

Kinsfire
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Harry Potter and the Paradigm Shift

Chapter 1

The pink-haired young woman watched as the boy she'd been minding these last few months left with his family, if you could call them that. "Remus, look at his face," she said quietly to one of the men with her. "He'd much rather be anywhere else. Hell, he'd probably rather be doing a detention with Delores Umbridge, that old toad!"

The gaunt, grey-haired man nodded sadly. "It pains me to watch that, but he needs that protection that Lily's sacrifice gives him. If there were any other way, don't you think that Albus would have used it by now?"

"I'm wondering more and more, Remus. What good do the blood protections do if he survives in a place where they make him not want to live? Do you really think that they're going to get him the help he so desperately needs to get through his grief over the death of Sirius? You heard Albus – Harry blames himself. So what sort of counselling is he going to get?" Remus opened his mouth to speak. "Don't answer; it was rhetorical. Something has to be done, damn it all!"

She stood scowling after the Dursleys, even though they were no longer in sight. Finally, she spun on her heel. "I need to talk to someone. I'll see you guys later." With that she stalked over to the brick column between Platforms 9 and 10 and walked right through it. As soon as she was through, she Apparated.

Appearing at the Apparation point for the Auror department, she headed for the office of her ultimate superior, Amelia Bones. She ran into the woman on the way there. "Madam Bones! May I have a moment of your time?"

"Certainly, Auror Tonks," the middle aged witch replied. "I'm on my way back to my office. Why don't we talk in there?" They engaged in small talk for the remainder of the walk to Madam Bones office. Once the door was closed, however, things changed. "Well, Nymphadora, this must be important if you jumped the entire chain of command just to speak to me," the head of the Department of Magical Law Enforcement said calmly, in a voice that threatened dire things for her career.

"I think it is ma'am – even if it means I never get promoted again. It's about Harry." Bones eyebrows rose. "He's back with those Muggles who raised him, and I think he's in danger. He just watched his godfather die, and thinks it was his fault. He's going to get absolutely zero by way of grief therapy this summer, or during the school year. He needs someone to talk to, and I'm volunteering to be that one."

"There's more to this than simply being there to talk to him, isn't there, Nymphadora?" Amelia Bones asked pointedly.

Tonks blushed quickly, but ruthlessly suppressed it. "Yes, ma'am. Potential suicide prevention. I propose to ..." Tonks stopped and blushed harder. "I propose to move into the Dursley home

with him, magically enlarging his bedroom to allow room for a small house, if you will. Plenty of room for two people, and room for him to be by himself without being completely alone, if you know what I mean.”

“Why you, and not someone else, such as Remus Lupin? He’s close to the boy, and the boy respects him.”

“Harry needs someone closer to his own age. I’m an adult, but I can understand the pressures that he’s going through, both as a recent student and as someone on You Know Who’s hit list.” She sighed. “Let’s also not forget that he’s going through the grief of losing one of the best friends he’s had since he was eleven years old. They may have had that falling out, but when they made up, they were as tight as when they’d been children. His grief is still too fresh and too raw to inflict on Harry.”

“Why not allow one of his best friends to move in with him?”

“Have they been given training in grief counselling? Don’t answer that, ma’am – we both know the answer. He needs someone with some general understanding of his pain. We both loved Sirius, ma’am. He was my cousin, once removed, and I loved him like the dickens. Harry found a father figure in him. I can approach him from a grief standpoint and from the standpoint of someone who isn’t really that much his elder. Six years is a hell of a lot easier to surmount than nearly four times that, as it would be with Lupin. Don’t get me wrong – Remus loves the boy to pieces, but he’s still got a bit of that professor thing going with Harry. Harry still calls him that sometimes. Me? I’m Tonks. Just Tonks. A girl he knows who can make him laugh sometimes, who ignores it when she catches him sneaking a peek at her.” She grinned. “I can use that too. He’s too much the gentleman to ever say anything to me, but I’m betting I can get him to speak to me.”

