

Wizards Fall: The Truth is Out There

Standard Disclaimer:

Bob walked out onto the stage and faced the audience. He was nervous, he had an important announcement to make and he never was very good at speaking in public.

"Ladies and gentlemen, my lovely wife Alyx has insisted that she be allowed arrange for this episode's disclaimer. Frankly that worries me. After all, we've had Alan Rickman, and Rupert Grint, we've had famous guest disclaimers like Stephen Hawkins and Issac Asimov. And others like Musings of Apathy, Homer and Bart Simpson.

"Who else could we possibly get to tell you that we don't own the rights to Harry Potter and his wonderful world. If you don't know that JK Rowling owns it all by now, we're truly in trouble!"

Bob paused and took a deep breath. "Anyway, here's Alyx and her guest disclaimer!"

He motioned to one side of the stage, then he ran to the front of the stage and clambered down. Quickly he picked a seat and sat down right next to Albus Dumbledore.

"Lemon Drop?" offered Albus.

"Thanks, maybe you're not such an old disgusting pervert after all," muttered Bob, helping himself to a lemon drop.

A moment later Alyx took the free seat next to him and he looked at her in shock. "What are you doing here?"

"Oh our guest can handle himself. He's quite capable. We should be honored to have such a distinguished disclaimer for this episode," she said excitedly.

The stage lights dropped and a single spot light came on, outlining one edge of the stage. Somewhere, a drummer began an intense pounding on a kettle drum.

A Llama, dressed in an orange robe walked out onto the stage. Surprisingly it walked on it's hind legs. Tucked firmly under one free leg was a small doll.

Bob stared at the beast in astonishment, then turned to look at Alyx. "What?" he stammered.

"It's the Dolly Llama," Alyx said reverently.

Bob groaned and slid further down in his seat. This was embarrassing.

Dumbledore leaned towards Bob. "I didn't think he was that tall," he murmured.

Alyx's brow crinkled. "He's hairier than I thought also."

Bob placed a bag over his head to hide. He'd never live this down.

Wizards Fall – The Truth is out there.

Norman's Cay, The Bahamas (Late 2006, Seven years after Voldemort)...

It was the banging that woke him up. It seemed unending, and unbelievably, it was louder than the storm outside.

"I'm coming," he grumbled.

He climbed over two bodies to get out the bed, then threw on a robe and shuffled out of the bedroom. With a wave of a hand, he ignited the candles in the house, giving him light. He had learned wandless magic from Harry and even if he was only capable of doing simple things, it still impressed him.

He absently noted that it was raining heavily outside and he grimaced. He really needed to talk to Harry about adjusting the weather ward around the island.

The knocking had started up again and he opened the door grumpily. "Hermione? Come in! Come in!" he blurted in surprise.

She stepped inside and quickly cast a drying charm on herself. Fred struggled against the gale force wind to close the door. Papers in the house blew around in the mini wind storm.

"I'm sorry for waking you, Fred, but we need Alicia."

"What's wrong?"

"Angie woke us up a little while ago. Felicity, one of her kids, is missing. Harry's out looking for her now. I think we're going to need Alicia when he brings her in. I left Angie at our place to come here."

Fred's eyes widened. "Harry's out there in this?" he asked, gesturing towards the window and the wild storm sweeping the island.

The storm had been threatening all day and had finally hit the island with its full fury in the middle of the night. The twins had scoffed at Harry when he offered to weather ward their home. Now Fred was wondering if that had been a good idea. Hermione had apparated to their door and she'd been soaked to the bone when she entered their home. Her hair looked more wild than ever before.

Hermione nodded worriedly. She had tried to talk Harry out of it, but he wouldn't listen. All he knew was that out there in the dark, a small child was all alone.

Fred glanced at the clock, then shook his head. It was barely two in the morning. And to think Angie had walked from her compound to Harry's place!

Several months after their marriage, Harry had been forced to apply an enlarging charm on the island, quadrupling it's size. At the same time, he drained the lagoon, adding even more dry land to the island. Angie's place used to be several hundred yards south of Harry and Hermione's house. Now it was nearly two miles away and Harry was deep into plans to enlarge the island again.

"I'll wake everyone up," Fred said as he turned to rush back into the bedroom.

Hermione nodded and moved to stand in front of the large bay window. Outside, a cold winter rain pelted down and a stiff breeze made it feel even colder than it was.

"Oy, George, got to get up! Harry needs us," Fred said softly.

George's head popped out from under the blankets. Up until that moment he had been resting his head quite comfortably on Angelina breast. Alicia opened her eyes and stretched.

"Harry needs us?" George said groggily.

"Is something wrong?" asked Alicia.

"Is breakfast ready?" asked Angelina. Angelina was pregnant and just starting to show. She had finished with her morning sickness and was starting the point where she ate more than usual. Being that the Weasley twins were identical, even with magic they weren't able to determine which one fathered the child. Not that it mattered to the four of them in the least.

Fred shook his head in exasperation. "Yes, yes and no."

Alicia blinked and glanced out the window. "What's going on? Do you know what it's doing out there? And why does Harry want you two?"

"Hermione is here, asking for you, Alicia. Harry's out in the storm at the moment. Angie walked to their house in this weather to let them know one of the children had gone missing. Hermione thinks you'll be needed when she's found. As for Harry, I'm not letting him search this island alone in this weather," Fred replied firmly. Then he turned and started to get dressed.

"Good enough for me," George replied. He rolled from the bed and hurriedly put on a pair of blue jeans.

Angelina sat up and swung her legs off of the over-sized bed they all slept in. "I'll go to the infirmary and start up a couple of cauldrons."

Alicia nodded. She was busy cataloging in her mind what she could possibly need. She had become the island's permanent healer while Angelina created all the potions she needed. "Fred, when you're dressed, tell Hermione to get Angie and bring her to the infirmary. I want to make sure she's alright after being out in this storm."

"Yes, dear," Fred said with a nod. He finished tying his laces, then left the room.

Harry, somewhere on Norman's Cay...

Harry staggered against the buffeting wind and cursed under his breath. He had tried to hold a weather ward on himself, but the ward had never been designed for use on a moving object. A shield would work for a few seconds, then collapse, as it's ability to absorb energy vanished. A single raindrop was one thing, but getting hit with thousands every second, driven by fifty mile per hour winds, simply overwhelmed the shield. As a result, he was soaked to the bone, cold and having difficulty seeing with the rain driving into his face.

He had started with a locator spell at the Coven compound and breathed a sigh of relief when it pointed east, rather than west. West would have meant she had gone down to the beach. There would have been no chance of survival for anyone entering the surf tonight. It was only a tropical

depression, and one late in the year, but the fifty mile per hour winds were whipping up enormous waves on the beach.

He was glad the Lily was riding anchor out beyond the breakwater and his dive boat was safely on its trailer, parked near the villa. He had put the boats in their winter storage locations two weeks earlier. The only thing still tied up at the dock was his small skiff, which he had hoped to use as a fishing platform during the winter months.

He blinked and tried to see the locator. Without knowing her destination, all he could do is follow the locator and hope he stumbled across her in the dark. If he knew where she was, it would have been a simple matter of apparating to her. The direction the locator had him going in gave him a clue, but he couldn't be sure enough to risk apparating.

Lightening flashed, blinding him for a moment and he staggered through the dense undergrowth. A gust of wind suddenly pushed him from behind and he stumbled out onto the old airstrip. He slipped and fell on one knee, tearing his jeans on the rough coral airstrip. The razor sharp rock easily sliced through his jeans and skin. Cursing, he stood and tried to blink his eyes clear. A palm frond whipped by him, missing his head by a few inches, and he realized that the storm was whipping up lethal projectiles.

He cast the locator again, and it showed her path cutting across the airstrip towards the old bus. No one had bothered to remove the ancient vehicle from where it had landed. To some, it was a silent monument to the various ways people were coming to the Cay. To others, it represented all those who never made it to safety. It wasn't unusual to find that someone had placed fresh flowers at the bus. It had become a symbol for the people of Norman's Cay.

He pushed forward against a straining wind, one arm thrown up to cover his face and block some of the rain from his eyes. Across the strip, he stumbled into the brush again and nearly fell. He stepped wrong and his ankle twisted violently in a small pothole.

Gritting his teeth against the pain, he limped forward, ignoring his wrenched ankle. Thanks to the space enlarging charms he had cast, the old bus, which was once only a hundred yards from the airstrip, was now more than a mile away. He was wet, cold and miserable and wishing he had never cast those enlargement charms on the island.

"Felicity!" he shouted.

The wind grabbed his words and tore them to shreds with its unyielding and unending howl. *She's never going to hear me unless I'm standing on top of her*, he thought sourly. Stubbornly, he pressed on.

Norman's Cay Infirmary...

Gabrielle looked up from her book when Alicia and Angelina popped in. Now that Alicia had received her Healer's certificate from Mother Marie, Alicia had taken to training Gabrielle, who had been studying to become a healer. As a trainee, she pulled late night duty at the infirmary, which usually meant sitting around doing little more than studying or sleeping.

Angelina rounded out the infirmary staff as the potions brewer.

The infirmary was an old aircraft hangar. It had first seen use as an infirmary when Angie and her coven arrived, and had been in use as such ever since.

A second floor had been installed as a potions lab and a small kitchen had been added to the building. The ground floor held one room with two beds for critical cases. The rest was an open room ward and small office for the on-call healer. It was fortunate that when they cleaned and fixed up the building, they'd had Harry cast impervious charms on its few windows. Regular windows would have broken by now because of the storm.

"Alicia? Is something wrong?" Gabrielle asked, looking up from her text book in alarm. Only an emergency would bring her here this late at night.

"Gabrielle, make sure all the outside lights are lit, will you? Then set up a couple beds," Alicia said as she removed her cloak. She frowned. The metal exterior of the building transmitted the sound of the howling wind better than the brick and stucco that made up her home and what she heard was frightening. She gnawed on her lower lip worriedly and considered a small child being out in that. That her husbands and Harry were out there didn't add any comfort to the thought.

She mentally berated herself for not allowing Harry to weather ward the building. She hadn't allowed it because she had noticed that that ward interfered with some healing charms. Now, with the building vibrating in the storm, she wondered if that had been a smart idea.

Gabrielle nodded and ran to a panel that controlled a bank of enchanted exterior flood lights. Duncan had insisted on installing them in case they had more cases than the small fourteen bed infirmary could handle. The idea was to light up the exterior so people could work outside in the dark.

The lights pierced through the darkness, pooling around the building and its small section of airstrip. It was a clear sign to anyone outside that the infirmary was open and ready to receive injured.

"I'll get a couple of potion bases started," Angelina said, hurrying to the stairs.

Alicia nodded and turned to see Hermione arrive with Angie. Hermione gripped Angie's arms and the old woman had both eyes screwed tightly shut. She hated apparating. Despite knowing it was safe, she was terrified every time she had to travel that way.

Alicia hurried over to the old woman, pulling out her wand.

"Don't you worry about me, dear. I'm fine," Angie said placatingly.

Alicia grimaced and ran a quick diagnostic charm on her anyway. "I'll be the judge of that. You walked to Hermione's house in this storm. It's not something I'd recommend anyone do."

A pop signaled the arrival of Dobby, who immediately started making hot food in the small kitchen.

"Where are Fred and George?" asked Hermione, looking around and not seeing them.

Alicia grimaced. "They got it in their heads to apparate to the eastern side of the island and start working west together. They started around Party Point. Harry's working east, so they should meet in the middle somewhere."

The wind outside howled and the building shook slightly under the onslaught. Alicia winced as the large building visibly trembled. Her husbands were out in this weather and she was dreadfully worried about them.

A large bang echoed in the building when debris, driven by the wind, smashed into a wall. Everyone jumped from the noise.

"Did you find out what happened?" asked Alicia in a hushed tone.

Angie was watching Dobby from the kitchen door and wasn't paying attention to their conversation.

Hermione nodded. "Apparently the children were teasing the youngest girl, Felicity. It seems Angie had been teaching the children their form of magic and Felicity had been unable to perform anything. The other kids said some hurtful things to her and she ran off sometime after their bedtime.

"Angie went to check on them around eleven last night and discovered Felicity missing. The storm was just starting by that time, so they searched the compound and the surrounding area, then Angie walked to our place. That had to take her at least an hour."

Alicia nodded absently and walked over to an empty cot to sit down. Angie walked up carrying three mugs of hot tea.

Hermione took one cup and she sat next to Alicia on the cot. Angie handed another cup to Alicia and sat down.

"So, now we wait?" Angie said.

Alicia shrugged. "There's not much else we can do. Harry and the boys will find her, it's just a matter of when." She turned to Hermione. "Any word on how long this storm is supposed to last?"

Hermione frowned. "The Coast Guard Advisory said it was expected to last till mid-morning."

Harry had installed a shortwave radio at home that included marine and aviation bands so he could monitor the weather forecasts from Florida. Hermione had inadvertently derailed her father's electrification project when she discovered that she could charm the power needed to use most on electronics. She had wanted to run her computer and she had charmed a power strip to provide electricity. That was all it took. She taught the charm to Fred and George, who then provided people with charmed power outlets. As a result, Norman's Cay now had plenty of electronics.

Harry had bought a lot of the electronics for the island, including televisions and disc players, but for their home, their selection was more limited.

Hermione asked if he wanted a television. She didn't really watch a lot of TV and was pleased to discover that Harry had never developed a taste for it. They opted for the fancy radio/stereo system and went at least twice a week to watch movies at her parents house.

Hermione looked up at the large clock on the wall. It was nearing four in the morning and still there was no word from Harry or the twins.

Angelina had joined them, but rather than sitting, she was pacing in the central aisle between the beds.

Alicia turned to Angie. "Why do you think Felicity is having trouble learning your type of magic?" she asked suddenly. "She didn't seem to have any problem with that candle during the memorial ceremony."

Hermione turned to listen to the old woman. Anything was better than just sitting there!

Angie shrugged with a slight smile. "Most of that magic was channeled through me. I can't say why the child can't channel the Goddess. Not everyone can. It doesn't mean the Goddess loves her any less. Nearly half of our coven back home couldn't call on the Goddess directly, but they were faithful." She paused for a moment, frowning. "I thought for sure she would be talented. Often small children who are blessed have incidents of magic. Felicity had more than her share, more than the other children."

Alicia's eyebrows rose and she shared a glance with Hermione.

A loud crack signaled the arrival of Fred and George. Fred was leaning heavily against his brother, blood streaming down his forehead from a large gash.

Alicia dropped her cup of tea and dashed to help him.

"A tree fell on him," he gasped. "I don't know how Harry's handling it. He's going against the wind. I pulled Fred out from under the tree and brought him here."

Alicia and George steered Fred over to a bed and laid him down. She immediately began casting diagnostic charms.

Gabrielle, get me a swelling reducer and pain relief potion," she commanded.

The French girl leaped to obey her, rushing over to a potion cabinet. She grabbed the bottles, plus a good supply of bandages.

George staggered over to one of the cots and sat down heavily. He was exhausted from the effort of trying to walk outside in the high winds. Dobby appeared next to him and handed him a large cup of hot soup.

"Thanks, mate," he said absently. His eyes were fixed on his wife working on his brother. Dobby smiled broadly and went back into the kitchen area. Most of Harry's close friends didn't consider Dobby to be simply an elf anymore. He was just one of the extended family.

Twenty minutes later, Alicia went over to check on George. Fred was sleeping on a cot nearby, having been healed, then spelled into a light, healing sleep.

"Will he be alright?" asked George worriedly.

She smiled at him. "He'll be fine. His hard head cushioned the falling tree just perfectly. Now, are you hurt anywhere?" she asked, then she cast a diagnostic on him.

He shook his head and visibly relaxed. "No, just tired. It was difficult out there. The rain's very cold and the wind made it nearly impossible to stand."

He glanced over to see Hermione pacing nervously by the kitchen door. Every so often she'd glance at the wall clock.

"I think," George said softly, "that Fred and I need to look into making something like the Marauders map for the island."

"Your body temperature is colder than I like. Lay back and get under the blankets. A few hours sleep should fix you up," Alicia ordered.

"Yes, mum," George said wearily, then he lay back on the cot, letting Alicia cover him up.

Alicia grinned at him. "Don't you forget it," she murmured then she turned to watch Hermione.

Hermione paused in her pacing and performed a complex spell Alicia wasn't familiar with. A set of numbers appeared over her wand, one number was slowly changing, and the color of all the numbers was a yellow with just a tinge of red. Intrigued, Alicia went over to see what she was up to.

"Hermione?"

Startled, her spell faltered and vanished. She looked at Alicia.

"What was that?" she asked softly.

Hermione smiled wanly at her. "It's a personal location and condition monitor charm that Harry built into our wedding bands. With it, I can tell roughly where he is and his condition. Normally the numbers should be green. The colors change to represent his physical condition. Green means he's healthy, yellow is injured, red is badly injured and black... Well, Harry once told me the colors meant 'breathing', 'coughing', 'barely breathing' and 'dig a hole'."

"But they weren't green," Alicia softly.

"I know," Hermione said worriedly. "He's injured, but not seriously."

Alicia looked at her for a moment longer, then she made a decision. She closed the distance between them and placed her hands on Hermione's shoulders. "Listen carefully. You need to keep calm. Panicking isn't going to help anything. Do you want a calming draught?"

Hermione shook her head. She didn't think that was necessary.

Alicia nodded. "Alright then. Go get yourself another cup of tea and relax. He'll be fine."

Something smashed up against the side of the building and the whole frame shook for a second. Fred's eyes sprang open and George sat up, looking around wildly.

"Oh, Merlin," muttered Alicia, then she hurried over to help the twins. She sat next to Fred. "Shhh. It's just the storm. Rest now."

He blinked at her in confusion. "Harry?" he whispered.

Alicia frowned. "Nothing yet, but you need to rest. You took a bad bump."

Fred nodded and closed his eyes. Alicia relaxed and glanced over to George, who was looking intently at the both of them. "What are you looking at Mister? You should be resting too!"

George grinned. "I'm alright, love, but I'll lay here if it makes you feel better. Or perhaps you could ask Angelina to join me?" he asked, wagging his eyebrows and grinning.

