."

"What's the opinion of the ICW about it?"

"I'm not really sure, sir. The entire valley has been sealed off and on for years. It's hard enough getting cooperation from the Chinese Ministry, let alone bring up something involving Tibet. I think the ICW is waiting until all of the Ministry departments are merged before mounting a serious expedition to break those wards."

Percy shuddered. If rumors were to be believed, the wards and spells protecting that ancient valley were many thousands of years older and stronger than the ones protecting Hogwarts.

"Alright, what do you need from me, O'Connell?" Percy asked.

"I'd like your permission to pull some people from the fugitive squad. My thought is that they're still working on finding the undesirables in our society, so it's still the same job."

Percy nodded. "Yes, that makes sense. Let me schedule a press conference for later today and we'll announce the new direction we're taking."

O'Connell hid his wince and nodded. "Of course, Minister," he replied, standing.

"I'll see you this afternoon, O'Connell, and bring the Auror you're putting in charge of this effort to the conference," Percy commanded.

"Yes, sir."

Percy turned back to papers he was reading. O'Connell left, realizing he had been dismissed. It rankled him that he was working for someone nearly one third his age.

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### **The Coven Compound, Norman's Cay, The Bahamas...**

Angie smiled at her much reduced Coven, people she had always considered family. They had landed on this island refuge and the inhabitants had welcomed them with open arms. Harry had been true to his word, too. In just two days they had turned the four building compound on the north end of the airstrip into a place for Angie and her people.

She stood by the edge of the water. The sun had settled below the horizon behind her. The sky was streaked with deep reds and yellows, quickly turning black. In her hands hovered a sacred flame, which she had summoned.

One by one each member of her flock came forward, even the little ones, to light a candle from her hovering flame. Once the candle was lit, they went back to their place in the circle.

"The pain of loss is hard to justify. It is hard to explain. Those who are left behind to pick up the pieces wonder why and there are no answers that satisfy," Angie said softly.

Ten children and six adults stood in a semi-circle around her, holding their candles and thinking of the people they had lost back in Drummond. Behind the coven members were several of the island inhabitants, people like Harry and Hermione, and Gabrielle Delacour, who wanted to help the children. Behind them stood Amos, Fred, George and their girlfriends. Angie had told them about the memorial service they were going to hold and invited them to come watch if they wanted.

"Our loved ones never truly leave us. The Goddess teaches that life is a great circle. There is no end, no beginning. There is only change and life spins out again. We mourn their passing and celebrate the times we shared. In their sharing, our lives were made richer."

Cindy Ferguson led little Felicity, the youngest child, forward. Angie smiled down at the little girl.

"Goddess bless you, child," Angie said softly.

Felicity's candle began to glow brightly.

"Let go of the candle, Felicity," Cindy instructed softly.

The little girl released the candle and it fell to the ground, extinguished. The light from it remained hovering in front of the girl for a moment, then it moved up to brush her forehead before rocketing skyward.

Angie looked up. "For Felicity's parents, Mathew and Samantha."

"*Goddess bless,*" intoned the adults.

Felicity watched the spark receding into the night sky until it was lost among the stars, then she smiled.

Cindy led the little girl back to the half circle and then brought another child forward with a lit candle held tightly in his hand.

"Amazing," Hermione said in a whisper. "Can you feel it?"

"It's like the air is crawling with magic," whispered Alicia. "If I didn't see it with my own eyes, I wouldn't have believed it."

"It's magic," Harry added, to the general amusement of everyone.

They watched respectfully as each member of the coven had at least one person to memorialize, some had their entire families. Hermione slipped her hand into Harry's. She sniffled a little as she realized the extent of the disaster that had been visited upon the people before her.

It took a while for Harry to notice, but as more and more candles were extinguished, he noted that there was a faint aura of light around Angie. When all of the candles had been used, the coven broke up, except for Cindy and Angie. Cindy approached Harry and his friends.

"Angie would like you all to join her at the water's edge," she said softly, then she turned and left them.