“Don’t break the boy’s heart, Tonks,” Madam Bones said, and Tonks breathed a sigh of relief. If she’d returned to the Tonks appellation, that meant that Madam Bones was pretty well sold on the idea. “What does Dumbledore think of the idea?”

“He doesn’t know yet, ma’am, and I have no intention of telling him until it’s a fait accompli. He doesn’t truly understand what Harry has been through, and thinks that because Harry doesn’t say anything, everything is fine. I don’t want Albus discovering this until it’s a foregone conclusion. That happens to be part of why I came to you. You’re my ultimate boss, and can put me on this duty so that I don’t have to use up all my time just to do what I’m planning to anyway.”

“You love him, don’t you?” Amelia asked suddenly, and chuckled when Tonks blushed the brightest she’d ever seen. “Ignore my comments about breaking the boy’s heart. You’d never do that intentionally.” The head of the Magical Law Enforcement Department sat back in her chair, and thought for a moment. Sitting forward again, she reached for her quill and some parchment. After scribbling for a moment, she handed it to Tonks. “Take this to your immediate supervisor. You’re on detached duty until it’s deemed that you’re no longer needed on that duty. Unlimited expense account, but remember that it *does* get audited. Take what stores you need.” The woman paused, and then scribbled something else on another parchment. “This authorises you to teach

him magic during the summer. The only person who can override this is Fudge, and given the current situation, I doubt he will." She smiled. "Treat him well, Tonks."

"I know I'm a pervert for falling for a boy who's only sixteen – well, sixteen in a little more than a month – but I actually did fall for Harry. I would never hurt him on purpose."

"Don't worry about the age difference," Amelia chuckled. "I was ten years old the year my husband was born. Six years is huge now, but in a few years, no one will care. Go, get yourself ready. Your mission starts today. Be aware I may extend it to have you continue to protect him at Hogwarts."

"Oh no – more years as a student," Tonks laughed. She let her eyes twinkled merrily. "At least I'll be able to check out some of those broom closets I never did first time around." She wiggled her eyebrows at Madam Bones, who laughed.

"Get out of here, you," she finally laughed. Becoming suddenly serious, she added, "Good luck with the assignment. I have the feeling you'll need it."

"I know I will. Grief's a damn tough thing to work through. At least we can work it through together. We both loved Sirius, and I look forward to the day we can drag Pettigrew before the Wizengamot and give him the trial Sirius never had."

Amelia Bones nodded. "If only someone other than Harry had seen Pettigrew alive, we could use that to clear Sirius."

"Damn," Tonks said. "The only other person who was an adult at the time was Remus, and they won't listen to him because he's a werewolf."

"Wait – Remus Lupin saw Pettigrew at the same time Harry did?" At Tonks nod, the head of the Magical Law Enforcement smiled the largest smile anyone had ever seen in that department. "Find him and ask him if he'd be willing to submit to Veritaserum to verify the existence of Pettigrew. If Fudge can use secret trials, I can use secret evidence to clear someone's name." She smiled a nasty smile. "Besides, when I finally get my hands on Lucius Malfoy, I can use him to corroborate that, not to mention what I think we're going to discover about some Ministry officials." At Tonks quirked eyebrow, Madam Bones explained, "Minister Fudge has it set up so that all requests to speak to the Death Eaters in Azkaban *must* go through his hands."

"If you can promise him that it'll stay secret, I'm betting Remus will agree to testify to you."

"I want Sirius cleared as much as you do, Tonks. He may have been a right royal smart-aleck, but he was ... a-heh ... 'serious' about fighting You Know Who. Now get out of here. You have a job to do, missy," Amelia said, suddenly all business. The twinkle in her eyes told Tonks that she wasn't entirely serious in her complaint.