"Do you want me to slip you a sleeping potion?" she asked archly.

George pouted for a moment, but lay back down on the cot.

Alicia turned to ask Gabrielle something when Harry appeared in the infirmary. His face was ashen and he was visibly shivering. In his arms he held Felicity. Like him, she was soaked to the bone and whimpering in his arms. She seemed to be unaware of her surroundings and only semi-conscious. He cradled her to his chest protectively.

"Harry!" exclaimed Hermione. Angie stifled a gasp from the cot she sat on.

Alicia ran to him with Gabrielle hot on her heels. She lifted the child carefully from his arms and turned around. She gave a look at Gabrielle clearly indicating she wanted her to look after Harry.

Hermione stepped forward, but Gabrielle stopped her with a hand. She cast several diagnostic charms on him, frowning at the results. "Are you in a lot of pain, Harry?" she asked.

Hermione realized he was holding himself stiffly. His pants leg was torn and his leg soaked with blood.

"She was hiding in the bus. The wind slammed the back door into my back," he said tiredly, then he tried to stifle a groan. He swayed and both Gabrielle and Hermione jumped to help him.

"Let's get him to a bed. I can't find any internal injuries, but he's hurt his back," Gabrielle said to Hermione.

Hermione nodded and led him to the nearest empty bed. She helped him sit, then took a seat on the cot opposite his, watching him worriedly.

He tried to smile at her, but she could tell it was forced.

"Harry can you take off your shirt?" asked Gabrielle.

He started to lift his arms, only to groan and let them fall limply in his lap. "I can't lift them high enough," he gasped.

"That's alright," Gabrielle said, patting him gently on his shoulder. "Let Hermione help you remove the shirt, then I want you lying on the bed, on your stomach. I'll be right back with some potions and something for your back."

Hermione stood and walked to him. She reached over his shoulders and pulled up the back of his shirt. He leaned his head against her chest and groaned again. She gasped at the size of the bruise forming. It extended from the top of his shoulders to nearly his hip and covered most of his back. She pulled the shirt up and over his head and let it fall between them.

He swayed and she steadied him against her. "I'm sorry," she whispered in anguish. He was in a lot of pain.

"Not your fault," he gasped.

"Can you stand?"

He nodded and stood while she steadied him. She fumbled with his belt, and pushed down his pants.

"Not here, love. Fred and George wouldn't care, but Gabrielle might," he said with a slight grin.

She paused and suppressed a giggle. She helped him sit again and stepped back when Alicia joined them.

"How's Felicity?" Hermione asked.

"She's suffering from hypothermia. She's got a few cuts and is pretty frightened at the moment, but she's going to be just fine. Gabrielle said Harry got hit with the bus door?"

Harry nodded miserably. He was really starting to feel the pummeling he'd taken. Every motion sent waves of pain coursing through his body.

Alicia cast a few spells, then she cast a numbing charm on his back. "That will last until we can get something more potent into you. Stay seated until Gabrielle comes back with the potions and a salve. Hermione, you can help by applying the salve to his bruise. I'm going to need Gabrielle's help bringing Felicity's temperature up to normal."

Hermione nodded, more than willing to help.

Gabrielle approached with several potions and a small tub of salve. Hermione took the potions, which were single dose, and helped him drink them. Even with the numbing charm he still couldn't lift his arms high enough to do the job himself. With that done, they helped him lay down on the cot.

Gabrielle handed Hermione the pot of salve. "Cover his entire back with this and massage it in. He's going to be stiff and sore for a couple days, but this will reduce the bruising and prevent his muscles from knotting."

Over an hour later, Alicia leaned back and gave a sigh of relief. Between the potions and their efforts, they had managed to bring Felicity's temperature up to normal. She watched the little girl sleeping deeply on the cot for a moment. She was literally buried under a pile of blankets. The small cot glowed a dull red with a heating charm.

On the other side of the cot, Angie sat in silence. She had watched the entire time, waiting to hear the verdict. Alicia's actions of this evening only reaffirmed her opinion of the young woman. She was truly a gifted individual.

"Will she be alright now?" Angie asked hopefully, looking up at Alicia.

Alicia nodded, and absently pushed a errant strand of hair behind her ear. "She's going to recover just fine. In the meantime, you might want to speak to Madam Maxime about when she can start her training."

"You mean?" Angie gasped.

Alicia grinned. "Oh, yes. Our little Felicity couldn't do your magic because she has it within her to do her own. She's a little witch and she needs to learn from another witch."

Angie looked down at Felicity and reached out to gently stroke her hair. "Dear child. No wonder you've been having such trouble of late. Well, the plans of the Goddess are a mystery. No doubt she has something special in mind for you."

Alicia stood and held out a potion bottle, which she offered to Angie.

"I don't need..."

"Yes, you do," Alicia said firmly. "You've been up all night. We're going to keep Felicity here for a couple of days and you need your rest. She won't wake for at least eight hours. This dose will make you sleep for about six hours. Take the cot next to her and drink this. You need to be refreshed so you can help her when she wakes."

Angie blinked and smiled knowingly. Taking the potion, she drank it down quickly, then curled up on the cot, facing Felicity. She'd known country doctors with commanding personalities like Alicia. There was no use in arguing with them.

Pleased, Alicia looked around. Fred and George were still sleeping. Angelina had joined them, bedding down in a free cot. Gabrielle was cleaning up, still hoping to return to her books at the desk. Hermione was still working on Harry's back.

Wearily, she walked over to the pair. "How's my other patient?" she asked, approaching them.

"I'm fine," mumbled Harry into the pillow. "I have the prettiest and sexiest woman on the island rubbing my back. Why wouldn't I be fine? If I could move better, I'd drag her into this bed and have my way with her." His eyes were glassy and his speech slightly slurred.

Alicia chuckled, noting that Hermione's expression flickered between amusement and pleased surprise. Harry was not normally this expressive in public. He kept his public displays to hand holding and quick kisses.

"And now you know why we rarely mix this particular salve and pain relief potions. The two interact. In fact, it was the effect of that interaction that led directly to the invention of Veritaserum," Alicia said with another chuckle.

Hermione stared up at Alicia and she stopped rubbing Harry's back. "He's under a truth serum?"

Alicia grinned. She could hear the wheels turning in Hermione's head. "No, not really a truth serum. Let's just say his ability to lie has been reduced and his inhibitions lowered."

Hermione looked down at Harry who was nearly asleep on the bed. "Really," she said breathlessly. *Nowthis has possibilities, s* he thought.

Alicia shook her head and walked away with a wave. She wanted to check on everyone one more time before she found a cot for herself. Behind her, she could hear Hermione whispering to Harry.

"In our first year, before the troll, did you really..."

Norman's Cay, The Bahamas (Late December 2006)...

Hermione stepped out onto the deck and breathed deeply. It was a mild day and only three days before Christmas. They had visited the Coven compound yesterday for the Yule celebration. She had been surprised how many old traditions Angie and her Coven had taken and mixed with modern American customs.

Somehow, it just didn't feel like Christmas to her. Not when there were palm trees gently swaying and the daily temperatures hovered around sixty degrees. She turned slightly, seeing Amos walk up the beach towards her. He waved and she returned it. She had felt him crossing the first warning ward and was glad she had dressed properly for guests.

He stopped at the edge of the deck and looked up. "Good mornin'. Is Harreee up yet?"

She shook her head. "Not yet, Amos. We stayed late at Angie's last night for their Yule. I figured I'd let him sleep in."

Amos shook his head. "Dat hoodoo woman. She a pain, if ya ax me."

Hermione smiled. "What is it with you two? You call her a hoodoo woman and she calls you a pirate?"

Amos shrugged. "I know its not right, but she one weird lady doing magic witout a wand. An she don' like my Mary," he grumbled.

"Would you like to come up and have breakfast? We missed you the last few days."

He peered up at her. "I wouldn' mind a cuppa hot coffee."

Hermione nodded and gestured for him to climb the stairs to the deck. He joined her a moment later in their spacious kitchen. Now that she had converted one of the bedrooms into a study for them and moved the books into the new library building, the house had much more space available. Harry's notebooks were now neatly filed and stored on shelves in their study.

She had, in the past two years, turned Harry's bachelor house into a real home, one that both were comfortable in.

She poured him a cup of coffee from a pot that Dobby kept constantly ready for Harry and Amos. Amos took the offered cup and sat at the table.

"I heard some news yesterday. I was ova at Eleuthera island lookin' for some bish bulbs for Miss Angelina. I heard that them Argentinians and them South Africans have fallen. That leaves only China."

"I suppose it was to be expected," Harry said from the bedroom door. He stood there, wearing only a pair of jeans. He moved stiffly still from his injury. Alicia said there had been some muscle damage which would take a while to fully heal. She also told him that he would always have a possibility of back problems now.

"What will China do?" asked Hermione worriedly.

"Who can say with them?" Harry replied. "They have the only independent Ministry left in the world and they were threatening to ask help from the muggles if anyone tried to take over. After the ICW assault destroyed Shangri-La, the Chinese backed off and refused to cooperate any more. It's as close to a war as it can possibly be and still not be a declared war. I understand the ICW lost large numbers of aurors in the battle for Shangri-La and even the muggles noticed something was up."

He paused and poured himself a cup of coffee. "Besides, the longer the ICW is occupied with China, the longer they will take before they start hunting down the refugees," he said, then he turned to Amos. "How many people are on the island now?"

"Bout fifteen hunnert," Amos replied.

"Harry," Hermione said, frowning. "Are your shoulders hurting again? It's too chilly for you to go without a shirt."

"It's just the one shoulder, love," he replied sheepishly.

She stood and walked into the bedroom. A minute later she reappeared carrying a shirt, which she tossed to him. When he caught it, she drew her wand and muttered an incantation under her breath. A blue beam bathed his back and he breathed a sigh of relief.

"Bloody annoying to get injured in the winter. If it were summer, I'd be able to swim this shoulder back to normal," Harry grumped.

"Yes, yes. Now put your shirt on. I don't want you getting sick on top of being injured," Hermione snapped.

He grinned and put his shirt on.

Amos watched the two interact with a smile. "I tol' ya, Harreee. A good woman would fix ya up."

Harry chuckled and raised his cup in salute. "You said a good woman, Amos. I ended up with a great one."

Hermione blushed and smiled to herself.

"There be one otha ting, Harreee. One more bit a bad news."

Harry frowned. *And the fall of Argentina and South Africa wasn't bad enough?* he thought sourly. "Alright, lay it on me."

"Well, ya know that Minister Weasley is still in charge a Britain. He don' want to appoint no regional gov'na. Las' week, he make a law that say it now legal ta hunt elves."

"He what?" exclaimed Hermione.

Amos pulled a crumpled up paper from a pocket and smoothed it out. It was a torn out page from the Glasgow Gryphon, a daily paper like the Daily Prophet.

Harry picked up the paper and started to read.

"In a surprising move, ICW Minister Weasley has designated that it is now legal to hunt unbonded elves in Scotland and Wales. The move came about due to the increase in the feral elf population..."

He paused and looked up, his hands tightly clenching the paper. He was glowing and his magic beat at her senses oppressively. This was Harry, close to losing control of his temper.

"Harry," Hermione said in alarm. She quickly stood and walked over to him, wrapping her arms around him tightly. She knew this was one of those situations he had feared, when something would happen that could push him into attacking the wizarding world.

"Breathe, Harry," she whispered to him.

She started to relax when she felt him leaning into her. "Saved me again," he murmured.

It's my job to keep you from doing something stupid. Sometimes I even succeed," she replied airily.

Amos gawked and started to choke on his coffee. Hermione released Harry and moved to pound on their guest's back. After a few minutes he got his coughing under control.

"You is almost as dangerous as tha' weird hoodoo woman," he told Hermione.

She grinned at the old man and turned back to Harry. "Well? What are we going to do?"

He sighed and pinched the bridge of his nose tiredly. Like it or not, he was slowly being sucked into the Rescue Committee.

"Killing the pure-bloods is out, right?" he asked grumpily. Then he sat up a bit straighter and his eyes lit up. "Maybe we could raze Hogsmeade and burn Hogwarts to the ground! Or, how about turning the high council of the ICW into elves and dropping them in the middle of an elf hunt? Or... Wait! I know! I could put Percy under and Imperius curse and make him announce to the world that he's a transvestite and that Dumbledore's his secret lover."

She glared at him.

"Right, no total annihilation," he muttered, his shoulders slumping somewhat. He looked down at his cup of coffee, sat back and let out an explosive sigh. "I just don't know, Hermione. Most of the house elves are found in Britain and Europe, but there is no way we can save them all. As it stands, we have to expand the island again. I don't know what else we can do. I've already got my Miami lawyers looking into buying Saddleback and Pyfroms Cays."

Hermione frowned for a moment before sitting back down in her chair. It wasn't news she wanted to hear. "Can't we save some of them?"

"Of course. We just can't save them all," Harry replied, then he angrily ran a hand through his hair. "Dobby!" he snapped.

Dobby appeared with a pop. He took one look at Harry and quailed with fear.

Harry sighed and took a couple cleansing breaths. "I'm not mad at you, Dobby. Please, never be afraid of me."

The elf nodded uncertainly and looked at Amos and Hermione for reassurance.

"Harry's right, Dobby. He's not mad at you. He's angry about what is happening to the elves back in Britain."

Dobby's ears drooped unhappily and he nodded. "Is not good time for elves," he said sadly. "It happen before, it will happen again."

"Dobby, we cannot save all of the elves, we don't have the room. But if you know some elves needing a place to stay, we could offer some of them sanctuary," Harry offered.

Dobby looked up at Harry gratefully. "Some elves will come here. Others will go to elf secret place, and some will not be so lucky."

"Elf secret place?" asked Hermione.

Dobby nodded. "Is where we go when we pop places."

Harry blinked and started to chuckle. "An alternate dimension, I bet, similar to what we're trying to do with the Avalon equations."

Hermione nodded in agreement and Harry stood up.

"Alright, so we'll be taking in some elves. In the meantime, I still feel in the mood to destroy the Ministry," he grumbled sourly, then his expression brightened.

"What do you have in mind, Mister? I know that look!" Hermione said warily.

Harry grinned and expanded the hoop he normally used to send mail back to the Ministry. Then he conjured a large pail full of pebbles.

"I know it's early and we just ate, but is anyone up for a game of wake up the Minister?" he asked, scooping up a handful of pebbles and dribbling them into the hoop. Each pebble vanished with a small staccato pop.

Amos grinned and helped himself to some pebbles. Hermione giggled and pulled out a small handful. She placed them on the counter and charmed them with a spell. She wanted to make a point by having her pebbles act like dung bombs on the other end. Even Dobby shyly threw some pebbles into the hoop.

The Minister was in for a noisy morning.

More than an hour later Amos left them with a broad grin. He had dragged Harry a little further into the Committee, and had enjoyed the chance to torment the Ministry. Shortly after he left, Harry banished the pail of pebbles and turned to Dobby.

"Would you bring the items I asked you to buy?" he asked.

Dobby grinned wildly and vanished with a pop.

Hermione turned to look at her husband. "What are you planning now?" she asked cautiously.

"Why does everyone seem to think I always have something up my sleeve?" he asked, his face lifted up towards the sky. He turned to look at her and pointed to his short sleeve shirt. "Look! No sleeves!"

"Because you usually do," she replied dryly, hands on her hips.

He sighed and shook his head, then he went over to where she was sitting and took her hand. "It's sad when your own wife doesn't trust you," he moaned theatrically, then he turned serious. "I know that the last few Christmases just haven't felt right to you. So I thought I'd try to fix that."

"Oh?" She eyed him, wondering what he was up to this time.

"Dobby?" Harry called.

The little elf reappeared with a pop. Behind him floated a large cardboard box. "I'm sorry, Harry Potter Sir, I am late. I had to deliver to the littlest Grangy witch also."

Harry smiled. He knew Dobby liked Victoria very much. "That's alright, Dobby. Just put the box by the corner. If you want, you can go help Victoria. I think Hermione and I can manage this time."

Dobby looked up at him, his expression hopeful. "Harry Potter Sir won't mind me helping littlest witch?"

Harry shook his head. Dobby grinned and moved the box over to the corner. Harry walked over and moved the lamp and table from the corner, shrinking them down and placing them onto the mantle of the fire place.

"Harry! We need those!"

He grinned at her and opened the large box. "It's only temporary, love. This year we're going to do something different for Christmas. I had Dobby pop over to Miami and pick up some things for us."

He reached into the box and levitated out a large Douglas fir tree. She gasped, then smiled joyfully. With a flick of her wand, the radio was on and tuned to a Miami station playing Christmas music. Then she moved to examine the box Dobby brought. Inside, there were several stacks of boxed Christmas ornaments.

"I thought maybe you'd like a more traditional Christmas this year. I had Dobby pick up three packages like this; one for us, one for your parents and another for Angie and her children," he told her. "Olympe has done something similar for her children, otherwise I would have taken care of it for them."

She smiled. He was always thinking of ways to improve the lives of all the children on the island.

He stepped back from the large tree and the scent of pine filled the room. "Every Christmas the Dursleys would make a big show of putting up a plastic tree. It looked so inviting and real, and so far away."

He turned to look at her, his expression pensive and a little haunted. "You know, I have no idea how to decorate a tree," he admitted ruefully.

She paused in her examination of the ornaments. "They never let you participate, did they?" she asked sadly. It bothered her that he had experienced so little of normal childhood.

He shook his head. "No. My first real Christmas was at Hogwarts in our first year. No one had ever given me a Christmas present before then. Hagrid was the first person to give me a birthday present when he took me to Diagon Alley," he said, then he sighed heavily. "It almost seems like it was in another lifetime, you know?"

She nodded in agreement. It did seem like it was so very long ago when they were innocent and carefree.

He looked at the tree again. "So, what goes on first?"

"Lights," she said decisively. She turned and started to rummage around in the box. Finally, she pulled out another large box. "Harry? Christmas Fairies?"

He turned to look at her, his brow knitted in confusion. "Maybe they're some sort of enchanted Fairy light spell?"

Dobby had purchased magical ornaments and lights, something that neither Harry or Hermione had any experience with.