Harry took Hermione by the hand and led their small group of wizards down to the glowing muggle.

Angie smiled at their approach and she gestured for them to come closer.

"A lot has happened in the last few days. Our lives have been ripped asunder and in the midsts of chaos we found sanctuary and friends," she said. "Please, join hands with me?"

One by one hands were grasped until they stood in a circle with Angie.

"We stand at the transition point, the edge where land ends and water begins. Life is full of such transitions. Boys become men, who become fathers, girls become women, who become mothers. Friends become lovers and so on. I stand here by the grace of the Goddess, and I hold hands with new friends who were willing to help strangers. It is another transition point and I ask the Goddess to bestow her blessing on these souls that helped her children in their time of need."

The light that surrounded Angie crawled up Harry's arm and then flowed down to Hermione's hand. On the other side, Alicia gasped, feeling the powerful magic flow through her. In only a few seconds everyone was glowing with the strange aura.

"The Goddess's blessing, my friends. You have a noble cause and she approves," Angie added.

The glow faded and everyone took a deep breath they hadn't realized they'd been holding.

"Merlin! I've never felt anything like that!" exclaimed George.

Fred, for once in his life, was uncharacteristically quiet. All he could do was nod.

"Thank you, Angie," Harry said quietly. He wrapped an arm around Hermione and she was hugging him tightly. The experience had moved her greatly. Her eyes were glistening and she was as quiet as Fred.

The group slowly broke up, each apparating back to their homes or, in the case of Harry and Hermione, walking back.

"You're awful quiet," Harry commented.

She tightened her grip on him and remained silent a few moments more. "I've never felt anything like that before. It was like the world touched me and for a moment I was the world."

He nodded absently.

"You felt something different, didn't you?" she asked.

"Angie's magic reacts differently based on gender and personality. I've spoken with her about this once already. You felt nature's desire to nurture. I have no doubt in my mind that her blessing stirred your maternal instincts.

"For me, I felt a great desire to protect. You felt the world, I felt the power. It's a seductive thing, power. The power to protect can be easily turned into the power to attack. There is always a temptation to use it. I deal with it daily. I'm glad you felt what you did, but I could have forgone the experience."

"You're not, you know," she said.

"Eh?"

"You're not going to attack anyone. As much fighting as you've done, you've never once started a fight. You've never once thrown the first punch, or cast the first spell. You've always been a defensive fighter, Harry. You're not the monster you seem to think you are or will become."

He sighed heavily. "It's not easy. Had I been there, I could have easily killed those aurors and saved Felicity's parents."

"Yes, but you weren't there to save them. And if I gave you the names of the aurors right now, would you run off to kill them?" she asked archly.

"No!"

She hugged his arm tightly to her. "See what I mean? You'll fight to defend yourself and others, but you won't deliberately start a fight. I'm going to keep telling you this until you believe it."

"I know," he replied with a hint of a smile.

"You were right about the maternal instincts being stirred," she said, breaking the silence that had fallen between them.

"Oh?"

"Yes. I don't want to start a family tonight, but I do think I should quiz you when we get home and make sure you haven't forgotten what to do."

He grinned and pulled her tightly to him. "Did I ever tell you how much I like your quizzes?"

She giggled in his arms and before she could reply, they vanished, apparating the last fifty yards to their house.

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

Angie sat on the deck watching Harry tend a large fire he had created. The bonfire was at the center of an extremely complex diagram that he and Dobby had spent hours drawing in the sand. Hermione walked up to stand next to her chair and she handed Angie a cup of tea. Even though they were in the tropics, it was now nearly November and the temperature at night tended to get a bit chilly.

The Coven was settling in and adapting well enough, but for the nights. The children seemed to take the changes more easily than the adults, who were still struggling a bit. The nights, however, were another matter. The nightmares were a problem, especially among the children.

Gabrielle Delacour was staying at the compound, helping the children with their nightmares. She had been studying to become a healer and had a lot of interest in the mind healing arts. She spent her days working with Angie and the others to help the children, and then her nights with the four youngest children who had lost their parents.

Harry helped a few days after the coven moved into the compound. He turned up one day at their compound with a litter of four puppies that he'd had Amos pick up in Nassau.

The puppies seemed to instinctively know who needed company each night and they often moved from bed to bed, keeping away the nightmares. It wasn't a perfect solution, but it helped.

The other large change came about as a direct result of Angie coming to the island. The Weasley twins got married. In an unusual ceremony, Angie wed Fred and George to Angelina and Alicia. It wasn't two couples, it was two husbands and two wives. Surprisingly, no one commented on the unusual arrangement.

Hermione sat on the lounge next to Angie and watched Harry.

You know, in Montana, we would have had our first snowfall by now," Angie said. "If you didn't have a four wheel drive vehicle, you'd be snowed in and stuck until the spring."

Hermione grinned. "Then I'm glad we're not in Montana. I don't mind the snow once in a while, but winters always seem so dreary."

Angie nodded knowingly, then gestured with her cup towards Harry. "Has he told you what he's up to?"

Hermione shook her head. "No, not in the least. All I know is that he asked me to break tradition by being with him tonight for this spell he wants to cast. And that he wanted you present. He seemed to think that it would be good for both of us to be here."

"He hasn't said much to me about it," Angie replied.

"Does it bother you? I mean, we asked you to officiate for us, but we're not part of your coven." Hermione watched the old woman closely.

Angie smiled. "No. Actually, I think I'll do a better job than that old pirate you were going to use. Besides, we each, in our own way, believe in the same thing. Your young man loves you and that's something universal. Wizard, witch or spiritualist, we all understand that love is a mighty force.

"I still envy you wizards a bit. We can call on the Goddess to help us or to help others, but common things, like lighting up a room, isn't something we'd bother her about. That makes your abilities that much more personal than ours."

Hermione smiled. "Don't judge us all by what you see Harry do. He said something to me the same day you arrived on the Cay that describes him perfectly. He said I needed to stop using magic like a tool and start using it like an extension of myself, like my hands. That's what he does, and that makes him different from all of us."

Harry coughed and both women turned to face him. "If you ladies are done discussing my behavior, we can begin."

Hermione blushed and stood from her lounge. She turned quickly and took the cup of tea from Angie's hands, then she helped steady the woman as she stood.

"Harry, I'm sorr..."

Harry shook his head. "No apology is necessary. I know I'm different. I don't like it, but I accept it."

Hermione walked over to him and gave him a quick hug. He grinned at her, then his expression turned serious.

"It's Halloween. In years past this meant some sort of traumatic event for me. After Voldemort was killed, I usually got drunk. However, Angie can attest to the fact that tonight is the one night in the year when the barrier between this world and the next is at it's thinnest.

He turned to the old woman. "Angie, you arrived here, and in doing so, you taught us an important lesson about how interconnected we are, and how magic is magic, no matter who, or what, you are. Our lives have changed with your arrival. I think for the better. I asked you here because I thought this might give you some needed closure, and as a way of thanking you for what you've done for us."

The two women exchanged curious looks.

Harry led them out to a glowing box next to his circle. "No matter what happens, do not try to enter the circle. Dobby has strict orders to prevent you from doing that. I won't say he'll hurt you, but a house elf stunner comes with a wicked headache, and he has permission to stun tonight, if it becomes necessary."

"Harry what are you talking about?" Hermione asked, alarmed by his words.

He walked over to her and took her in his arms. "Shh. This is something you both need to see. Watch the box."

She nodded uncertainly and Harry returned to the circle. Dobby appeared, standing just outside of the lines in the sand. He nodded to Dobby who raised his hands. A curtain of sand rose up, blocking Hermione's view of Harry in the circle. All she could see was a bright glow from the now lit bonfire over the curtain of sand.

Hermione nibbled on her lip worriedly, but the sight of Dobby watching her stopped her impulse to walk around the curtain. She was certain that Dobby would not allow Harry to be seriously hurt.

Suddenly the box drawn in the sand exploded upwards into a solid cube of light. Both Hermione and Angie took a step backwards in surprise.