She looked thoughtful for a moment, nibbling on her lower lip, then she opened the box and gasped. A large glowing cloud of lights emerged from the box and hovered in the air for a moment. Harry stepped closer and was surprised to see it was made of tiny live fairies!

The swarm spotted the tree and immediately dove for it, spreading out as they approached it. In less than a minute the fairies were uniformly spread out in the tree, twinkling softly.

"It says on the box that they like you to speak to them, and they prefer you leave out a bowl of milk and a plate of cookies. After Christmas they will return to their native habitat, no matter how far away it is, and will return every year at Christmas if they liked how they were treated during their stay."

Harry blinked, then nodded at the tiny creatures. "Welcome to our home. This is Hermione and I'm Harry. I hope you'll enjoy your time with us," he said, bowing to the glowing group of fairies. The fairies giggled and the tree vibrated slightly from their mirth.

Hermione put the box down and conjured a large plate of cookies and a glass of milk on the coffee table. Then she cast a keep-fresh charm on both items.

"I always thought the cookies and milk were for Santa," she murmured.

Harry stopped unpacking the boxes of ornaments. "You don't suppose?"

Hermione looked at him. "I suppose a time turner would make it possible. And if they can enchant a Ford Anglia to fly, why not a bunch of reindeer?"

The two stared at each other for a moment before breaking into laughter at the absurdity of the idea. She handed him a box of ornaments and together they started decorating their tree.

They were nearly complete in their decorations when they heard the singing and Hermione grinned. Angie had told her what they were planning on doing yesterday, but she had kept it to herself. She grabbed Harry's hand and dragged him out onto the deck.

On the beach were the ten children Angie looked after, plus nearly a dozen more from Madam Maxime's school, singing carols. They were using a portkey, created by the twins, that allowed them to select the destination, then they'd walk from the beach to the house where they'd sing their songs.

The children broke into song, singing 'God Rest ye Merry Gentlemen'. Harry bowed his head and Hermione sucked in her breath. She turned to Harry. She felt a brief wave of sadness wash over her. It was a byproduct of their rings which Harry had enchanted. Very strong emotions could be passed to each other. Harry thought it would be helpful to them if they could feel the emotion when something affected them.

She searched his face carefully. His expression did not match his emotions, however. He had a smile for the children, thought it didn't reach his eyes. She slid her hand in his as she realized what he must be thinking about; Sirius Black singing 'God Rest ye Merry Hippogriffs' so many years ago.

"Harry?" she whispered worriedly.

He sighed, but kept the smile on his face. He gestured above the children and a small cloud formed, gently dropping snow on them. They all giggled and continued into 'Frosty the Snowman' while they walked away, followed by their snow storm. Angie grinned and waved at Harry and Hermione before ushering the children up the beach in the direction of Hermione's parent's house.

They watched the children, singing as they walked away, then Harry turned to Hermione. "I'm alright. It's just sometimes things sneak up on me. I haven't thought about Sirius in years."

She smiled at him. "I know. Every so often something reminds me of Ron and the hurt comes back for a moment. I think I got very lucky. The enchantment you placed on our rings makes it easy for us to know when the other is hurting."

"It also makes it harder for us to fight. But on the downside, it makes it harder to plan surprises," he added with a wistful grin.

She wrapped her arms around him for a moment, then she pulled back. "Oh? You're not very observant then, Mr. Potter."

He blinked and turned his full attention to her. "Eh? What did I miss now?"

She pulled at the neckline of her shirt enough to show a sprig of mistletoe wedged in her bra. His eyes lit up and he pulled her into a passionate embrace. She grinned to herself. It had worked out the way she hoped it would, and it would be hours before they got back to finish decorating their tree.

Cannon Beach, Oregon (On the Pacific coast)...

Cannon Beach was a sleepy little coastal town that, like so many others, had seen better days. With a population of only 1500 people, the town had skimped by for many years on trade brought in by nearby US-101, the Pacific Coast Highway, but things were changing for the better.

Hi-tech companies, looking for a more relaxing environment, were moving away from the cities in force and Cannon Beach found itself at the source of a revolution in miniaturization. NanTech was a new startup founded by Dr. Richard Atkins, PhD., and newly wed to a most extraordinary woman.

It was still a small company, mostly funded by research grants from larger companies and a new NASA contract to develop micro-machines capable of repairing deep space probes. It was this contract that funded the huge growth in the company over the past few years. Frugal spending and the award of several other minor contracts had placed NanTech as one of the leaders in the new science of Nano-Technology.

Richard Atkins had met Luna Lovegood at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 2002. She had been an exchange student from Cambridge University. She was working in an accelerated program for her Masters degree when the newly frocked PhD. crossed her path. He was immediately smitten with the quirky young blond who had an uncanny ability to see through a problem to a solution. That she was at least as smart as he, was a bonus in the equation.

Richard tapped in the command to shut down the system, then he waited patiently until the chugging of the vacuum pumps silenced. Satisfied, he shut down his workstation after making sure all the data was safely tucked away on the network server.

He was about to stand when he felt a pair of hands kneading his shoulders. His head drooped forward and he sighed softly.

That feels wonderful. No, what would you say? Bloody wonderful?" he asked.

Luna laughed softly and continued her ministrations. "Are you making fun of my accent again?" she asked.

He shook his head. "You know I love your accent," he replied, then he swiveled his chair so he was facing her. He wrapped his arms around her. "It's dead sexy, and I love it and you," he whispered huskily. It amazed him, the effect she had on him. Until he had met Luna he had dated only halfheartedly. She had changed all that.

Luna wrapped her arms around him, pulling him in until his face was nestled between her breasts. Richard held her tightly. He never thought he'd find something more interesting than his work, until he met Luna. Add to that the fact that she was invaluable to his work and was his primary research partner made him feel especially lucky. He had fallen in love with a woman who could not only understand his great work, but could also help him with it.

Not only could she help in his work and often did, but she was quickly making a name for herself in the use of nanites in the biosciences.

Luna caressed his hair and kissed the top of his head. He didn't see the single tear that slid down her cheek. Their time together would be pitifully short and she knew it. Time was running out for them.

She wiped the tear away and smiled brightly down at him. He looked up at her, and it took all her control to prevent more tears. "I got some new lingerie today. And the results from that lithographic X-ray scan. Which would you rather see first?" she asked impishly.

He grinned and nuzzled her breast through her blouse. "Lingerie first, scan later," he murmured.

Luna's eyes brightened and she started to undo the buttons on her blouse. She paused once to cast a quick set of locking and silencing charms. He watched her do magic with interest, then his eyes went back to devouring her form as she revealed it. It amazed her that she, plain old Luna Lovegood, could force this highly civilized man to throw away his control. His hunger and desire for her was something she could feel in his every action.

Richard took over undoing the buttons and pulled her into his lap. She smiled and placed her wand on top of the keyboard. Richard glanced down at it and then dismissed it. Once he hadn't been so cavalier about her magic, but now it was old news to him.

Luna's gift told her quite early that she and Richard would have only a limited time together. She also saw that without her, his end would come even sooner. He was close to that perfect match she yearned for and lost. She knew she could easily love Richard, their souls were that compatible. But they weren't soul mates; they were extraordinarily close but not mates.

They had been dating only two short months when she met him at Tanya's Tech Bistro just outside of M.I.T. And he proposed to her. It was a typical geek hangout; good food, a reasonable library of trade magazines and every table had it's own dedicated T3 connection to the Internet. It was a place where geeks could let down their hair and pretend to be normal people, if a little quirky.

He slid a small jewelry box across the table. "L-L-Luna, I know we've only been going out a very short time, but I feel that you are a part of me. I don't want to spend another minute of my life without you," he stammered.

Luna looked at the ring incredulously. She had known they would get together, she had foreseen it. But nothing of her gift had prepared her for this moment.

"Sweet Merlin," she murmured. She looked at him and saw the love and hope in his eyes and knew what she had to do.

"Richard," she said, avoiding picking up the ring. "I want to say yes, but before I do, I owe you an explanation. If you will allow me to explain something first, then I'll gladly be your wife."

Richard swallowed nervously. "Oh... ah... ok... What is it?"

Luna smiled and pulled a five dollar bill out of her pocketbook and threw it on the table. Then she stood and grabbed his hand. "Not here, my place."

Confused and more than a little terrified, Richard allowed himself to be led the three blocks to Luna's apartment. It was a first for him. He had picked her up there on several occasions, but had never been inside before.

The first thing that stuck him as odd is the large number of seemingly ancient books lining one wall, and on the counter top — was that a cauldron? A gray barn owl sat perched on a lamp. He looked at the owl and it stared back at him.

She pushed him onto a comfortable couch and moved to stand in front of him. She pulled the stick she normally used to hold up her hair and laid it down on the coffee table.

"Richard, you live in a world of order. A place where numbers and quantum states control existence and everything can be described in mathematical rules."

He smiled at her. "Well, so do you, sweetie. In fact, your paper on Nanite Submersibles in a biologically wet system was remarkable."

She smiled at him. "Thank you, but I'm afraid I don't just live in your world. In fact, for the last few years, I've been living in more than one world. Do you have a coin?"

He grinned at her. He was roughly used to her abrupt changes in topic. He reached into his pocket and pulled out a quarter, holding it in the palm of his hand. He knew that whatever brought about the abrupt change of topic would be clear soon.

She nodded and picked up the stick. With a wave of her stick, the coin lifted up until it was eye height, then it morphed into an eye and blinked at him.

He leaped backwards with an inarticulate yell, tripped over the back of the couch and fell to the floor. "Jesus!" he cried, then he moaned. He had hit the floor hard enough to hurt his shoulder.

Luna was instantly by his side. She waved her wand at his shoulder and it instantly went numb under a strange pale blue light.

He blinked at her. "How did you do that?"

"That's what I'm trying to tell you, Richard. It's magic. I live in your world and in a world of magic."

He frowned. It sounded like something from his *Dungeon and Dragons* days. "So you're saying you're some kind of Sorceress or something?"

She smiled brightly at him. He understood! "No, I'm not nearly that powerful. I'm not quite at a mage level, which is below a Sorceress, but a lot higher than an ordinary witch. Technically though, I'm just a witch, since no one really pays much attention to the power structures anymore. My friend, Harry, is very powerful. Someday he'll put Merlin to shame."

He blinked at her and rubbed his temples. "I must have hit my head. Maybe I'm delirious. Yeah, I must have a concussion. Can you call for an ambulance? I don't think I should walk to the hospital with a concussion."

She scowled and poked him in the chest. "I'm being serious. Remember the duck!"

He stared at her in shock. She couldn't be serious, could she? He thought quickly. She had given him a plaque that read "If it looks like a Duck, sounds like a Duck and acts like a Duck, no subatomic particle will change the fact that it's a Duck!" The message was simple, some times the answer was plainly under your nose.

"Luna, what are you trying to say?" he asked plaintively. Proposing to a girl wasn't supposed to be this difficult, or this bizarre.

"I'm a witch, Richard. I am also studying to be a Nano-architect and biologist. I can do magic, cook a flawless omelet, fly a broom, and I want to be your wife. But that means you need to know me and accept me, all of me, including the fact that I can do things that science can't explain."

She stood and looked down at him. He laid on the floor, propped up on his elbows staring at her.

"You'll explain this better when my head isn't pounding?" he asked uncertainly.

She nodded. "Does this mean you still want to propose to me?"

"Well, I thought I already did that, but I can do it again if you want."

He climbed to his feet then got down on one knee. "Will you..."

She took the ring from his hand and slipped onto her finger, then she pulled him to his feet and led him towards the bedroom.

"W-W-Where?" he stammered.

She smiled seductively. "I want to make love to my future husband for the first time," she said huskily. She unzipped her skirt and let it pool around her feet. "Let's explore the magic we can do together tonight Richard. Tomorrow we'll talk of the other type."

He blushed and let her pull him into the darkened room. It was a first for both of them, and it ignited a passion which left them both breathless.

Now, four years later, in a small part of Oregon, Dr. Luna Lovegood-Atkins, PhD., made love to her husband with a wild abandon. She knew the clock was ticking and time was running out.

Harry's Villa, Norman's Cay (February 2007)...

Harry picked up his mug of coffee and walked into the study. With most of the books now occupying the library building behind the Villa, there was much more room to move around in the house. The study had several comfortable desks and couches, and in one corner Harry had installed a large drafting table, which currently held a hand drawn map of Norman's Cay.

He walked over to the table and picked up his notes on enlarging the island. The charm became progressively more complex and more power intensive each time he cast it. This next enlargement, according to the theory, would expand the island significantly, so much so that they'd have to start looking at expanding the road network. Perhaps they'd even begin sculpting the interior for special purposes, like growing crops or creating pasture lands.

The problem was that enlarging was becoming incredibly complex. He had to know exactly where every structure was and everyone had to be inside their homes, which had to be warded against the enlargement.

There was adequate room for now, but if the population continued to grow he would need to cast the charm, and soon. He had already concluded that he'd only be able to perform two more enlargements, and he planned on doing them one after another as soon as he could.

Hermione helped as much as she could, but Harry was pushing the boundaries of his magic and invoking forces she couldn't hope to control. The surprising thing was how much geometry was involved in the whole thing and it led him to a world he barely remembered from his muggle school days; exploring mathematics and, in particular, how it applied to enlarging the island.

He sat down and rolled his shoulders, still stiff from his injury. Alicia told him he was healing well, but it didn't seem like it to him. His left shoulder and arm seemed weaker and prone to being uncomfortable. He couldn't wait for the warmer months when he could start swimming again. That would tone up his shoulder just fine.

Placing his mug down, he reached for a blank parchment and started to scratch out some equations. He looked around the table for a moment, but didn't find the book he needed. He frowned and sighed heavily. It was an ongoing and very minor battle between Hermione and himself. She insisted that books should be returned to their place on the shelf when not in use. He thought it should be alright to keep the book at his table until he no longer needed it. He considered charming one book so she couldn't lift it, but if he knew his wife, she'd somehow remove the charm, then enact a bit of nasty revenge.

He walked over to one of the bookshelves to grab the book he needed when something caught his eye. There, on the desk Hermione used, was what looked to be a manuscript written in her neat handwriting. Frowning slightly, he picked it up and ran one finger over the flowing script of the title.

'The Second War: Voldemort's Downfall as Witnessed from the Front Lines.'

Curious, his current project momentarily forgotten, he walked back to his drafting table and sat down. He opened the book and found an inscription on the inside front cover.

*Harry my love,
When I first started to write this, a year after you left, I had no clear cut idea as to why, except that I wanted to get the facts down on paper. For the longest time, the last few chapters remained unfinished and unwritten. It was only after we were reunited that I picked up this project and finished it. Some parts received extensive editing, thanks to your unique perspective, which helped me see the truth behind the events.*

This is the only copy and I dedicate it to you. You are my life, and this is a part of who you are. I know you dislike talking about your early years before Hogwarts, or the war. It was a difficult time for all of us, not just you.

It is a part of us and helped define who we are. Someday, our children will ask about this time, and they will be able to consult this book and know the truth of what happened. This book adheres to the one principle you have spent your life pursuing - the truth.

*With all my love,
Hermione*

Harry placed the book down with a trembling hand and he took several deep breaths. Once he was calm again he opened the book to the first chapter.

Originally, this book was started in an attempt to understand what I witnessed. I had the unique privilege of not only being a witness to many of the events leading up to the fall of Voldemort, but I was also a participant, as well. As the book progressed, however, my goals changed. In fact, the effort behind this book went from seeking a personal understanding of what happened, to an examination of the motives of certain individuals.

This is a tale about a child, torn from his family and cruelly manipulated to validate a prophecy. This is also a story of love, hate, betrayal, murder, abuse and the quest for power. This is a story in which many people were fooled, and those we believed to be heroes as great as Merlin turned out to be merely human, with all the faults, frailties and flaws that condition entails. This is also a story of the lies told by the leaders of our society, lies most people willingly believed, rather than face the hard, dark truth. If the reader learns anything from this, they should learn that our idols indeed have feet of clay.

The tale doesn't begin on October 31, 1981 like so many believe. Instead, it started eighteen months earlier, in a seedy tavern in Hogsmeade, where an incompetent psychic gave her very first real prophecy. This prophecy started a chain of event that would rock the wizarding world and caused the downfall of one of the worst Dark Lords in a millennia...

Harry read, and read. Before he knew it, he was several hundred pages into the book and his stomach was growling noisily. Still reading, he walked slowly into the kitchen and pulled down the fixings to make a sandwich.

He sat at the counter, idly eating and reading until a gasp caught his attention. He placed the book to one side and looked up at Hermione.

She was pale and afraid of his reaction and he felt an irrational surge of anger. Not because of her book, but because she was afraid of him. Anger, however, was quickly replaced by a hard knot of fear. He didn't know what he had ever done to make her afraid of him.

"I'm sorry," he blurted out.

She blinked and stared at him. "Excuse me?"

"You're afraid of me. I don't know what I've done to make you fear me, but I'm sorry," he replied. "I don't want you to be afraid of me."

She moved closer to him. "I wasn't afraid of you, Harry, I was afraid of your reaction to the book."

"I'm surprised by it, but I don't think it's a bad thing," he said, then paused for a moment. "I suppose it makes sense, in a way. When you started the book you had no one really close to talk to. I bet writing it out helped you as much as my talking to you helped me."

She nodded, pleased he was able to see why she wrote it.

He hefted the book again. "You know, this really is an indictment against Dumbledore and the Fudge administration."

"I know. It's a pity we can't use it to take them to court. But a book written by a wanted felon?"

Her tone was bitter. He was immediately on his feet and closing the gap between them. He wrapped his arms around her, holding her tightly. "Felon? Only in the minds of some very narrow minded individuals. Wanted? Yes, by me," he said softly against her ear.

She shivered in his arms and felt a thrill run through her. She clung to him, drawing strength from him.

"What's wrong?"

She stepped back out of his arms and motioned for him to sit, then she poured herself a cup of tea and sat down. "I know I've been out of sorts lately, but I can't help wondering what the purpose of it all is."

When he only looked at her blankly, sandwich in hand, she frowned.

"Think about it, Harry. I was slowly becoming a recognized expert in my field. And here, with your help, I've learned things that would have catapulted me to the pinnacle of my career. But no one knows about them and never will. You laid out a foundation with your work on the Grimoires that myself and the Weasley boys were able to expand upon. We've created spells the likes of which are unknown back in Britain."

He glanced at his half eaten sandwich, then he put it back on the plate. He had something to say, but he wasn't sure how well it would be received by her.

She looked over at him and her frown deepened. "What? You have that look that says you want to say something, but won't because you think I won't like it."

He sighed and shook his head. "Sometimes your ability to read me is a real pain," he muttered.

She stifled a grin. "Alright, spill it."

He stood up again and walked over to her. "Fine, but remember you asked. Deep down, you're still a little insecure muggle born witch looking for validation from your peers. In here," he said, gently caressing a spot just above her breast, "you still believe you need to have everyone's approval, when none of that really matters."

When she scowled at him, he scowled back, frustrated. "Hermione, there's only one person on this planet who's opinion means anything to me, and that's you. I have friends whose opinion I respect and value, but yours is the only one that matters to me. Your opinion is the only one that has the ability to truly hurt me.

"The rest of the wizarding world thinks I'm still an attention seeking psycho. Maybe it was the way I was raised, but the opinions of others don't mean much. And they shouldn't to you.

"You're so smart, you're scary. You took my muddled collection of thoughts on the equations and turned them into a solid piece of work, even if you aren't finished with them. It's more than I could do. But really, other than your family, why should you worry about the opinion of people you don't know, and who could never truly know you?

"Your parents love you. Victoria loves you. I love you so much I know I couldn't live without you. It's a short list, but it's the only list that counts. And what really pisses me off is the fact that you still can't see it. You're still looking for validation from nameless faces."

Hermione's eyes sparked with anger. "I don't!"

"Yes, I'm sorry to say, you do. Ask yourself why publishing your book would mean so much to you. We're reasonably well off. You could spend your life studying and never have to work a day, if you didn't want to, so you don't need to publish in order to survive. What other reasons do you have?" he asked bluntly.

She sagged in her chair and looked away. He was right and she knew it.

"You know I'm right about this," he added gently.

"When did this happen to me?" she asked.

He shrugged. "Like this book, it's always been a part of you. At school, you could measure your worth by your grades. Away from school, you had Ron and myself, until the battle. Then you had your work and that was about it. The problem is, we always see ourselves in the worst possible light."

"And what about you, Harry? Do you see yourself in the worst possible light?" she asked. She was watching him intently now.

"This isn't about me," he stated firmly.

"No, it isn't. But since we're being candid about my faults, how about exposing one of yours?"

The look she sent him made him sigh in exasperation. "Sometimes," he said tiredly. "Late at night I wake up because you've gotten up to study or use the loo. And for a brief moment I think everything I've gone through since I brought you to the Cay is nothing more than another drunk induced dream."

Hermione shook her head. "What a pair we make, eh?"

Harry smiled. "That's nothing. Between your hair and my hair, our kids will want to shave their heads."

Hermione giggled softly at the idea.

He turned to the counter and eyed her book thoughtfully. "What's to stop us from publishing this?" he asked suddenly.

She reached over and poked him in the shoulder. "Don't make fun of me. You know we can't publish it. No publisher in the Wizarding World would touch it."

Harry turned to her and grinned. "So? We change a few minor parts, call it fiction and get a muggle publisher to print it."

She rocked back on her chair and thought quickly. When she looked up at him, her eyes were dancing. "Oh, that is truly evil. The Wizarding world will freak out. And while the muggles ignore it as little more than a fun story, the truth will still leak out."

Harry nodded. "It's something to think about. I'll leave the book with you. I was working on the enlargement charm when I found it and got sidetracked." He stood from his chair and banished the remainder of his lunch.

As he walked past her, she reached out and grabbed hold of his belt, pulling him in. She looked up at him with warm, inviting eyes. "Work later. Fun now," she commanded.

He laughed. He wasn't about to disobey that kind of order!

Cannon Beach, Oregon (March 2007)...

Luna sat on the couch with her legs drawn up under her. On her lap was a copy of the New England Journal of Medicine and a notebook. While Richard concentrated on more physical aspects of their nanites, she was exploring medical uses, in particular gene therapy and gene repair at the cellular level. She looked up from her reading when Richard entered the room.

"Hello, darling. Did you have a good flight?" she asked him, smiling brightly.

He grinned at her. "It wasn't bad. Chicago is still freezing cold in March. And I still prefer your way of traveling. Just pop and your gone."

She grinned. "I told you why I don't do much magic out of the house."

"Yeah, I know. It's just frustrating. All that ability and you have to hide most of it."

"At least the runes we've set up let us use magic locally without any problems," she replied, then she turned back to her magazine for a moment. "Did you stop by the office on the way in? Frank, from NASA, called about the P3 prototype. It seems his bosses are very interested in seeing a more advanced demonstration."

Richard plopped down heavily on the couch next to her and groaned theatrically. "These demonstrations are going to kill us. Every time I turn around someone wants to see what we have."

She ruffled his hair fondly. "What can I say? It's tough being a popular genius. But I survive it, so I'm sure you can, too."

He sat up and looked at her, grinning. "Aren't you being forward today?"

She laughed in reply.

He stood and walked over to his briefcase. "There's a notice of a symposium at Cambridge in May. They sent requests asking that I give a speech about the P3 repair modules and they specifically asked for you to talk about your micro DNA sequencer and splicer. I think we should go. There should be several representatives from the European Space Agency there."

A cold knot of fear formed in her belly. "Oh?"

"Yeah. Come on, Luna, think about it. I know you said you didn't like Britain, but I'd like to see where you grew up. Hell, I haven't even met my father-in-law yet. We'd have a blast, and it would be a big boost for the company," he said intently.

She was thankful she wasn't looking directly at him. "Are you sure we can break away from work for the conference?"

This was useless. It was foreordained and nothing she said could change it. But she had to try. This was the price of accepting someone that wasn't the right match for her. Her karma, and Richards. She knew he would have died in an automobile fire if they weren't together. By marrying him, she had bought him an extra two years, but at a terrible cost to herself.

“Yeah, our schedule is clear that week. I checked already.”

“Alright, then,” she said, agreeing to his request. Then she sat forward and put her work on the table. Standing she walked over to him. “Come. Let's use the hot tub tonight. I'll scrub your back.”

He grinned down at her and wondered how he'd gotten so lucky.

Later, she would make love to him with a fervor that bordered on desperation. He didn't understand the reason for it, but wasn't about to question her. He loved her and that was all that mattered.

Ministry of Magic Building (Mid March 2007)...

“We have a problem.”

Kingsley Shacklebolt looked up from his desk. Standing in the doorway was Albus Dumbledore and Charlie Weasley, the new Deputy Headmaster of Hogwarts.

“Albus? Charlie! Come in! It's been a long time,” he said, motioning the two men into the room.

Once the two were seated, he looked at them curiously. “Now what seems to be the problem?” he asked.

Dumbledore reached into a pocket and pulled out a book, which he tossed on the Auror's desk. “I confiscated that from a student, who bought it in the United States while on holiday. This is a muggle publication, which has somehow slipped into circulation in our world. In fact, I found that Flourish and Blotts was selling copies of it.”

Shacklebolt picked up the book and looked at it.

The Downfall of Voldemort
by Hermione Jane Granger

Shacklebolt frowned and paged through the book for a moment, then he shrugged and passed the book back to Dumbledore. “I'd like to help you Headmaster, but you know the new laws forbid any Ministry involvement in muggle affairs. This book is being sold as fiction, so there is no danger to our secrecy laws. At best, this gives us a possible clue as to where we might find Ms. Granger. I will assign someone to check with the publisher and see if we can find our missing muggle born.”

He scribbled out a note, then waved his wand. The parchment folded itself into an airplane and flew out a hole in the wall.

“Surely you can do something about this, Kingsley,” protested Dumbledore. “This is exposing Ministry secrets!”

Shacklebolt leaned back in his chair. “You mean it's exposing your secrets, don't you Headmaster? I will remind you that you enacted that legislation that prevented the aurors from interfering with muggle affairs. I told you it was a bad idea, but you wouldn't listen. Now there is little I can do. Most of my Aurors are busy and the ICW Ministry won't touch it. I take it you punished the student?”

“Of course, I punished the student. But it was too late and the damage already done. The student had already passed the book around and it's become common knowledge among the upper classes.”

“We could expel the student, Albus,” Charlie offered.

Dumbledore held up his hand, silencing him. He didn't want to expel the student if he could avoid it. His father was a powerful figure in the ICW.

“Headmaster,” Shacklebolt said in a conciliatory tone. “Perhaps, after the crisis with China is past, we'll be able to revise the laws to address problems such as this. In the meantime, I can allocate someone to see if they can track down Granger using the information given in the book and from the publishing house. That's about all we can do. Most of our force has been drawn off to help deal with China. As it stands, I'm having trouble finding enough bodies to fill crucial roles. We've resorted to Auror trainees to man guard posts in Azkaban.”

Dumbledore sagged in his chair and nodded unhappily. When he enacted the legislation to prevent the Ministry from becoming entangled in muggle affairs, it was because of Scrimgeour's meddling with the muggles. Now that law had come back to bite him hard.

It wasn't unusual for him to walk down a corridor now and have students look at him and whisper. Old posters of Harry Potter from his time at Hogwarts were once again appearing on the walls of the girls dormitories, and he had heard rumors about a copy of the book surfacing at the Daily Prophet. He shuddered to think of what they'd do with it.

Dumbledore stood and Charlie followed him.

“Headmaster, one thing before you leave,” Shacklebolt called.

“Yes?”

“About this enforcement order against Minerva McGonagall?” Shacklebolt sounded unhappy. He knew Minerva. They had both been members of the Order of the Phoenix and he didn't want to carry out this directive. However, the only person who could derail it now was Dumbledore.

Dumbledore sighed and shook his head. “I tried to warn her that the Ministry would take her leaving unfavorably. When they ordered her back to

work, I warned her not to defy them. There is nothing more that I can do, Auror Shackbolt.”

Shackbolt nodded slowly, understanding what was going on. Dumbledore was abandoning Minerva as politically too hot to help. “Very well. We’ll carry this out immediately.”

Dumbledore turned and walked out of the office with Charlie on his heels.

Norman's Cay (Early May, 2007)...

He looked at the old unused airplane hangar that sat next to the island infirmary and shook his head in pained amazement. Nearby, a dozen elves worked to repair and clean the building, preparing it for their use. Harry had given it to the elves and they were ecstatic to have a house of their own. They had cautiously asked Harry if they could modify it and he told them in no certain terms it was theirs to do as they pleased. He wanted them to know they weren't servants, but part of the larger Norman's Cay community.

Harry turned away from the building. Some of the modifications the elves had made seemed to extend into other dimensions. Just looking at the building gave him a headache and spots danced before his eyes. He could swear there was a corridor leaving from the second floor that seemed to stretch into infinity.

“Well, it *is* different looking,” Hermione offered tentatively, then she followed Harry's example and turned away. The building was disturbing and seemed to defy all laws of physics. It actually seemed as though it was snowing inside one window, and she would swear the rear of the building was undulating. The color scheme of the building alone would cause a Parisian designer to have a nervous breakdown. Picasso, however, would have been proud.

“Headache?”

She nodded, then winced at the pain the movement caused. “Maybe a glamour, or some kind of illusion charm?”

“It's an idea. Or a *Fidelius* and let the elves be the secret keeper. I still don't see how they intend to fit a hundred elves in that building. I mean, it's big, but imagine cramming a hundred people in it and asking them all to live there,” he said.

“My father offered them a bigger place, but they turned him down,” she replied. “And they're already looking for people to bond with.”

Harry shrugged. “It's in their nature to bond. They need it to survive. I bypassed the slave bond by offering Dobby a bond of family, but I can't force anyone to do the same.”

She placed a hand on his arm.

“What?” he asked curiously.

“Love, you could ask people to adopt an elf into their families. They'd listen to you.”

He looked at her for a moment, then walked in the direction of the infirmary. Outside the main door was a bench which he sat down on. Seeing that she'd followed, he motioned for her to sit down beside him. “I don't want to fall into that trap, Hermione,” he said simply.

She looked at him, confused.

He leaned back and looked up. The day was seasonally warm, nearly eighty degrees, with light fluffy clouds drifting over head. She knew him well enough to know he had more to say, but that he needed to order his thoughts first. He sat silent for a few more moments, then he began to speak.

“Dumbledore started off by offering advice. People saw the man who defeated Grindelwald as their savior. He didn't start off by being another Lockheart. He slowly fell into the trap that sort of fame tempts people with.

“There is an intoxicating lure to knowing that everyone is looking to you to lead them. Dumbledore started off down that path and I'm sure, at one point, he had good intentions. Eventually, however, he believed what people were saying about him. By that point he thought he was capable of making life and death decisions over people, and no one told him he couldn't get away with it. Once he started to believe the hype, he was lost.”

Hermione turned on the bench to look at him. “And you think you'd fall into that trap?”

He smiled at her. “What did Thufir Hawat say? 'Knowing there is a trap is the first step in avoiding it.'”

She smiled at his reference to Dune. She had introduced him to some of the lighter tales she read and he found some of them quite enjoyable. He never did get into the historical romance novels she liked to keep on her night table, however. He liked to tease her by calling them 'bodice ripping hysterical romance'.

“I don't want to put myself in the position to find out if I would be tempted. I'm perfectly happy to perform magic and advise the committee on stuff I'm doing. But I don't want to be talking to people about things I have no right to. And I certainly don't want them to start letting me do the thinking for them.”

She thought carefully about her next words before uttering them. “Harry... I think you're making a mistake,” she said finally.

He looked at her, surprised. “Huh?”

This was one of the things she cherished the most about him. Ron would immediately argue with her. Harry would want an explanation from her, and most of the time she could make him see her point. Even when he stood firm on an issue, he never fought with her over it. It was always a calm conversation.

She held up her hand and started to tick off fingers. "First off, you're not Albus Dumbledore. You don't have a character even close to his, so saying you'll fall into the same trap is silly. Second, people are waiting and hoping you'll get involved. Like it or not, they see you as a leader. Third, and this is really important, people *need* a leader. They won't follow a committee for long."

"But..."

"Hush," she commanded, placing her hand against his lips. "Let me finish, then you can have your say."

He frowned and nodded, watching her intently.

She held up the last finger. "Finally, like it or not, you've already picked the role for yourself. Who went searching for Felicity when she went missing? Who rescued the Mercedes family from the Aurors when they got captured up in Nassau? Who rescued me, or my parents? Who created this island of safety? You, Harry, that's who.

"You're not Dumbledore and you won't make his mistakes. I won't let you, nor will the committee. They're all waiting for you to step up and do what you've been doing all along. I don't know about you, but I'd feel a whole lot safer knowing you were leading, rather than some nameless committee."

Harry sat motionless, his cheeks flaming. He really didn't want the job, but she was asking. And that was the one thing he couldn't ignore.

He looked down at his feet. "I don't like it Hermione. I don't want it, but I'll think about it, alright?"

She nodded, then hesitated, suddenly unsure of what she was doing. "Harry, I don't want you to feel like you're obligated to do this. But I would feel happier knowing you were more involved. This is our home now and someday we'll raise our children here. Do you want to rely on someone else to keep them safe?"

"I see what you're saying," he replied quietly. It was a thought that had occurred to him as well, and he didn't like the idea of relying on anyone to keep those he loved safe.

She was about to reply when Dobby appeared in front of them, holding a newspaper. Dobby's reading skills had progressed to the point that he was capable of reading and often brought them newspapers from Diagon Alley that contained articles he thought would interest them.

Dobby had to be especially careful not to get caught reading while in the Alley. That was an automatic death sentence for an elf. He wore a collar signifying he was a bonded elf. Thus far, no one had bothered to look at it closely enough to see it bore the crest of the Potter family. But even the collar wouldn't save an elf that could read.

Harry laid a hand on Hermione's arm, stopping her from speaking. She turned to see that Dobby was visibly upset by something. Huge tears slid down his cheeks and his ears were nearly brushing his shoulders.

"Dobby, what's wrong?" asked Harry.

Dobby silently handed him the paper and his lower lip trembled.

Harry read the article concerning the death of Minerva McGonagall, who refused a Ministry order to return to her old job at Hogwarts. The article detailed how she had been killed trying to escape the Aurors, who had been sent to arrest her. The more he read, the older and tired he felt. It was an unexpected blow. If he had known she was in danger, he would have gone to get her.

"Oh, no! No, no, no," moaned Hermione, reading over his shoulder. Her shoulders shook and she leaned against him, weeping softly. She had become very close to Minerva when she accepted a position to teach at Hogwarts. "No, this has to be a mistake. It can't be," she sobbed.

Harry held her with one hand, then he handed the paper back to Dobby. "Please take that to the twins. Then go to Duncan and ask him to call together a meeting of the committee for tomorrow. Hermione and I will be attending. We'll be at home tonight. When you've finished, come home, Dobby. Family needs to be together at times like this."

He wrapped his arms around her and shifted them both to their living room.

How long they sat there, holding each other, neither could say. But eventually a voice broke their silence.

"Harry! Hermione!"

"In here," replied Harry.

Fred and George walked in with their wives. Angelina had been crying and now she was hiccuping steadily. Alicia was trying to calm her down. She was well along in her pregnancy and Alicia didn't want her getting in trouble now.

"Lee is spreading the word to the others from Hogwarts, and especially Gryffindor. They're all coming here," George said quietly. It was an uncharacteristic mood for him. It struck Harry that the last time he had seen the twins so somber was at the combined funeral for Ron and Ginny.

Hermione lifted her head from his shoulder and wiped her eyes. "Here? I'll put together some drinks and snacks then."

She stood and went into the kitchen, while Fred led Angelina over to a chair and helped her sit. George conjured several boxes of tissues around the living room.

Duncan, Cassandra, Victoria and Puff appeared via their permanent portkey. Dobby appeared a moment later. Puff looked around, then she went and curled up in the sun on the floor, her eyes always watching Victoria.

"She's in the kitchen," Harry said to Cassandra's unasked question.