A figure formed in the softly glowing cube, then more formed until it looked like a whole host of people waiting and watching. A figure stepped closer to the front of the cube where the women stood and Angie gasped.

"Vinny? Is that you?"

The man smiled. He was ruggedly handsome, with very large hands, and looked to be about twenty five years old. "Angela, my angel. I'm sorry I had to leave you, but I'm waiting for you. When your tasks are done, you'll come home to me. We've done good, old girl, and the Goddess is well pleased."

Angie clutched Hermione's arm painfully and choked back a sob. Vinny smiled softly. "Do not weep, beloved. Rejoice in the time we had and what we'll have again."



"I miss you," she gasped out painfully.

"I know. I miss you, too. But I'm not alone, just as you're not alone. You have a new family, including many little children who need the love you can give them. Stay true to the Goddess and trust in her path. She is pleased with you."

Angie nodded and for a moment Hermione was afraid the frail old woman would collapse on the beach.

Vinny moved away from the front of the cube and two other people took his place. Behind them were three very familiar faces.

Hermione gasped. "Mr. Potter? Mrs. Potter? Sirius? Remus? Tonks?" She shook her head trying to deny what her eyes beheld.

Lily Potter nodded and smiled gently at Hermione. "We had to come, if only for a moment. We wanted to meet the woman who held our boy's heart in her hands."

"We wanted to meet the girl who would marry our son," added James. "You are as pretty as Sirius and Remus said. And as smart as his mum, too."

Sirius, Remus and Tonks grinned at her from behind the Potters. Just seeing them again filled her with a sense of peace and joy.

Hermione blushed furiously. "Do you want me to go get..."

Lily shook her head and Hermione trailed off, confused.

"You cannot and he cannot. The ritual he performs prevents him from attending the window. His sacrifice, powers the spell."

Hermione blinked and her expression darkened. "Sacrifice? What sacrifice?"

"He holds the window open. He's doing it for you, Hermione. That's the measure of his love for you. We only wanted to stop by briefly to tell you how proud we are of him, and you. You'll bring much honor to the name of Potter. It was an old and respected family, but you two will bring it renown unlike any it's had before," said James proudly.

"Revel in your love and life Hermione," added Lily. "You've given our son the one thing he's wanted all his life; Someone to love him above all others. I wish we could stay longer, but there are still two others who need to speak to you tonight. They are the reason he cast this spell to weaken the barrier enough for us to speak. Be happy in your life. In time, we will meet again. Give him our love."

James and Lily backed away and two more figures swam into view. Hermione took one look and sunk to her knees in the sand. "Ron... Ginny..." she whispered. Tears fell from her eyes like rain.

The two smiled gently down at her and she thought that Ginny's smile seemed a little wistful.

"I'm glad you two finally woke up to the reality of what you have. I'd hate to see you have to spend another eon searching for each other again," Ginny said softly.

Hermione shook her head, trying to make sense of her words. "What do you mean?" she asked in confusion.

"Part of our job on earth is to find our soul mate, Hermione," Ron said with a grin. "You and I would have been happy and good together, but only soul mates can create new souls. Those who never find their soul mates are reborn to try again. You've found yours, in Harry.

"Had things happened in a different way, you and I would have been happy. But once you passed away, you would have been reborn to begin your search again. Now, you don't have to," he said gently.

"And I can't tell you how much I envy you that," added Ginny softly. "But we've both been told we're close to finding our mates."

Tears started to roll down her cheeks again. "We're both so very sorry how things turned out."

Ginny shook her head and smiled radiantly. "Don't be. My death was the final piece needed to activate his powers. It was foreordained. Soon, I'll be reborn to begin my search again. I've been told what I need to know to find my mate this time. It's my reward for playing a role in fate's plan."

Ron put his hand on Ginny's shoulder. "It was wonderful while it lasted, Hermione. I'm sorry I couldn't be there for you, but it also wasn't meant to be. You and Harry were meant for each other and we will celebrate your union, even while you celebrate your marriage. The joining of two soul mates is cause for joy on this side every time it happens."

"Hermione, things will get worse in Britain. We're sorry about Percy, but he is condemning himself. Your path ahead will be twisted one and will have events and people that you would never believed if we told you. I will tell you this. When the time comes, listen carefully with your heart and your head," Ginny told her earnestly. "Someone from our past will ask you for something. Listen carefully and follow your heart."

"We love you both, Hermione. Make sure he knows," Ron said, his eyes shining. Then he stepped back from the edge of the cube.

Ginny waited a moment longer. "Love him for me?" she asked.

Hermione nodded. "With all my heart."

Ginny smiled again. "See you soon, Mum." she whispered and stepped backwards.

Hermione blinked in surprise and wondered how that could be. *If Harry and I only create newsouls, then how could Ginny be calling me mum,*

she wondered. Then it dawned on her. *As an in-law!* She stifled a giggle. Ginny would ultimately get her wish and be married into the Potter family.

More figures approached the edge of the cube, but Hermione didn't recognize any of them. After a few minutes, the cube wavered and sunk back into the sands.

She stood slowly, then turned when the curtain of sand fell, exposing Harry. She had forgotten about him in the emotions of the moment. He lay on the ground and Dobby was hurriedly slathering him with some kind of unguent.

"Harry!" she shouted in alarm as she rushed to his side.

"Stop, Miss Hermy!" Dobby said imperiously. "Harry Potter sir knew this would happen and he taught Dobby what to do. Let me finish then you can yell at him."

She blinked and smiled slowly. Dobby was becoming more and more assertive, but only within specific areas. He took his membership in the Potter family very seriously and firmly believed it was his job to protect both Harry and Hermione, even from each other, on occasion.

Angie stepped over to stand next to Hermione. She gasped, seeing the blackened skin on Harry's hands and arms. Dobby smoothed a clear translucent cream over the burns, causing the skin to lighten as the burns faded. His hands and arms were badly burned. His eyes were closed and Hermione could tell he was holding back a scream behind his tightly clenched jaw.

"It's a miracle," she murmured in awe.

"It's burn cream for dragon fire induced burns. It's the strongest burn cream made. Although I'm sure right about now he's thinking it's a miracle also," Hermione whispered.

He opened his eyes to look up at her and he tried to smile.

She knelt gently by his side, examining his healing hands and arms. "Why, Harry? Why would you do this? What possible purpose could this pain serve?" she asked, not bothering to hide the tears sliding down her cheeks.

"Did you see them? Ron and Ginny?" he asked weakly.

She nodded and he sighed softly. "Good. I was so hoping you would. The spell only promised that the ones you most needed to see would come to the window. It was worth the pain then." His voice was weak and he was obviously exhausted.

Dobby stepped back and Harry closed his eyes in relief. "I won't do that again. That wasn't easy."

"But why did you do it in the first place? Why did you feel it was necessary?" she asked again. She could feel his pain resonating within her and at the same time a strange sense of warmth and connection, which she couldn't explain.

He opened his eyes and reached out with one hand. She pulled back slightly, afraid his touch would hurt him.

"We needed to... what did you call it? Put our ghosts to rest?"

She sighed and shook her head. "I love you, Harry Potter, but don't you dare do something so stupid again! If I had known..."

He grinned at her and reached for her left hand. She looked down, surprised to see his hand was healed and most of the cream was quickly evaporating.

"I didn't want you to know until it was done. If I told you what would happen before hand, you would have insisted I not go through with the ritual. This way, all you need do is forgive me." he whispered tiredly.

She nodded. "I saw your parents," she blurted quickly. "And Sirius, Remus and Tonks. They appeared before Ron and Ginny."

Harry's eyes widened. "I didn't expect that," he murmured.

"They're so very proud of you, and so am I," she whispered.

He squeezed her hand and his eyes closed.

"Miss Hermy, Harry Potter sir is very tired from his magics. Dobby will puts him to bed. Don't you worry. Harry Potter sir is in no pain anymore. He'll be fine for tomorrow," the elf told her quietly.