Duncan walked over to Harry. "A terrible thing to lose a friend."

Harry nodded. "She was special. A true teacher who cared, even if she didn't always show it. She was very special to Hermione and she's extremely upset about it."

Lee Jordan appeared with his wife and their small child. He brought along several kegs of his home brewed butterbeer, as well as a keg of homemade rum. Hermione came into the living room and directed Lee to bring the kegs into the kitchen.

Seeing more people walking up to the house along the beach, Dobby snapped his fingers twice and several elves appeared. He immediately set them preparing food and drinks and helping where they could.

Duncan nodded to Harry, then he walked over and hugged his oldest daughter. Hermione hugged him back for a moment before breaking into tears again.

Annette spotted Victoria and squealed. The two little girls ran to the door. A moment later, Puff followed them outside. Annette was a half year younger than Victoria, who was a very mature and refined five years old. The two were close friends and often played together, with Puff and Dobby keeping careful watch.

"She'll be fine, Harry," said Cassandra. "She just needs this time to reach out to those she loves and to grieve." She turned and smiled at the sight of the two small girls playing outside with the dragon. "They're the lucky ones. They don't understand, and it's too early to explain it to them."

Slowly people migrated to the outside deck. Hagrid and Olympe arrived, bringing with them some of the girls who had visited Hogwarts during the tournament. Then Bill and Fleur appeared. Bill quickly conjured more chairs on the deck and the beach.

Amos arrived, bringing more food and a set of enchanted musical instruments. He didn't know Minerva, but he knew many of the people who she had affected, so he'd come to support his friends. Angie arrived not long after Amos and the two glared at each other. The pair seemed to have a rivalry that no one could explain. They didn't hate each other, but there were definitely interesting feelings between the pair.

More and more people kept arriving, either by foot or by apparation. Some Harry recognized from his Hogwarts days, others he barely knew because they were before his time, or after.

Harry looked at his assembled friends and his wife, who sat next to her mother. Then he stood. "Can I have your attention please?" he called out.

The noise slowly died down, until the only sound came from Annette and Victoria, playing under the watchful eye of a house elf.

"When I heard the news I returned home, thinking I'd grieve with Hermione and Dobby. Grieve with my family. The twins showed up and without saying so, reminded me that we're all family of a sort. Gryffindors, people who knew Minerva, or just our friends here to help us ease the pain of loss."

Harry paused and took a deep shuddering breath. Hermione stood and walked over to him, her eyes glistening with tears. She slipped her hand into his and his breath hitched a few times. "This is hard," he said in a hurt tone, then he smiled wanly at her.

She returned his smile, but his expression bothered her. She could read him better now, she could see the iron control clamping down on his emotions, bottling them up behind steel walls. She could see the pain and anguish in his eyes, but he'd not show the world how he felt. She again cursed the Dursleys and wished she could have prevented the damage they'd done.

It was all there in his eyes. It was there after Voldemort, but she hadn't known what to look for then. She'd cry and be sad for several days and slowly move on, remembering the good times. He'd torture himself with nightmares and question his actions. He'd work himself until he dropped from exhaustion, because that was what he did. He didn't grieve well at all, and probably wouldn't until she coaxed it out of him.

"Yes, it is, but that's why our family is here," she replied, then she turned to the others. "I remember Minerva as both a teacher and a friend. She was a source of strength and inspiration. Minerva McGonagall touched our lives and in doing so, helped most of us become who we are today.

"I can't claim to know anything about the next great adventure, but I know from personal experience that Minerva isn't dead. No, she's probably watching us right now and hoping we don't get too weepy over her passing. I remember Minerva and I will not forget the impact she had on my life," Hermione said, then she choked and sobbed.

Harry wrapped his arms around her waist and she turned into him, crying softly.

Fred and George stepped up to stand next to Harry and Hermione. Fred grinned and threw an arm over Harry's shoulders. "Let us tell you a story about Professor McGonagall, something that showed she was more than just a stern teacher."

He spoke to the assembled people and they hung on his words as if they were an emotional lifeline. George stood next to him, his own eyes glistening with tears.

"You see, we were coming back from the Quidditch pitch after charming the Slytherin pitch to turn ice anytime they had the quaffle," added George with a grin.

"You did that?" exclaimed Harry. "I remember them complaining about that when they played against the Puffs."

Puff stuck her head up and wondered if someone had called her.

When the twins grinned at him, he chuckled and led Hermione over to a lounge. He sat down, then pulled her down into his lap. He needed to hold her today and she wanted to be held. He rested his cheek against the top of her head and watched Fred and George standing where everyone could see them.

"Anyway, it had snowed and a group of first years had made a line of nearly ten snowmen," Fred said.

"Yes, quite good snowmen for a bunch of firsties, but they weren't much to look at," George said, continuing the tale. "So there we are, sneaking back from the Slytherin changing room, when we stumbled onto Professor McGonagall, who was giggling like a little girl and carving smiley faces on each snowman."

"Except for one, which she made look like Snape," George added. The crowd laughed, hearing that.

"She made George and I promise we'd never tell a soul when she saw us, but I don't think she'd mind us telling it now," added Fred. Then he lifted his bottle. "To the best Head of House Gryffindor ever had!"

Everyone raised their glass or bottle and drank.

Over the course of the next several hours, one by one people who knew Minerva stepped up and told a small story about her. There were more than a few laughs and plenty of tears. Like Hermione had said, in the end, it boiled down to family. They were all interconnected in ways that were hard to define, but family seemed to describe it best.

When the final story was told and an uneasy silence fell on the adults, the twins hopped up and went down to the beach to set up a large BBQ pit. Duncan pushed them aside and started cooking. The twins and fire were a dangerous mix. They hadn't quite managed it yet, but Duncan was sure that, sooner or later, they'd set fire to the sand.

A little ways up the beach, Bill conjured a pile of logs and built a box bonfire for later. Amos set up his instruments and waved his wand to get them playing.

Harry sat with Hermione on the lounge, his arms wrapped around her. They weren't in the mood for much socializing, but no one really was tonight. Everyone seemed to have someone they could seek comfort from. Couples and small groups paired up and talked in soft tones. It wasn't a party as much as it was a sharing of emotions and experiences.

"I'm sorry," he whispered to her.

She tilted her head to look up at him. "What for?"

"This," he replied gesturing to the large crowd.

She smiled sweetly at him. "Don't be. We need this. We all did, I think. It isn't so much a party as it is a way of reaching out to others and reconnecting after being hurt."

He nodded uncertainly. The fact that there was a heavily charged emotional atmosphere made him uneasy. She sensed it and snuggled closer, distracting him with her presence. He smiled and tightened his grip around her.

Tomorrow he would inform the rescue committee that he would be taking a more active role. He owed that to their future, and to Minerva.

Rescue Committee Meeting, Norman's Cay (the next day)...

Cassandra smiled when Harry and Hermione appeared at the door on her deck. She walked over and opened the sliding glass door. "Come in. It's a bit nippy outside today."

"Uncle Harry!" shouted a little voice, then a brown streak crashed into him, hugging his leg.

"I think she wants you more than I do," Hermione murmured with a smile. Victoria loved when Harry visited. He was one of her favorite people, and not just because he could loan her his magic to play with.

Harry grinned at her, then he knelt down and hugged Victoria. "Hello, Vicky. How are you today?"

Her eyes darted up to her mother, then back to Harry. "Mum says I'm on probation," she said softly, not wanting to anger her mother.

Harry's eyebrows rose. "Oh? What did you do this time?"

"Victoria, we discussed that already," Cassandra said sternly. "Remember?"

Victoria nodded unhappily. "I have to go back to my room until Mum says I can come out."

Harry nodded and conjured a little flower, which he gave her. She smiled and ran back into her bedroom with Puff on her heels.

Harry straightened up and looked at Cassandra. "What did she do?"

She sighed and shook her head. "Somehow last night she got her hands on Lee's wand. Between her and Annette, they managed to straighten Lee's hair."

Harry tried to stifle a laugh and failed.

Hermione frowned at him. "I hope you won't act this way with our kids," she said huffily.

"Hermione," chided Cassandra. "If you can't see it, I don't know if I should point it out or not."

Hermione looked at her mother in confusion. "What?"

"Vicky has Harry wrapped around her finger. Any child of yours is going to be even worse."

Harry frowned. "I am right here, you know. And I'm not that bad, am I?"

Hermione patted him on the arm. "Yes, dear, we know you're here. Why don't you head into the committee meeting? I'll only be a few more minutes."

Harry looked at the two, then nodded slowly. Clearly Hermione wanted to talk to her mother. "Alright. I'll save you a seat," he replied.

Harry walked into the kitchen, closing the door behind him. Hermione sighed and sat on a chair. Cassandra watched her daughter worriedly and sat opposite her. "So how are you holding up?"

"I'm fine. It's Harry I worry about. Last night was difficult, but every time I woke up and needed to cry he was there for me. I don't think he slept at all. He spent most of the night buried in his notes and working on some of the Grimoires."

Cassandra frowned. "How is he taking Minerva's death?"

Hermione shook her head. "Not well. I know now he doesn't handle grief well. In a few days, he'll exhaust himself enough for it to break through. It just worries me."

"We each grieve in our own way. At least he's learned that you'll be there to help him."

She nodded, still not happy with the situation. "I guess so," she said dubiously. "I'd better join him in the committee. Are you coming?"

"You go ahead, dear. I need to make sure your sister doesn't climb out the window like she did the last time she was on probation."

Hermione laughed and shook her head. Victoria loved her books just as her older sister had at that age. Unlike Hermione, however, she enjoyed reenacting the stories she read, something Hermione would never have dreamed of doing. Although, if she'd had a dragon familiar at that age, she might have been more adventurous too.

In the kitchen, she found Harry sitting at the table with Amos, Olympe, Bill Weasley and her father. Olympe's chair had been magically enlarged. Duncan looked up and smiled in greeting when she entered.

"Hermione, we've been waiting for you. Harry was telling us that he's decided to join the committee. I was just getting ready to explain to him that he, and you, were already on the committee, we just hadn't gotten around to telling you yet," Duncan said with a grin.

Hermione took a seat next to Harry and an elf appeared. The small creature smiled, handed her a cup of tea, then vanished again.

The elves were helping every where on the island, working in kitchens, cleaning, acting as baby sitters. Some were bonding with families and others seemed to want to be available for groups of families.

Duncan stood and nodded to the others who fell silent. "Harry, we've accomplished an awful lot as a committee and there is no doubt in my mind that you've noticed the number of times we've brought you in on one or more of our projects. The truth is, each of us knew that we'd need your help and participation, beyond the magical help you've given so far. Now, if you'll let me, I'd like to outline our plans, starting with this coming summer..."

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

It had only been a few days since the meeting with the rescue committee and Hermione watched her husband worriedly. He had performed true to her predictions, burying himself in his work and the plans for the committee. She helped where she could, but Harry was burning himself out and she'd decided that enough was enough.

She stepped into the doorway of their study where he was transcribing something from one of the Grimoires.

"Harry, come to dinner," she said.

"In a minute. I'm almost done," he replied without looking up.

She sighed and walked into the room. She paused for a moment, then very deliberately closed the book he was working on.

"What did you do that for?" he grumbled.

"Because you're working yourself to death and I'm not going to sit back and watch you do it!" she snapped.

Taking a deep breath, she stepped closer. "Harry, love, you've stopped me from studying all hours of the day and night. You even made me join you outside. After you saved me from Britain, you saved me again. We both know I was working myself to death on the equations and the library. Now you're doing the same thing. I'd be a really poor wife if I let you do that."

He gaped at her dumbly and she smiled at his expression.

"Now come to dinner. It's been ready for nearly two hours," she said, taking his hand and leading him out of the study.

Dobby smiled, seeing Hermione bring Harry out to the dining table. She didn't sit across from him like she usually did. Tonight she sat next to him.

"Bill orbed earlier today. He said he'd drop by those population figures you requested sometime tomorrow. I told him not to come by until the afternoon so you could have a bit of a lie in."

Harry nodded. He hadn't realized how hungry he was until he sat down and smelled the food. He ravenously dug in, while Hermione ate and watched him.

After he had put down several helpings, he finally pushed his plate away and leaned back. He looked sheepishly at Hermione.

She shook her head, a bit awed. "I haven't see anyone eat like that since the last Weasley family reunion."

"I'm not that bad. Ron could really pack it away," he replied.

"Very true. I often wondered if he had cast a space enlarging charm on his stomach," she replied. Inwardly, she was pleased that she could joke like this and not have it bring back the aching hurt.

"I don't suppose that you'll let me go back to work now that I've ate?"

She shook her head. "Nope. No more work for you tonight, Harry. You need sleep most of all at this point, so we can do this the hard way, or the easy way."

"What's the easy way?" he asked curious.

"After dinner you and I go to our bedroom. I'll draw a bath for both of us. Then we crawl into bed. I want to sleep in my husband's arms tonight."

He leaned back on his chair. "And the hard way?"

She pulled out a potion bottle and grinned maliciously at him. "I'll put you in a bind and force this nasty potion down your throat that will knock you out for oh, twelve hours or so. Then, just to be especially nasty, I'll orb Alicia and tell her what you're doing to yourself and why I needed her strongest sleeping potion."

"So, it's a choice between taking a bath with my wife or a potion. Tough call," he said, scratching his chin.

"You prat!"

She leaned closer and lightly smacked his arm.

Nearly two hours later they climbed into bed after an extended bath that left them both tired, relaxed and very mellow.

With the lights down low and the moon shining in through the sliding glass doors, she could make out his form next to her. He turned to face her on the bed and she laid her arm around him. His shoulders hitched and she pulled him closer. The grief was finally bubbling up to the surface.

It was the side of Harry that no one saw but her.

She held him through his silent spasms, knowing full well this was no different than crying. When he finally relaxed, she loosened her grip on him and leaned back a little so she could see his face.

"I'm sorry," he whispered to her.

"Why?" she exclaimed softly. "I don't think you're weak because you needed to cry on my shoulder. Harry, the two nights following the news of Minerva's death I cried on your shoulder. Even a strong man like you can't hold it in forever."

"I try."

"I know, and that's why I insisted you take the evening off. I rely on your strength. You need to believe you can rely on mine."

He nodded and reached up to caress her cheek. She leaned into his touch and ran her hands along his bare back, knowing it would relax him further. She knew he was close to dropping off. A few minutes later, his breathing evened out and he lay cradling her in his arms. She grinned to herself and snuggled closer.

Diagon Alley, London (Early May 2007)...

"You can't possibly mean that!" she shouted.

Blaise pushed the merchant that was blocking his path out of his way. "I can and do. We're through!" He stopped suddenly and rounded on her. "You were a member of the party that killed my parents. MY PARENTS!"

"Blaise, they were violating the law. I was under orders."

"Bullshit, you bitch! You never liked them in the first place because they knew about the muggle world and liked it. You should have refused to follow those orders. You know they weren't right! Besides, you were ordered to arrest them, not kill them. Or are you going to lie about that, too?"

Su Li-Zabini winced and thought quickly. She knew this wasn't going well. She had taken two weeks to track Blaise down. He had gone to ground after his parents were killed, although the Ministry always claimed they resisted arrest, they both knew better. Now she had to make him see reason.

"They resisted arrest. Don't do this, Blaise. You keep this up and I'll have to take you in for causing a public disturbance," she said, shakily pulling her wand. She didn't want to fight him. He was a former Auror and a mean fighter, skilled in more than just magical combat. He had left the Aurors because he couldn't abide by the Ministry's new laws anymore. The arrest and death of his parents was merely the final straw for him.

Blaise crossed his arms and stared at her coldly. "Su, we both know your Auror skills are pitiful and no match for me." He looked around at the crowd that was forming. "I disown and divorce you, Su Li-Zabini. You are no longer a Zabini. As the head of the family, I cast you out," he said loudly.

Su paled and took a step backwards. Divorce was very rare in the wizarding world. It was considered a disgrace, and to be cast from a family like this, in public, was very humiliating.

"Bastard!" she screeched. "*Reducto!*"

Blaise, former Auror and, thanks to his deceased parents, a practitioner of martial arts, stepped inside her badly thrown curse. His foot came up in an arc and connected with her head. She dropped limply to the ground.

"*Stupefy!*" shouted a voice to his left.

Blaise rolled and whipped out his wand. In seconds he had laid down a pattern of five reductors in the direction of the new caster. The front of the new wand shop exploded outwards and the auror who had been watching his fight with Su Li was thrown to the ground, shredded by hundreds of fragments of the front window.

"*Diffindo!*"

He turned to see Su had regained her senses and was facing him down again. He backed up and cast a shield wordlessly. It was a skill that few had, but he had mastered it with the help of Harry Potter in his last year at Hogwarts.

He hit Su with a bludgeoning hex, throwing her through the window of Madam Malkin's, then he tried to apparate and couldn't.

He swore and started to run towards the exit. Someone had erected an anti-apparation ward!

An Auror appeared in his path and he tried to dodge. The man grabbed for him. Blaise twisted and slid his arm around the man's neck. With a deft twist and a sharp crack of a broken neck, the Auror slumped to the ground, dead.

Just in front of the exit, he encountered four Aurors. He tried to blast his way through, but he was hit with a bludgeoning hex and his left leg snapped. He stumbled and fell, and the aurors closed in on him. Goaded on by the crowd, they proceeded to kick and pummel him until he lost consciousness.

Hogsmeade (Mid May 2007)...

Luna made her plans, then she carefully unpacked what little she had brought with her. Most of the important stuff had been left back in Cannon Beach, with very specific instructions in a detailed letter to their lawyer.

For the first time in her life she was praying that her gift was wrong.

The days at the conference had gone over well and both of them were well received. Richard was ecstatic over several possible business contacts that might turn into additional work for NanTech. When the conference ended, they returned to London for two days before continuing their trip.

Luna had tried to convince Richard to skip the part about visiting her father, but he stubbornly refused to let it go. Fate would not be denied. She now knew that even if she told him about what was to come, fate would still step in to see its design was met. Schroedinger's Cat didn't exist in the magical world. There *was* no uncertainty, especially for a gifted seeress.

She shrunk their belongings to fit inside her purse, then she left the hotel room and got onto the lift to meet Richard down in the lobby and their meeting with destiny.

Norman's Cay (Mid June 2007)...

With the arrival of warm weather, Harry had placed his dive boat back into the water and brought the Lily in from its anchorage. He then spent several days inspecting each boat, cleaning and repairing the minor damage caused by the weather and the winter.

Work on the boats was a welcome break from their constant study of the Grimoires and the Rescue Committee work.

Hermione sat on a chair on the dock, while Harry tinkered with the Mercury outboard engine on the dive boat. It was idling a little rough and he was trying to correct it. The problem was that he had little experience with engines and the manuals only went so far in offering trouble shooting assistance. After that, they suggested a qualified mechanic.

Hermione had watched Harry struggle over the winter, reading and rereading the manual, trying to learn everything it had to offer. Finally, she ordered several books on internal combustion engines and their design, as well as several books on trouble shooting maritime engines. It surprised her when he plowed through the books like Ron used to plow through his Quidditch magazines.

When he finished them, he asked her to buy some books on Naval Architecture and sailing ships. He had in mind a project like the Lily, but something that would take him a lot longer to build.

Today, Hermione's contribution to Harry's attempt to master the difficult marine engine was to act as the interpreter. She held a book on engine theory in her lap and would explain functions when he asked her what a particular part did.

It was awkward, and it was cumbersome, but they were having fun, so neither cared.

He held up a spark plug. "What would Arthur call this? Oh, yeah, a sparky thing. And when you tried to explain to him that it was called a spark plug, he'd look at you sadly and tell you it's not a plug, because he has hundreds of plugs and none of them look like this."

She giggled and thumbed through her book. "You don't really need to know what that does, do you?"

He looked up at her from the back of the boat. "No, I'm just having you on a little."

She shook her head and placed the engine book on the deck. She started to reach for the book she was currently reading when she stopped.

"Harry, Amos is here and he's on that ship of his," she called.

Harry looked up and frowned. Normally, Amos took the Mary Celeste to his deep water dock on the eastern shore. The sandbars and shoals on the western shore were dangerous for his ship.

The large brigantine was tacking hard, then it came about and the sails started to flutter. Several sea anchors were dropped over the stern to slow her enough to drop his heavy 400 pound anchor.

"That's strange. He usually doesn't bring the Celeste to this end of the island... too many sand bars. I wonder what the emergency is for him to push her that hard?" Harry said, then he looked at the disassembled engine and frowned.

"Reparo!" he snapped.

Suddenly parts flew up into the air and back into the engine. He looked at the now assembled engine and smiled to himself. Wiping his hands on a rag, he made to move to the ladder so he could climb up to the dock.

Hermione stood at the top of the ladder, glaring at him, her hands firmly planted on her hips. He paused on the ladder, looking up worriedly.

"Hermione?"

"How long have you been able to fix those engines with magic?" she asked through clenched teeth.

He swallowed nervously. "Umm... I've always been able to," he admitted sheepishly. "But you don't learn anything by doing that."

"I could have... You could have... Ohhh!" she sputtered, stomping one foot.

He tried to smile at her, but he knew he was on thin ice. "Seriously, Hermione. This hasn't been a waste of time. I'm trying to understand the machine and you've been a big help. Besides, we can't always rely on magic. I don't know about you, but I like doing things with my own hands. It's fun and I learn about these engines."

She stared at him for a moment in shock, but when she thought of it, Harry didn't use a lot of magic in daily life. He cooked by hand, even washed dishes by hand, and every time she tried to teach him the household charms, he just laughed and said he was old fashioned. In truth, she didn't mind all that much. She thought he was a better cook than she was, despite her mother and Mrs. Weasley's efforts when she was a teenager.

Their conversation was cut off by Amos, who was heading towards the dock on his little skiff. Harry quickly climbed up to the dock and made ready to grab the bow rope.

"Harreee, mon! Gots a letter from that Tom fella in London. Looks important," Amos called from his boat.

Harry nodded and tied off the rope. "Come on up to the house, Amos. I picked up several snappers this morning that you'll be interested in."

Once in the house, Amos sat down at the kitchen table, while Hermione moved to the counter to make a quick bit to eat for the three of them. Dobby handed Harry and Amos large mugs of coffee before vanishing.

Amos slid a parchment across the table to Harry.

He picked it up and began to read. Then the color quickly drained from his face and the house shook violently.

"Harry!" shouted Hermione as she dropped what she was doing and rushed to his side. "What is it? What's wrong?"

"It's Luna. They are starving her to death," he whispered.

Hermione gasped and sank into the chair next to him. "What? Why?"

"Tom says she was caught in Hogsmeade with a muggle man. They killed the man and she decimated a ten man auror team and cursed the town before they subdued her. He says that there is something strange about her magic that they can't control with inhibitors. They were going to throw her through the veil for killing so many Aurors, but she's killed three more while in lockup. Now they're terrified to even be in the same room with her. They've sealed the cell and aren't feeding her."

Harry's hands crumpled the parchment.

"You know dis Luna, aye?" asked Amos.

"She was one of our closest friends in the DA. Her help was invaluable in Diagon Alley that day. But she dropped out of sight after the war. No one knew what happened to her. I know, I tried to find her," Hermione replied softly.

Harry turned to look at her. "You did? Why?" He had a similar desire once he arrived on the Cay, although he never acted on it.

She shook her head. "I'm not sure. It's just that, whenever I thought of reconnecting with someone from that time, only two people came to mind, you and Luna. But I was too ashamed to talk to you at the time."

He patted her hand comfortingly, then sat back, thinking hard.

"What is it?"

"I could have said the same thing. In fact, the only thing that stopped me from looking for her was a month long drinking binge. When I think of all the people who helped us and survived, you and Luna always came to mind first. You two come to mind even easier than..."

Her eyes widened. She knew what he meant. She reached out and gripped his hand, sharing his hurt.

"That be weird. Maybe ya should be talkin' wit' dat hoodoo wooman. I don' like her, but she got that hoodoo. Maybe she know wha' dis all means," Amos said, his eyes wide. He watched them both as if he expected them to grow horns and tails.

"She's not that bad, Amos. She's a nice lady. Just because she can do something we can't doesn't mean we turn our backs on her," Harry said, turning to look at his friend.

"I know that," countered Amos. "But that wooman and her magic give me the creepies. 'Sides, she insults ma Mary."

Harry and Hermione exchanged an amused glance. The real reason why Amos didn't like Angie had finally been revealed a few weeks earlier.

Amos was inordinately proud of his ship. Harry would agree. She was a fine ship. However, Angie, it seemed, suffered from terrible sea sickness. Her one and only trip to Nassau had her calling his fine ship a floating vomit trap. Insulting Amos' Mary Celeste was worse than insulting his children, which, as far as anyone knew, he didn't have.

"Can we do anything about Luna?" asked Hermione.

Harry closed his eyes and thought for a moment. It would mean hitting the Ministry building in London. He sat up straight. "Orbis," he snapped. A sphere appeared in front of him, then shot out the open door at high speed.

A moment later another sphere appeared in front of him with Fred's head floating in it. Behind him, Harry caught a glimpse of Angelina and Alicia scurrying out of the room in a shocking state of undress.

"Did I disturb you, Fred?" Harry asked innocently.

Hermione snickered behind her hand and Amos laughed loudly, causing the red head to turn even redder.

"Er, no, not at all," Fred replied. "Unless you want to come over and join in?" he asked, turning it back on them.

Harry and Hermione immediately colored and shook their heads. They all knew who had won that round and it wasn't the Potters. Harry coughed a few times and took a moment to recover before he spoke again.

"Good, gather up your brother, a couple pair of sunglasses and box of marbles and get over here. Tell Alicia to expect at least one new patient tonight."

Fred immediately turned serious. "We're on our way."

Harry nodded and the orb vanished from sight.

“At least one patient?” asked Hermione archly.

He turned to look at her. “Do you really think the Ministry holding cells are empty except for Luna? I'm not going to leave people there if I can help it. We'll take anyone who is willing to take the oath.”

The oath was one of Harry's contributions to the rescue committee which, up until that point, had been relying on Veritaserum solely to determine if someone would betray them. The oath was a blood oath, based on the oath taker's magic. Violation of such an oath would result in the loss of their magic and that was something everyone wanted to avoid, considering the Ministry's attitude towards muggles and squibs. Harry had suggested the idea of the oath, and Hermione had refined it with the proper words.

Hermione nodded, seeing the logic of his argument.

Harry stood and his clothing shimmered, transforming into black jeans and a black shirt. He looked at Hermione. “If you're going to come along, you might want to change.”

She gasped and stared at him. “You want me to come with you?”

“Do you want to stay here with Amos?”

“No.”

Amos rolled his eyes. “Gee, tanks, 'Ermionee!”

“Er, I didn't mean that like it sounded,” Hermione said quickly. “It's just that..”

“Oh, go on wit ya, girl. Amos was jus' teasin' ya,” the old man said, laughingly.

Harry shook his head at the two, then looked at Hermione. “I'm your husband, not your father or your keeper. I don't want you coming, but I know you won't be happy unless you do. I can't protect you from dangerous situations all the time, but I'll do what I can. Now if you're going to come with us, get dressed or tell me to transfigure your outfit.”

She walked over and embraced him. He wrapped his arms around her and her dress shimmered, vanishing in favor of black jeans and a tight, black shirt. She stepped back and looked at her outfit.

Amos stood. “I betta get Mary up to her dock. I be seein' ya lata.”

Harry nodded and Hermione walked over to the counter to pick up her sunglasses.

“You have a plan?” she asked.

“I do, but let's wait until the boys get here,” he replied.

She paced for a few minutes before she rounded on him.

“Aren't you worried? Scared?”

He smiled at her. “Of course. Just because I don't show it, never believe I'm not afraid. What really scares me is what Luna is going through. But there's another reason why I'm willing to let you come with me tonight.”

“What's that?”

“To keep me from destroying the Ministry if they've hurt her.”

She nodded to herself. It was what she had expected from him. His temper when dealing with the Ministry tended to be short, and now that a close friend was involved, it would probably have no fuse at all to it.

She moved closer to him and leaned against him. “I promise you I'll keep you from going overboard.”

He nodded and leaned down to kiss the top of her head. “You look really sexy in black,” he whispered.

She smiled against his chest. “I'll remember that the next time I'm buying lingerie.”

“Oh, please do!” piped a voice from behind her.

“Yes and take pictures!” offered another.

Hermione closed her eyes and groaned. She could feel Harry frame bounce as he laughed softly. “Fred? George?”

“Yes, oh, intelligent one?” Fred replied.

“Do shut up or I'll tell Alicia and Angelina on you both.”

Fred and George started to snicker at her threat.

Harry grinned and released her.

“So, what's the mission, little brother?” asked George.

“Little brother?” Harry repeated warily.

“Sure!” replied Fred. “Since Mum's a loon and Dad didn't survive the war, that leaves only Charlie and Percy on the outside and they don't count. So we've decided to adopt you as an honorary Weasley.”

“I'm honored,” Harry replied dryly.

“I'd be frightened,” Hermione added and he nodded in agreement.

Both Weasleys beamed at the pair. “So, what's up?” George asked.

Harry picked up the letter on the table and handed it to George. Fred leaned over his shoulder to read with him. Both of their happy go-lucky expressions faded by the time they'd finished. Luna had been a neighbor of theirs and a close friend of the Weasleys. She also had the particular distinction of having been able to avoid *every* prank the twins set on her.

“We got to go get her,” Fred said angrily.

“Too right, brother,” added George.

Fred turned to Harry. “Is this going to be like what you did with Trent or the Mercedes?”

Harry shook his head. “No. If I was going for just Luna, I'd go alone. But we all know those holding cells probably aren't empty. If I went for Luna, the Ministry would beef up security so tightly even I would have trouble getting through. So, this is going to be a mass breakout.

“Hermione and I will be going for Luna, but I'm going to spring the doors on all the cells. It will be up to you two to find out if anyone wants to come to someplace safe. Remember, once they come here, they can't leave without a memory wipe. If they're willing, they have to give the oath.”

George walked over to the table, pulled out a chair and sat down heavily. He frowned for a moment. “This is right in the heart of Auror central, Harry. How are we supposed to quiz people when we're ducking and dodging Auror spells?”

Harry held out his hand. “Give me your sunglasses for a moment.”

He took the three pairs and held them. “Do not be afraid of the dark,” he said over the glasses. They glowed a soft green in response, then faded. He handed the glasses back to the twins and Hermione.

“Hold the glasses in your hands for a moment. I want you to be absolutely sure you can put them on, so don't put them down.”

All three held their glasses, watching Harry curiously. He grinned at the three of them, then snapped his fingers.

The darkness that descended on them was total. Not a single shred of light was visible. Hermione exclaimed in fear and she backed into the counter. Harry could see fine, but only because his spell specifically excluded him.

“Hermione! Relax and put on your glasses,” Harry said quickly. He was a little hurt that she'd even considered he'd do something that would harm her.

“Wow!” Fred said, looking through his glasses. “It's like looking at a drawing before it's been colored. Everything is in lines.”

“Oh, sorry about that,” Harry replied. “Tap the glasses with your wand.”

“Ohhhh, that's better,” exclaimed Hermione. The drawing effect had vanished and now everything almost looked normal, except the colors seemed washed out, like pastels.

She paused and looked at Harry. “It isn't really dark is it?”

“Seems pretty dark to me,” Fred said.

“I nearly poked an eye out getting the glasses on,” added George. “You've got to teach us this spell, Harry.”

Harry chuckled. “No, it's not really dark. In the sixteenth Grimoire, the Book of the Mind, it discussed mind arts and techniques used to enhance them. One of the chapters contained a series of spells to alter perceptions. This spell, centered on me, will fool every human eye into thinking it's truly dark when it isn't.

“Your glasses actually create a small disturbance in the field affecting your eyes. It's only a few feet wide, but anyone inside that field will be able to see you, while you can see further. Now, give me the box of marbles.”

He snapped his fingers again, canceling the darkness and frowned. He hadn't invented a good incantation for it yet and somehow he didn't think Hermione would like an incantation of “Dark as Dudley's shorts!” Clearly, he needed to consider the matter further.

He took the box and held it for a moment while it shimmered, then he handed it back to George, who accepted it with a curious look.

Harry smirked. "Now it's an unending box of marbles. Tip it over and it will spill marbles by the millions."

Fred and George grinned, imagining the havoc they could cause.

He glanced up at the wall clock and decided to wait for a bit. "We'll leave in an hour. I need to create some portkeys that can cut through the Ministry wards, and I want one more item."

He looked around carefully before spotting what he needed. He walked over and pocketed the deck of cards, and picked up the small bottle, then he stepped out onto the deck.

Fred, George and Hermione exchanged a puzzled look. The occasional flicker and flash of light around him told them he was clearly up to something.

Ministry of Magic, London...

Harry walked back into the house nearly an hour later with a large grin on his face.

Hermione, Fred and George looked up at him expectantly. They had been sitting at the kitchen table, conversing in low tones.

"We're just about ready," he announced, then he shimmered in place and seemed to grow taller.

Hermione gasped and stared at him. "Harry?"

Albus Dumbledore turned to look at her. She noted his emerald green eyes and relaxed.

Fred and George started laughing, until Harry changed Fred to look like Voldemort and George to look like Severus Snape. Hermione he altered to look like Bellatrix LeStrange.

"A little misdirection goes a long way," Harry said. His eyes were flashing with suppressed magic and mirth. "Glasses on, then grab my hands."

The three put their glasses on and formed a simple circle. Fred had the box of marbles in his pocket and Harry was sure George was loaded with extra items, brought along, just in case.

"Ready?"

Everyone nodded and the world shifted. It wasn't apparating. In fact, only Harry knew what it was and it was something he couldn't explain, or even translate into a spell.

"He's got to teach us to do that," Fred muttered.

George nodded ruefully. They had already tried to grill Harry about the teleportation spell to no avail.

Bellatrix looked around, noting they were in front of the bank of phone booths used for the Ministry entrance.

"You didn't bring us directly to the holding cells?" she asked.

Dumbledore shook his head. "No. It will be more effective if we use the main entrance. After all, we want people to see us, so act the role everyone."

Harry stepped into the phone booth and dialed 62442.

"State your name and the purpose of your visit," said a voice on the handset.

"Albus Dumbledore. I'm here to assassinate the Minister," Harry replied in a flawless imitation of Dumbledore's voice.

Fred and George leaned against each other, barely holding back their laughter and Hermione bit back a giggle.

A name tag popped out of the slot and Harry put it on. It read, "Albus Dumbledore, Assassin."

Harry dropped from sight and Fred stepped into the booth. One by one they dropped into the Ministry, where Harry was waiting for them just short of the security check point.

The security guard was someone Harry knew very well. Anthony Goldstein had been in the same year with him at Hogwarts, though in a different house. He gave Anthony the patented Dumbledore smile, complete with twinkling eyes, and Anthony nodded agreeably to his former Headmaster. Then he noticed who was accompanying him and he promptly fainted.

"Pity," Harry said in Dumbledore's voice. "I was so looking forward to sticking him to a wall... upside down and naked."

Harry glanced at the fountain of Magical Friends and he couldn't help but notice the resemblance of the elf to Percy Weasley. He waved a hand at the fountain and the figures obediently moved to a new configuration. Now the Goblin was spanking the Witch, the Wizard lay prone with the Centaur towering over him, one hoof against his neck. The elf looked even more like Percy, who was down on his knees, his hands raised in

supplication.

Hermione eyed the statues for a moment, then she turned to Harry. "You kinky man," she murmured. "We'll have to try that."

Harry blinked at her in shock and the twins broke up in laughter.

"With a centaur? I suppose I could find one around Miami," offered Fred.

He glared the twins into silence, or at least restrained giggles. His wife's kinks were no one's business but his own. "The holding cells are on level eight, one level above the courtrooms."

Anthony woke up and struggled to stand. Hermione walked over to him and glared. He gave a strangled meep and promptly fainted again. Despite being dead, Bellatrix was still the stuff of nightmares for Wizarding Britain.