Dobby levitated a now sleeping Harry and walked him carefully into the house. Hermione watched for a moment, still struck by the events of the evening.

Angie walked over to her. "Come, child. Let's go up on the deck, where we can be more comfortable."

She nodded numbly and followed the old woman back to the house. They sat for a while in silence, listening to the gentle waves washing against the shore. In time, Angie broke the silence.

"Strong men are very hard to love, my dear. My Vinny was a tough old man. He served three tours in Vietnam and he almost never spoke about his time there while he was awake. I remember on our honeymoon he was fooling around, trying to impress me. Well, you know how they get."

Hermione nodded knowingly. Even Harry did that once in a while. She smiled to herself. It was rather cute, although she'd never tell Harry that.

"I remember it well," Angie continued. "We were going skiing. He was fooling around and eventually fell. We went home a week later and he immediately check himself into the base hospital. It was only then that I discovered he had spent the week hiding the pain of a fractured leg. He hid it because he wanted me to enjoy our honeymoon."

She smiled in remembrance of better times so long ago. "It was so sweet of him to do that. I nearly killed him, of course, once I found out. Then I threatened to break his other leg," she paused and looked at Hermione.

"Strong men, like your Harry, think nothing of doing whatever it takes to make someone they love happy. He did that ritual because he loves you, and that's all the reason he needed."

"Stubborn fool," Hermione muttered.

Angie cackled. "That he is, and you wouldn't have it any other way. I know my Vinny was stubborn and hard headed. But he was most stubborn about his love for me. Your young man is the same way. I can see it when he looks at you."

"You're right," Hermione said. "I wouldn't change it for anything."

Angie stood. "I'll see you tomorrow, at noon. In the meantime, I suggest you go get some sleep. You've got a big day tomorrow."

"Do you want me to apparate you home?" Hermione asked.

Angie tisked at her. "Thank you, child, but the walk will do me good. We're not that far away, after all." She made her way down the stairs to the beach.

Hermione sat up and watched her carefully. She had grown fond of the strange woman who could invoke a type of magic she didn't understand. She had talked with Angie many times about magic and about her beliefs. But there were parts that she had trouble accepting. Harry seemed more accepting of some of the philosophy offered by the old woman. Hermione believed he was more accepting because of his greater experience with other types of magic.

Once Angie passed out of sight, Hermione stood and got ready to apparate to her parents house for the night. It would be their first night apart in over a month, but that didn't bother her. Tomorrow they would marry and spend the rest of their lives together.

"Mrs. Hermione Potter," she said softly, smiling. It was meant to be.

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### **Office of the Minister, Ministry of Magic, the Bahamas...**

Santina Argent scowled at the hooded man who sat behind her desk, in her chair. It was bad enough that the population of the Bahamas was so small that they could barely afford this office, and now this wizard had usurped it!

"Who are you and what do you want?" she demanded.

"I understand the ICW has been putting pressure on you to find certain people," the stranger said.

Argent gulped and nodded. "Yes, but we're shorthanded. We only had a small auror force to begin with and it got smaller when six of our best aurors went missing. Now, who are you?"

"We are not unaware of your difficulties, Minister. The ICW is taking steps to rectify that particular problem. As for myself, I'm a tracker. I am the person the ICW turns to when they want to find someone."

Argent's eyes widened. "So you're from the ICW?"

The man nodded, his face hooded and indistinct. "Regrettably, I am not allowed to reveal my identity. But you may be assured that we will be taking steps to aid you, especially now that I've identified your country as one of several from which fugitives have been vanishing."

The man stood and walked over to look out a window. Unlike so many other Ministry windows, this one was real, overlooking the harbor at Freeport. He was a small man, barely five feet tall, but his presence was an imposing one.

"Are you suggesting we're helping these people?" asked Argent in outrage.

The man turned and stared at her for a minute in silence. Finally, she dropped her gaze to the floor, thoroughly cowed.