George, looking like Snape, sneered at Goldstein. "That will be ten million points from Ravenclaw and a spanking by Professor Hagrid, Mr. Goldstein."

Anthony's eyes shot open and he quivered in terror at his former potions professor.

"Oh, can I please kill him," whined Voldemort. "Come on, just one more time for old times sake?"

Anthony gave up the ghost and fainted again.

"The lift is here," Bellatrix said. She wanted to roll her eyes at the three of them, but she had to admit this rule breaking thing was actually a lot of fun.

"Hold the lift," Harry said absently. He raised a hand and Anthony Goldstein slid bonelessly up the wall. He twisted his wrist and Anthony turned upside just before his clothing vanished. A tattoo appeared on him with an arrow pointing at his crotch. The tattoo read, "Pure Blood Willies are Weaker."

Anthony woke up and started to bark in panic. Harry's parting gift to him was a slowly decaying spell. He'd be barking for the next several weeks, though it would slowly revert to English after much whining and woofing.

"Never mess with Albus Brian Wulfric Dumbledore!" thundered Harry at Anthony, then he grinned and turned towards the lift.

The four of them piled into the car, laughing madly. The lift headed down and Harry glanced over to check that his friends had their glasses on, then he snapped his fingers. The Ministry, plunged into darkness, centered around Harry.

Somewhere on the upper floors an alarm began to shriek. Fred, George and Hermione pulled their wands and their moods turned serious.

Harry handed George the deck of cards and canceled their glamors. He wanted them in their normal forms, since the prisoners were liable to panic otherwise.

"George, the cards are portkeys to our hospital. Tap your wand on them to activate. Everyone stay close to me until we reach the holding cells. Do *not* use any lethal spells unless you're attacked."

The lift door opened and they could see on-duty Aurors groping in the darkness. Most had cast a light spell, but since Harry's spell affected the optic nerve, casting light had no effect.

He stepped out of the lift and turned to the bank of elevators. With a single gesture, every lift came to a screeching halt.

Fred stepped around Harry and downed an Auror with a stunner, cast silently. George and Hermione dropped two more who were stumbling around the lift area.

Harry winced and stared at Hermione, who downed another Auror with a curse that constricted his underwear to painful levels. "You're cruel. You know that?" he asked.

"Yeah, but you love me anyway."

"I do," he replied with a chuckle. "But then, I'm crazy."

A cacophony of shouts and yells could be heard coming from down one wide corridor. He glanced in that direction and his mood sobered instantly.

"The holding cells," Harry said grimly, nodding in that direction. "Hang on while I pull down the wards."

Hermione glanced at Harry and gasped. Seen through the glasses, he was surrounded by a bright white halo that had small streaks of dirty gray running through it. He raised his hands slowly and there was a series of loud explosions.

The floor vibrated under their feet and Fred looked up at the ceiling warily. Dust shifted down from the ceiling.

"Harry, mate, I'd rather you don't bring the Ministry down on our heads. I've got two wives at home who have gotten used to my head and I'd hate to have you ruin my good looks," he said nervously.

"I'm sure they've gotten used to your head too," Harry murmured absently.

Hermione goggled at Harry before she realized she hadn't made the connection to what he had said. George on the other hand was hanging onto Fred and giggling insanely.

"Harry's a little busy right now. Please leave a message at the tone," Hermione said, then she laughed.

The twins looked at her strangely and Harry blinked, then he focused on her. "What?" he said.

"Oh, never mind," she grumped. Muggle jokes were a waste on pure bloods. "Are you done?"

He nodded and led them down the corridor towards the holding cells.

The corridor was not as well kept as the rest of the Ministry building. It seemed to be cut from rough stone and there was a small indent down the center of the corridor that held a sluggish, rancid pool of water. The doors to each cell were heavy iron and Harry could feel the remnants of the anti-magic wards still lingering in the corridor. They wouldn't affect his friends now.

Harry stopped just short of the first set of cell doors and scowled. Hermione and the others cringed back a bit. They were directly behind him and they could feel the magic pouring off him. Harry stretched out his hand, palm up and he started muttering in Latin. He abruptly clenched his fist and twisted as if he were turning something.

The sound of metal ripping filled the hallway and more alarms rang through the building.

"George, split the cards with Fred and each take a side of the corridor. Hermione, follow me," he said, striding forward and clambering over the twisted remains of the heavy doors. Hermione followed close behind, marveling at the power needed to simultaneously destroy so many doors at once.

Harry knew exactly where he was going. He could feel the spells on the cell all the way at the end of the corridor. Behind him, the twins rushed into different cells for what would probably be one of the strangest conversations of their lives.

Harry stopped at the entrance to Luna's cell and stared. Luna was visible inside, laying on a stone cot and surrounded by a nimbus of crystalline pure light. Hermione, behind him, gasped.

"What is that?" she exclaimed.

Harry frowned. "I think I know, but first I need to remove the wards imposed on this cell. When we get inside, don't touch her. I don't think that light is safe for us."

He laid his hands against the wall next to the doorway and the empty door frame began to spark and snap. Hermione took a step backwards and glanced up the corridor. She could see Fred and George darting into holding cells. Occasionally she'd see the bright red flash of a spell, probably a stunner.

She nodded to herself. Stunning those who refused the oath made sense.

She turned back to Harry, who was leaning against the door frame. The magic was snapping viciously, with bright sparks leaping in nearly every direction, except towards them. She could just make out the faint shimmering shield and she shook her head in amazement. He was holding a shield and tearing down the magic around the cell at the same time!

She noticed a set of silver looking runes that were glowing brightly above the door. Someone had gone to a lot of effort to seal this room by embedding metal runes in the wall. They continued to glow brighter and brighter until they started to melt and run down the wall.

Harry hissed in pain as the molten metal splattered his arms and hands. He groaned and pushed hard against the wall until it shuddered and crumpled inward. Very quickly it turned to dust as it collapsed.

Harry stood panting heavily and holding his arms out at a strange angle. Hermione stepped closer to look him over. "Are you alright?"

"No," he hissed. "But I will be once we get out of here. There was so much magic on that wall I never saw those runes until they were melting." He paused and took a shuddering breath. "How are the twins doing?"

She glanced up the corridor. "It's only a guess, but I'd say they are stunning more than they are taking."

He shrugged painfully. "Not everyone is willing to become a fugitive and we can't force people."

She nodded and turned to the dust filled room. It was too dusty to see anything but a dim glow from where Luna lay. "Acclaro!" she said, waving her wand. A wind picked up and swirled the dust into a tight little tornado, before moving out of the room.

Harry grinned at her, then stepped into the room. He walked over to Luna, still encased in a cocoon of light.

"What do you think it is?" she asked him.

Luna gave no indication that she knew they were there.

"It's a chrysalis made of magic. I'm sure of it." he replied after a moments thought.

She looked at him funny. "A what?"

It's kind of like a cocoon."

"And she's what? Turning into a butterfly?" Hermione asked dryly.

Harry shot her a grin. "No, her magic reminds me of that tracker. Somewhere along the line I think her family interbred with something else, dryad perhaps. She always felt different to me, and I don't mean in the sense that earned her that despicable nickname. Anyway, I think this is a survival response. Her magic is holding her in this chrysalis until it's safe to come out."

She looked down at the glowing woman. "Luna!" she said sharply.

Luna opened her eyes and blinked a few times before she focused on Harry and Hermione. The glow around her faded and she took a deep breath. "You finally arrived," she said flatly.

Harry's expression grew worried almost immediately. She had said only three words and they were so cold, so unlike Luna.

"We didn't find out what was happening until a few hours ago. We came as quickly as we could," Hermione explained. She reached into a pouch at her belt and pulled out a bottle of water, which she passed to the blond. Luna took the bottle and drank deeply from it.

While Luna was drinking, Fred stuck his head in the opening. "Everything alright in here, Harry?"

"So far. How many cells have you got to do still?"

"We're mostly done. Many of them are empty. We've picked up less than fifteen people. Another twenty or so refused."

Harry nodded. "Alright, we'll wait. Finish up, then dump your marbles near the lobby area. Sound off a whistle and portkey out. We'll follow right behind you."

"Righto!" Fred said, snapping off a salute.

"Oy, Georgie! Shake a leg, would you? We're on a schedule!" Fred shouted to the passing red head.

Harry turned back to Luna and eyed her carefully. He squatted down next to the stone slab she was sitting on and touched her arm gently. "Are you alright?"

Luna's hard eyes froze for a moment on the burns he received tearing down the wall. "No," she whispered. "But now that you both are here, I'll get there."

Hermione rooted around in her bag and pulled out a small plastic muggle cup with a cover on it. She murmured something under her breath and wandlessly heated the contents before handing it to Luna.

"Just some broth. She's had nothing to eat for who knows how long," Hermione said to Harry's questioning look.

"Over a month," Luna said absently. She knew Harry and Hermione would come for her. What she hadn't foreseen was the cold fury she felt. She wanted to lash out at everyone. She had been close to lashing out at Harry until she saw the injuries he had received rescuing her.

"We're going to take you someplace safe, Luna," Harry said, trying to be comforting. He was way out of his league here. He knew that she was upset, but she hadn't told them the story yet.

Hermione sat next to her. "You'll like it there, Luna. It's warm and bright, with a soft breeze that blows almost constantly. We have a lot of good people there, too."

Luna closed her eyes and in her anger she fought against the tug they were pulling on her heart. She didn't want the comfort they were giving without even knowing it. Her anger fought against their pull, drowning out the healing they were trying to offer.

The three of them were bound together in a unique way, but it wasn't time for her to reveal that information. She wasn't sure that time would ever come.

Her magic flared and in the distance Harry could hear a low boom every time an Auror exploded.

"Luna!" he said sharply. His hand reached out to grip her arm and he bit back a groan of pain as the burned skin stretched and cracked. When a wave of nausea washed over him, she turned back to him, startled.

She could sense his pain. It was on the hairy edge of her senses, but more importantly, she could feel Hermione's confusion and his emotional pain at her killing. Even after all he'd been through, he still hated to kill.

She pulled her magic back and reigned it in. "They deserve to die," she said coldly. "They killed Richard."

Harry leaned against the stone slab wearily. He had been gathering his strength to suppress her magic when she pulled it back. The effort had weakened him further.

"Who is Richard?" Hermione asked in a whisper.

"He was my husband," Luna said in a proud voice, but there was a ragged, hysterical edge to her voice. She would always be proud of her Richard

and the joy she had been able to give him.

Harry sagged against the slab. He hadn't expected that reply. Hermione gasped and her eyes filled with tears. She could only imagine the pain Luna was going through. Hermione was certain she would not want to outlive Harry.

A loud whistle echoed down the corridor and Harry lifted his head. "It's time to go," he said, then he painfully climbed to his feet. He reached in his pocket and pulled out the small bottle he had brought with him. He looked down at the bottle for a moment and his hand flashed with a bright purple light. "Swarm," he said clearly, then he handed the bottle to Hermione. "Take that and throw it as far as you can down the corridor."

She nodded and did as he requested, then stepped back into the room. She'd ask for explanations later. Harry held out a hand to Luna, who stood unsteadily. He moved closer and he wrapped an arm around her, steadying her. Hermione instinctively moved to her other side, copying her husband's actions.

Harry's eyes flared and he shifted the three of them.

Norman's Cay Infirmary...

They arrived in a madhouse! Someone was screaming at Harry. He blinked and looked around wildly before he noted that Fred was waving at him. "Turn off the darkness!" Fred shouted.

Harry blushed and the field dropped instantly. Alicia looked up at him and glowered. She was trying to heal a prone figure on the bed and his arrival had turned out the lights!

Hermione giggled slightly in hysterical relief, then she tried to tug Luna towards one of the cots. A number of people were milling about, eating food. Duncan and Cassandra were nearby, handing out clothing and getting names of people along with their occupations. Occupations were becoming critically important to the Rescue Committee.

Harry let go of Luna and watched numbly as Hermione led her to an empty cot. He leaned against the wall, exhausted, his arms feeling as though they were on fire. He slid to the floor and lowered his head, trying to relax, but the burns prevented that.

Alicia moved from bed to bed, snapping out orders to Gabrielle and another girl who was studying to become a midwife. Fred went upstairs to help Angelina. She was entering her final trimester and he didn't want her spending too much time around smoldering cauldrons.

Harry's left arm flared with pain when someone pulled on it and turned it over. His eyes snapped open and he stifled the urge to scream.

"Why didn't you tell me it was this bad?" Hermione demanded. She turned and looked around. Alicia was busy. "Gabrielle!" she yelled. The young woman looked around and spotted Hermione crouched down next to Harry. He had a silvery substance on the one arm she could see.

Alarmed, she quickly ran over to Hermione. She took one look and waved her wand, summoning some burn cream. Hermione grabbed the floating pot, while Gabrielle peeled off the metal that was still stuck to his skin. Harry closed his eyes and looked away, every muscle in his body trembling in tension. Gabrielle glanced at him then back down to the splatters of metal on his skin. One by one she peeled them off, in some cases, breaking blisters to peel the metal away. "Merde!" she muttered.

"Hermione, smooth some cream on each burn while I finish doing this. He will scar from these," she murmured softly.

One by one, each burn was covered in soothing cream and the tension slowly faded from his body, leaving him limp with exhaustion. Finally, Gabrielle leaned back and Harry smiled his thanks.

She nodded and turned to Hermione. "He doesn't need to stay here tonight. I'll release him to you as long as you promise to keep him away from the salt water for two days. The skin will be sensitive."

Hermione nodded and gave Harry a mock glare. "I'll tie him to the bed, if necessary."

"Now who's kinky," Harry muttered tiredly. "I'll just sit here until you're ready to go."

Hermione stood and looked around. Alicia seemed to be finishing up with Luna, so she went over to check on her.

"How is she?" Hermione asked Alicia.

Alicia smiled. "She's fine. She's a little under weight and a little dehydrated, nothing that can't be fixed with some water and a few good meals," she replied, then she looked around. "I think I'll release her. I'm going to be nearly full tonight, as it stands, and I've got two in critical."

Hermione looked around and nodded. There weren't that many beds in the infirmary and most were full.

"We'll take her home with us, then," she offered.

Alicia nodded, then her eyes narrowed. "Will you be able to manage? Gabrielle told me about Harry's injury."

"We should be fine. I'll make a portkey to take us home. Harry is pretty tired. I don't think I'd trust his apparating right now."

Alicia nodded. "Alright. Orb me if you need assistance. Luna should have several small meals instead of three big ones for the next few days," she said, then she turned away to look after another patient.

Hermione turned to Luna, who was sitting on the cot, clutching her water bottle tightly. "Luna, come on. We're going to take you home."

Luna nodded slowly. Home was a concept that seemed very alien to her right then. Home was with Richard in Cannon Beach, wasn't it? A numbness settled around her. She could only feel one real emotion at the moment. Anger.

Norman's Cay (the day after)...

Harry rolled out bed and winced. He ached from head to toe. He could see Hermione under the covers and was, for a moment, tempted to climb back under them with her. He didn't remember coming home after leaving the Ministry. *No doubt she'd fill me in on that detail later*, he thought.

After a long hot shower, he stepped back into their bedroom and summoned some clothing for the day.

"Harry," Hermione said sleepily.

"Yes?"

"Healer's orders. Stay away from the ocean until the day after tomorrow."

He paused and sighed. So much for his idea of working on the Lily today. "Right. I'll work on the new enlargement charm today, then," he muttered. It wasn't what he wanted to do, but Hermione could be a real nag where his health was concerned.

Thirty minutes later, he was sitting in the kitchen drinking coffee and reading a copy of the Daily Prophet that Dobby had picked up. The Prophet spent the first four pages detailing the disaster at the Ministry and how the brave Ministry employees had held off an attempted muggle born coup attempt. He shook his head in dismay, then looked up when Luna came out of the room Hermione had put her in. Harry hadn't even known she was in the house!

"Luna!" he said in a strangled gasp. She wasn't fully dressed, wearing only a t-shirt and panties.

She paused and arched an eyebrow at him coolly. Her eyes rested for a moment on the pink splotchy areas on his forearms. It was obviously new skin, growing over where he had burned himself, and her expression softened slightly. He'd received those injuries while rescuing her.

"Coffee?" he asked. He wanted to help her, he needed to, but he wasn't comfortable dealing with emotional issues. Even Hermione recognized that fact. When it came to these sorts of things he was clumsier than Tonks.

He poured a cup when she nodded and handed it to her. She clutched the cup tightly in her hands.

"You disappeared on us," he said softly.

She turned and looked at him. "I what?"

"You disappeared. Both Hermione and I tried to contact you after the war but we couldn't find you."

She looked down at her cup. She had expected a lot of things, but not this.

He reached across the table and grabbed her hand. "I'm sorry. I don't know what else to say, Luna except that I'm sorry. Hermione and I will be happy to help you in anyway we can."

She nodded slowly. She could feel his need to comfort her tugging at her and felt his sincerity. The fact that she was hurting was hurting him and Hermione both. She needed time and their help to get past this.

He released her hand and smiled softly. "You might want to put some clothes on. We have company coming. Someone just crossed the outer edge of the wards."

She nodded and walked back into the bedroom she had been sleeping in. A moment later she returned wearing a pair of Hermione's shorts.

Harry frowned and pulled out a small notebook and a pen. He quickly jotted down a few quick notes. "We'll have to get you a new wand and some new clothes," he added. He thought of the house next door to theirs. It had remained empty since Hermione had been rescued. It would be perfect for Luna, once she was ready for it.

"So, we're in the Bahamas?" Luna asked. She sipped her coffee and stared out the large glass doors, looking at the boats gently rocking next to the dock.

"How did you..."

When she looked at him, he sighed, but nodded. He should have known better than to ask. During the war she had demonstrated her talent enough for him to be a firm believer in it. "Yes. This island is called Norman's Cay. It's heavily warded, unplottable and under a fidelius charm."

"So who is Norman? A friend of yours?" asked Luna.

Harry paused and scowled. No one had asked that question before. It never even occurred to him. "Erm... I don't know."

"What a strange idea. To name the island for someone you don't know?" She shook her head.

The glass doors slid open. "Anyone home? Harry? Hermione?" called Angie.