"Actually, Minister, I know you're not actively helping these people. Your nation is far too small and too interconnected by family for you to hide such a secret for long. No, I came here from Patagonia, where I was tracking a number of fugitives. Many fled west, towards Asia. A small group, however, went north, to Puerto Rico, where I lost all trace of them, except for a rumor that they came here."

"Then you don't think they're staying somewhere near here? Or even in the Bahamas?" Argent asked hopefully. She sincerely wanted this to be someone else's problem.

The cloaked man shook his head. "No, I think they're hiding here somewhere. There are hundreds of islands and only thirty five hundred wizards in all of the Bahamas. I will contact my superiors and have them send a tagging team here. We'll tag everyone and monitor their movements."

Argent nodded unhappily. If the populace found out about this, they'd surely vote her out of office. *On the other hand, the ICW had been rumored to be behind several high level assassinations. Perhaps being unemployed is better than being dead,* she mused.

"We will cooperate with you in what ever way you need, sir," she said.

The hooded man nodded. "Excellent. Now, if you will excuse me Minister, I must contact my superiors to report my findings and recommendations."

Argent breathed a sigh of relief and sank into her chair. She knew the ICW was gaining control over everything and there was nothing she or her nation could do to stop that. She'd cooperate. It was the only real option available to her.

Just outside the building, the tracker tightened his cloak and glanced around. He sniffed the air for a moment. He could sense the danger, but couldn't tell where it was coming from. Suddenly a hand gripped his arm and the world blurred and rotated wildly.

He fought against the nauseating vertigo, and as soon as he had solid footing, he bounced away from his assailant, pulling a short blade and a wand. He whirled to face his attacker.

It was a young man, less than twenty five years old with striking green eyes.

"What are you?" asked the young man in a curious tone.

"Who are you?" demanded the tracker.

"Harry Potter, at your service," Harry replied with a mocking bow. "You know, I'm really sort of put out with you. I'm supposed to be on my honeymoon, but I had to interrupt it when I heard you were sniffing around the Minister's office in Freeport. I prefer her kept in the dark and ignorant, like a good pure blood should be."

"The ICW has been interested in talking to you for quite a while, Potter. Come along peacefully and I won't hurt you too much," said the tracker.

Harry smirked at the man. "Oh, do tell," he said with a sneer.

"Have it your way... *Diffindo!*" snarled the tracker, pointing his wand at Harry.

Harry yawned. The spell shot out from wand and bent back on itself. The tracker screamed as his hand was cut off cleanly at the wrist.

Harry shook his head sadly. "You know, I simply couldn't allow you to contact your superiors to report what you know. In fact, we've been intercepting your owls since Patagonia," he said. "Now, I'm afraid I can't let you reappear anywhere."

The tracker clutched his arm with his good hand, having dropped his knife. "Where are we?"

Harry looked around at the desolate landscape. There wasn't a single plant to be seen anywhere and a stiff, cold breeze swept off the shore.

"It is rather uninviting, isn't it? I thought it was rather appropriate for your sort. We're in the Falkland Islands, specifically on an island called Carcass, for obvious reasons. I'm going to leave you here. I had planned on taking your magic and dropping you someplace safer and nicer, but you're not quite human, are you?"

The tracker looked at him with hateful eyes. "I'm not telling you anything," he growled out.

Harry chuckled. "You don't have to. Your core isn't right, that means you have non-human blood in your veins, although you hide it well. It's probably why you were so good at your job... until you irritated me."

He looked around. "No one comes here. No one. The nearest inhabited island is that way," he said, pointing. "Swimming with one hand might be difficult, but I suppose you could give it a try. Of course, the water is quite cold, so I doubt you'd make it far. I couldn't drain your core like I did with the others, so I've bound your magic and placed a compulsion of silence on you. Even if by some stroke of luck, you get off the island, you'll be less than a squib and unable to tell anyone how or where it happened."

"Wait!" gasped the tracker. "You can't leave me here. I'll die!"

Harry blinked and giggled. "That thought did occur to me."

He smiled at the tracker, though there was something slightly off in his green eyes. "You see, I'm newly married, and my wife is beautiful, and probably naked and waiting for me at this point." He raised both hands, held them evenly in front of himself and wiggled his right hand. "On one hand, I have Hermione. Beautiful, naked, Hermione." He raised his hand over his head. "On the other hand, I have your life." His left hand sunk down as far as he could reach. "I'm sure you understand. You're life doesn't compare, really."

The tracker gaped in astonishment. Was Potter insane? "But..."

"Don't beg," Harry said sadly. "It's unseemly. Think of this as justice for all the people you've dragged back into the hell you call the ICW. But at least your death will be clean. It gets cold here, especially at night. You'll freeze to death in no time!

"Now, if you'll excuse me, I need to get back to my naked wife!" With one last, eerie giggle, Harry vanished.

The tracker fell to his knees, threw back his head and screamed his fear and despair to an uncaring sky.

## Aboard the Lily, North East of Puerto Rico...

Hermione lay on the deck of the Lily. They were resting in a secluded anchorage and she had just flipped over to even the tan on her back. They had spent a wonderful week in San Juan for their honeymoon and were planning on taking another week to make their way back home aboard the Lily.

It had been a perfect time for her. Angie's words about Harry doing everything possible to make this trip the best he possible could rang true. She'd even managed to get Harry to take limbo lessons with her at their hotel. He couldn't wait to teach it to Fred and George.

She sighed happily. At first she'd been afraid of leaving the Cay, even for a honeymoon. But Harry had come up with a way of allowing them to move about normally, even among wizards, without being recognized. He had cast a temporary ward on their wedding bands, which cause most people to not pay attention to them. It was something he had learned in the Book of Wards and she was greatly impressed by it.

For a week they had strolled the busy boulevards of San Juan and walked openly in the wizard's quarter, shopping, dining and just being in love. For a week, they avoided talk of the island. Instead, they went to inspect the old Spanish fort, El Morro, and they shopped at Gems of the World and ate at a restaurant where the waiters sang to them.

She had even given in to one of Harry's wishes and they'd attended a local boat show. The Lily attracted a lot of attention when they pulled into the marina holding the show. The tri-hulled sailboat smoothly eased into a slip and was surrounded by people wanting to know more about the boat.

Hermione thought their interest was in the Lily because she was homemade, and at nearly seventy feet long, a beautiful trimaran. Harry maintained it was her string bikini which brought the crowd to the Lily. In either case, they'd had a lot of fun looking at the boats and Harry purchased several books of plans for other boats with a gleam in his eye that said 'someday'.

The Lily rocked gently and she grinned. He was back from wherever he had gone. This morning an emergency orb call from the Amos arrived saying he was needed right away. Hermione was sure Amos probably needed CPR after that call. She'd been rather miffed at being interrupted and did not bother to dress or hide during the call.

A pair of strong hands started to massage her shoulders. She could smell the coca butter scented tanning oil and she nestled down a little further into the plush towel and purred under his hands. "I'm glad you're back," she said huskily. "It was getting lonely."

"I'm glad to be back to. I guess it was too much to hope for us to be left alone. But I think we'll be clear until we get home," he replied.

"Was it bad?"

He stopped massaging for a moment and shrugged. "No, just different. He wasn't a normal wizard. I couldn't drain him, so I marooned him and bound his magic."

Hermione propped herself on her elbows. She looked out over the bay they were anchored in. "He got too close, didn't he?"

"He did."

"And this person will probably die where you left him?" When he didn't reply, she turned to face him. "Harry?"

He nodded, not looking at her. He even ignored the fact that she was topless at the moment.

She lay on her back and held out her arms to him. She knew how much these episodes disturbed him. He was a warrior and he hated it. He hated what he'd become. She pulled him down into her embrace, crooning to him softly. He lay in her arms, partly atop her and she ran her fingers through his hair lovingly.

His grip tightened around her and they lay, each soaking up comfort from the other.

For now, Norman's Cay was safe and still a secret.

**FINIS**

(For now)

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