"Come in, Angie," Harry said, then he stood and went to get her a cup for some coffee. The old woman was totally addicted to the stuff. Then again, so was Harry. "Angela Lightfoot, meet Luna Lovegood, one of our best friends from Hogwarts and the war."

Angie walked in and stopped when she saw Luna. The two women looked at each other for a moment as if they recognized each other.

Angie broke her stasis and moved closer. She held her hand out. "May the Goddess bless you, child. I felt your hurt when you arrived."

Luna stood and stared at the woman in confusion for a moment, then understanding seemed to dawn in her expression. She took Angie's hand in her own, turning it palm upwards, then she touched the center of the palm with one finger. Angie seemed to glow for a brief second and Harry blinked in astonishment. He wasn't sure if it had been a trick of the lighting or not.

"I am honored to receive her blessing," Luna said softly, then she turned Angie's hand again, gripping it normally. She turned to Harry. "You didn't tell me you had a high priestess on the island."

Harry blinked. "Luna," he said in a pained voice, "you just got up. Hell, I just got up. We haven't exactly had the time for deep, meaningful conversations yet."

"Well, next time we'll skip the conversation about Norman and jump right into the important stuff," Luna said. Her anger was still there, but the presence of the priestess and her blessing had increased her level of control over it.

"He told you who Norman is?" asked Angie incredulously. "He wouldn't tell me!"

Harry sunk his head into his hands. "It's going to be one of those days," he groaned, then he looked up and out the glass doors. "I think I'll go check on the Lily."

He started to rise when Luna glared at him. "Sit!" she barked

He sat and looked up at her in surprise.

"Healers orders. Stay away from the salt water until your burns heal."

"Now that's scary. That's exactly what Hermione would say," he muttered. "What did I do to deserve this?"

Angie cackled with laughter and Harry stood and walked over to the sink, placing his cup in it.

"Where do you think you're going?" Luna asked.

"To work on the enlargement charm?" he asked, suddenly feeling like a three year old, asking for permission to cross the street.

"Alright, but don't make a mess."

He nodded and retreated into the study.

Luna watched him go with a slight smile, then she turned back to Angie.

"He really is a good man," Angie said softly, watching Harry retreat to the study.

"He is, and Hermione has worked wonders with him," Luna replied. Her hand trembled and her eyes filled with tears. "Damnation and Merlin's hairy balls! I want to scream! I want to kill them!" she gasped, then she took a deep breath and gripped the table tightly with her hands.

Angie eyed her for a moment. "He must have been very special. You married him despite knowing what was coming."

Luna sighed and nodded her agreement. She started to look down at the table when a hand touched her shoulder. She looked up to see Hermione smiling at her.

"Tell us about him. Please?" Hermione asked.

She sighed as Hermione moved to sit next to her.

Hermione placed a cup of tea in front of her and waited for Luna. Unlike Harry, who now drank coffee exclusively, Hermione insisting on sticking with her British roots.

"I met Richard when I went to M.I.T. as an exchange student from Cambridge. I was pursuing my undergraduate degree..."

Hermione's eyes widened when she realized that Luna had pursued a muggle education far above and beyond anything she had considered possible for a witch.

"And you fell in love, despite knowing what would happen?" pressed Angie.

Luna shook her head. "It doesn't always work that way. What I see are choices and outcomes. There is no clear path that one can follow. It's all a matter of picking and choosing, like following branches in a tree. I knew what Richard's fate would be if I didn't marry him and I knew what it would

be if I did. I gave him two years he...we wouldn't have had otherwise.”

“Oh, Luna,” Hermione murmured, her eyes filling with tears. It finally sunk home that Luna had fallen in love with and married a man she knew was doomed.

Luna looked down and sniffled. Inside, her anger burned brightly and she still wanted to lash out. But this wasn't the place or the time for that. An idea bubbled to the surface in the back of her mind and she'd need to talk to Harry about it. But if her lawyer had followed her instructions, there would be some interesting packages waiting for her in Nassau.

Angie looked at her with interest, then she frowned, slightly seeing something she didn't like. “Child, are you sure that's the path you want to take?”

Luna's eyes narrowed and she looked at the old woman. “You are very gifted, priestess,” she said softly. “And no, I'm not sure of my path yet. But I do want to keep my options open.”

Hermione looked between the two women in wonder. “What's going on?”

“She's a soul reader,” Luna said simply.

Hermione turned to Angie in surprise. She knew the woman had no innate magical talents.

Angie shrugged. “I've always been able to read people fairly easily. Your friend here is considering a dark path. She's hiding her hurt and refusing to let it out. The path might be the right one, but right now she has the wrong reasons.”

“You can't hold it in, Luna,” Harry said from the doorway. “Holding it in kills you slowly. I know, I lost count of the number of times I tried to kill myself before Hermione arrived. It kills you slowly.”

Luna glanced up at him in surprise. His eyes were distant, but the pain was obvious in his expression.

He shook himself slightly and focused on her. “We're here to help you,” he said earnestly.

“We want to help, Luna,” Hermione repeated softly.

Harry moved to crouch down by her side, then took one of her hands in his own and looked into her pale blue eyes. She could feel both of them tugging on her and their pull was irresistible. Hermione leaned a little closer.

“Will you let them help you, child?” Angie asked quietly.

Luna's dropped her gaze to the table and nodded her agreement, then a sob tore itself free from her throat. Hermione leaned closer and wrapped the girl in an embrace. That was all it took and she broke down weeping on her shoulder. Harry moved to embrace both women tightly.

Angie leaned back in her chair and smiled to herself. She had known since yesterday that a powerful force had arrived on the island. It wasn't Luna's magic that alarmed her, it was her ability to influence Harry and Hermione. The blond knew her unique position in this unusual triad, and her anger had burned like a beacon. It was eating at her and would continue to eat away unless someone stepped in and gave her a nudge.

That was her primary reason for walking the two miles from the compound to Harry's villa. She needed to nudge these three closer. Each was incomplete, but combined they would be a powerful force, especially now that Luna would allow the others to help her.

Norman's Cay Infirmary...

Alicia Spinnet-Weasley sat tiredly at the desk. She hadn't planned on spending all night in the infirmary but some of the people rescued yesterday were in really bad shape. Fred and George had deviated slightly from Harry's instructions, thanks in part to the anal retentiveness of the Ministry of Magic. The twins were certain that it had to be a move implemented by Percy. Only he would insist that each cell be clearly labeled with the name and blood status of the prisoner.

As it turned out, that information worked to their advantage. At least half of the people they portkeyed to the infirmary had been unconscious. One woman was clearly pregnant and showed every sign of having been exposed to the Cruciatus curse. Alicia had spent half the night trying to save the baby. Ultimately she'd had no choice but to help the woman miscarry the fetus.

And there were some very well known names. Blaise Zabini was finally resting comfortably. He was in the small, two bed critical care unit, with Gabrielle monitoring his condition continuously. He had so many broken bones it was safer and easier to count the number of unbroken bones. And that was just the simple stuff. It was a miracle that he still lived.

Penelope Clearwater arrived, hysterical. She saw Fred and George and she clung to them, weeping profusely. Percy had ordered her arrest, and until the twins had arrived, she'd expected to die, as her execution had been scheduled for that very day. They had arrived just in time.

Alicia looked over her notes and checked her patient charts again. Harry had been injured, but according to the paperwork Gabrielle submitted, it was minor. She tallied up the results of her labors. Sixteen patients had arrived yesterday evening. Two were treated and released to Hermione. One died at four in the morning, one was in guarded condition and the remainder were physically stable, if not mentally.

She felt a pair of hands tug at her hair, then someone nibbled on her neck. She sighed and leaned into the gentle caress.

“Rough night, love?”

She looked up at Fred and nodded.

He glanced around, then carefully picked up a chair and moved it so he could straddle it next to her. He didn't want to make any noise and wake up her patients.

"Well, then I have just the ticket for you," he said quietly. "George is upstairs with Angelina. They're restocking your potions cabinet. And you, my love, are going to come home where I'm going to give you a nice hot bath and some breakfast, then I'm going to put you in bed to sleep. If you're really lucky, I'll volunteer to give you one of my patented foot massages before I put you to bed."

She smiled and leaned over to kiss his cheek. "That sounds heavenly," she replied tiredly. She straightened up her papers and stood. Fred stood and embraced her, then he apparated them both home for a much deserved rest.

Ministry of Magic, Department of Magical Law Enforcement...

Dumbledore stepped from the office and slammed the door, causing heads to turn in his direction. He angrily slapped at a stinging bite at his neck, then scratched his bare arms. He was dressed in only a pair of boxer shorts, with tiny hearts on them. The hearts had little wings that fluttered and flapped as they moved around.

When he glared at the secretary and she squeaked in fear. "I'll send for your clothes immediately, Headmaster."

He slapped at another sting and glowered at the woman, who was trying her best not to quail under his gaze. Hours ago he had been unceremoniously pulled from his office and dragged to the Ministry in manacles. Once there, he had been stripped and subjected to an extremely rude body search, supervised by that hag, Umbridge!

After the search he had been interrogated for hours, then they tried several different types of truth serum, as they were convinced he could fight their effects. The last serum had been experimental, which had an unpleasant side effect of extreme flatulence.

He slapped at another sting, then farted loudly. He looked around the office, but everyone was studiously trying to pretend they didn't notice anything. That was easier said than done, however, as those closest to him were grimacing at the smell, noses twitching almost violently.

Kingsley Shacklebolt approached Dumbledore, carrying a bag of his clothing.

"I'm sorry, Albus. I tried to tell the director that you couldn't possibly be involved with the attack on the Ministry," he said, then he slapped the back of his head and scratched his shoulder.

Dumbledore snatched the bag from his hand and glared at the Auror. Then he reached in and pulled out his robe and quickly put it on. He paused to smack at another sting, then passed gas once more.

Kingsley took a step backwards as the green, noxious fumes rose around Dumbledore. The paint cracked and peeled from the wall behind him.

"I can't believe the Ministry would think I had something to do with the escape of some prisoners," he grumbled angrily. "And what's with these bugs!" he screamed.

Shacklebolt took another step back and everyone stopped to stare at the angry Leader of the Light.

"We don't know. The Ministry is filled with them," Kingsley replied lamely.

Dumbledore clutched the bag with the rest of his possessions, glared around angrily, then apparated with a deafening crack.

Kingsley staggered backwards, his eyes widening at Dumbledore's departure. The Headmaster had just made a big mistake!

Straightening up, he ignored the screaming of the apparation alarm and turned to the department secretary. "Send someone down to the containment tank," he said heavily, rubbing his forehead tiredly. "The Headmaster obviously forgot about the anti-apparation ward he put in place after the Manchester break-in."

The Headmaster had created a ward to shunt people attempting to apparate to or from the MLE to a special holding room. Kingsley and others had altered the holding room after the last attack on the Ministry. Right now, the Headmaster was immersed in a tank containing some of the pyropiranha saved from the time the Department of Mysteries had been flooded.

Kingsley winced as the screams echoed loudly from downstairs. It was going to be a very long day.

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

He leaned against the railing on the deck, his gaze fixed on the horizon. Hermione and Angie were in with Luna. She finally broke down in tears several hours ago and all three of them had been helping her since. Harry excused himself when they convinced Luna to take a light sleeping potion. Hermione was helping the blond undress and he didn't think he needed to be present for that.

Hermione stepped out of the house and moved to stand next to him. She rested her elbows on the railing.

"Is she alright?" he asked.

"Yes. She's sleeping now and Angie's gone home. But you know this isn't over yet."

He nodded and stared out over the water. "I know," he replied softly, then he fell silent for a moment before speaking again. "Did you ever notice that we seem to mark important points in our lives by the death of someone? Here I stand, puzzling over why I feel sadder than I should. I mean, I'm sad for Luna, but I think I would have liked to have known her Richard. If he was good enough for Luna to marry, he must have been special indeed."

She slipped her arm inside his and hugged his arm against her. "I feel it too," she whispered.

He nodded and watched a cormorant dive from a hundred feet up. The bird barely made a splash and surfaced a moment later with a tail hanging from its mouth.

"Dobby brought me a list of the people we rescued. One of them is an enchanter who apprenticed under a wand maker. We needed one of those," he said softly. "Alicia lost one patient last night, and one woman miscarried her baby."

Hermione sucked her breath in sharply and looked at him. His eyes were closed, but she could feel his anger and power simmering just under the surface.

"I couldn't believe that they were doing that," he said simply, then he turned to look at her. "Did you know we rescued Penelope Clearwater? Apparently she wasn't pure enough for Percy and if that wasn't bad enough, she had been told that she had been scheduled to be thrown through the veil today. Today!"

He turned away from her and gripped the railing tightly. "It's like Voldemort all over again, only now instead of one madman, the whole world has turned mad."

His hand flared with magic and clouds started to form overhead.

"Harry!" Hermione said in alarm.

He closed his eyes and took a deep breath, then another. Slowly, he released the magic and the clouds began to disperse. Hermione looked skyward and relaxed. The last thing she wanted him to do was start messing around with global weather patterns.

"I'm afraid. I'm afraid your job has suddenly become that much harder, my love," he whispered. "I think I could easily be convinced to go destroy them now, and I'm sure Luna probably has similar thoughts."

Hermione looked at him for a long moment and he wondered what she was thinking. Then she sighed. "I think you're right. I'll have to keep both of you from running off on a crusade. But I think Luna is going to be the one to worry me the most. You, at least, are willing to let me help you.

"I'm not going to let you kill anyone Harry. No, let me amend that. I'm not going to let you start a fight with them. If they come here, I know you will do whatever it takes, even if it means killing them, to protect us."

He nodded, accepting her limitations, but he added one proviso. If the Ministry ever came to the island, he'd make them regret it. Once he was through with them, they'd remember Voldemort as nothing more than a quaint man with an unfortunate temper problem.

Hermione knew that look and decided to get his mind onto something else. "How are you coming with your enlargement charm?"

He turned and motioned for her to sit on one of the deck chairs. "It's sort of complex, but I think I have a solution. The problem is that, according to my notes we'll only be able to do the enlargement two more times."

"How much space will that give us? And what's so complex about it; besides from the obvious impossibility of what we're discussing?"

"When it's done, the island will be sixty miles wide by one hundred and eighty long."

She blinked and stared at him.

He ran his hand through his hair. "Yeah, I know. That last doubling is going to be difficult."

"Difficult? Harry are you listening to yourself? What you're talking about is impossible!"

He frowned. "No it isn't, it's just hard to do. Besides, this isn't so much a charm as it is a ritual with a reinforcing feedback loop."

She held up a hand. "Stop. Let's take this from the top."

He nodded and waved a hand, causing a transparent map of the island to appear between the two of them.

"Alright, the first problem is locating and isolating every structure on the island, fixed or movable. We do that by etching some runes in the structure. If we don't etch the runes, then the structure would be included in the ritual, and end up expanding. Think about that. It means that our house could end up four times bigger in all dimensions. I don't know about you, but I don't think I want to live in a place with sixty foot ceilings."

Hermione nodded. The exclusion made sense. And etching runes shouldn't be that hard to accomplish, even if they had to do it to every structure on the island. "Alright, I can see why you want to do that."

"Right. The next thing is, we need to make sure everyone is inside when the ritual is performed. Anyone outside could be caught in its effects," he said seriously, then frowned. "That could get messy."

He hopped up to sit on the railing and looked down at her. "The ritual itself isn't very difficult. Setting up the ritual area is going to be a problem, but Dobby assures me that he and several of the other Elves can help me prepare the area."

"So, what's the problem then?"

He scowled. "The incantation is going to be quite long and involved. I won't have to memorize it, but if I misread anything, I'll have to back off and restart it. In the meantime, people will have to stay indoors for the entire time. I figure it will take me at least three hours to read it."

She crossed her arms and glared at him. "Harry you can't read a three hour incantation perfectly. You have trouble with anything over five minutes without stumbling."

Harry grinned and rubbed the back of his neck. "Well, I was kind of hoping you'd look at it and find ways of trimming it down. I've worked out the basic Arithmancy, but you're the expert."

She grinned at him, pleased with his response. "Alright, I'll start picking apart your work tomorrow. Now, not to change the subject, but I have to ask. What was in that jar you had me throw at the Ministry before we left?"

Harry grinned maliciously. "Mosquitoes. Millions and millions of them. Well, one actually and a duplicating charm that will take days to wear off."

Hermione giggled and he grinned back at her. The idea of filling the Ministry building full of mosquitoes tickled her fancy. The mosquitoes on Norman's Cay were particularly voracious if you weren't prepared for them and knew the charm that Amos had developed.

"You, Mr. Potter, are decidedly evil," she said, laughing.

"And they thought Voldemort was bad?" Harry asked. "What's a killing curse when compared to hundreds of mosquito bites?" He snorted. "Who needs a Dark Lord when you've got a slightly touched malcontent with a devious imagination?"

"And friends with enough ideas to make the Ministry jumpy for the next hundred years," Hermione added, her eyes dancing.

"Oh, yes," he said, his eyes becoming unfocused as ideas began to percolate through his mind. "You know, these sorts of rescues wouldn't be necessary if I just destroyed the Ministry. Or, better yet, I could just skin Dumbledore and hang him in the atrium as a warning. I could turn all the ICW's aurors into Blast-Ended Skrewts and the high council into Flobberworms."

"Harry," Hermione admonished lightly.

His eyes began to glow and the smile that began to form on his lips wasn't quite...right.

"I could give Percy to the Goblins. Or better yet, I'll give him to Penelope! I'll break Snape out of Azkaban and give him to the twins as a test subject. I'll give Shackbolt to Luna. She can have her revenge for Richard. I get what's left, though, for Minerva. I'll turn Hogwarts into a muggle petting zoo."

"Harry," she said quietly, beginning to worry a bit.

"Diagon Alley will become the next big muggle tourist trap. We'll sell cheesy ceramic statues of Merlin and Morgana for a mint! We'll turn the Ministry building into a muggle orphanage and force the Ministry workers to care for them."

Shaking her head, Hermione leaned forward and poked him in the chest. "Come back, love. You can have fun storming the Ministry later."

He looked down at her and sighed. "Right. So, where were we again?"

FINI
(For Now)