Tonks first visited the Underage Magic Department and did not leave until she had a signed verification that the order had been processed, and that Harry Potter would *not* be contacted if he

was discovered to be doing magic this summer. She then headed to her own section, catching up with Kingsley Shacklebolt.

"Hey, Shack!" she said quietly. "Got an order here from the big chief. I'm on detached duty until further notice." She handed the order to him, which he quickly read.

"Harry, right?" the large black man's voice rumbled softly. When she nodded, he said, "Good thinking. He's in no condition right now to deal with the crap those Dursleys are going to heap on him. If it weren't for Albus insisting that he's safest there, I'd pull him out and do a Lockheart on those damned Muggles."

"Well, I'll be there to talk to him, and to protect him a bit. Might be fun to watch and hit them with the fact that no matter what Harry keeps saying in his notes to the Order, an Order member knows what really happened."

Kingsley chuckled quietly. "I like the way you think. Since you have Amelia's okay, get what you think you'll need from the quartermaster." He paused. "Not to be rude about it, Tonks, but make sure you take some contraceptive potions. I've seen you two looking at each other – you've both got it bad."

"Disappointed in me, Kingsley?" she asked a little despondently.

"Hell no!" he replied. "All I ask is that if it happens, could you at least wait until he's sixteen? Less problems that way."

"It really doesn't bother you that ..."

"That you're sweet on someone roughly six years younger than you? Answer me this – would you be this worried if he were twenty and you were twenty-six?"

She thought for a moment. "No. But then he'd be an adult."

"True enough – legally speaking. Answer this one now – you know what he's been through. Emotionally speaking, is he an adult?"

"Hard to say – he's got so many reactions that are pure teenager, but then there are those times where he'll surprise people three and four times his age. Overall? Yeah, he's fairly mature." She laughed. "If I'm gonna be brutally honest 'bout it, he's probably more mature than me!"

Kingsley laughed outright. "I'm glad you saved me the trouble, Tonks!" Her scowl would have been a lot more effective if her mouth wasn't quirking upwards at the edges. "Now get going. You have a mission to deal with."

She hit her desk and wrote out a list – books for training, complete sets of various tools he would need such as a potions set, the contraceptives that Kingsley suggested – *damn, why am I hoping so hard that I need them this summer?* She blushed to herself as she realized that her knickers were slightly damp, and she knew damned well that she wasn't incontinent. She finished her list and

went to the quartermaster's, getting a raised eyebrow at the size of her requested list. She began to get an argument from them, but simply tapped her finger next to the signature on the bottom of the parchment. Grumbling, they complied, handing her a very small case a few minutes later. She curtsied to them mockingly and left.

Ruddy bastards fight giving out supplies as if they were giving out their own stuff, she mused with some annoyance as she cleaned up her desk before leaving for Morgana only knew how long. Finally finished, she stood up to leave, and promptly tripped, knocking over her waste bin. She heard a snort from the door and heard, "Now that's a view many a man would pay to see."

She rolled out from the embarrassing position she was in, with her rear end high in the air, and scowled at the man in the doorway. She brightened almost immediately. "Remus! Just the man I wanted to see!" She pulled him into the room and closed the door. "Amelia Bones wants to talk to you. If you can testify that you saw Pettigrew in Harry's third year, she'll trust it and get Sirius a posthumous pardon, or more likely a full acquittal, since he was never given an actual trial!" As he started to look worried, she added, "She's promised to keep your identity secret. Fighter against Voldie, that sort of thing, I guess. She says that if Fudge can do secret trials, she can do secret witnesses."

"Okay. Can you get me in to talk to her?"

"Let's try." As they walked toward the office of the head of the Department of Magical Law Enforcement, she asked, "What brings you here, by the way? Other than the chance to admire my beautiful arse?"

He laughed. "I wanted to see if your idea, whatever it was, worked out. Probably not, since you're here in the office."

She laughed. "If you'd been another ten minutes later, I would have been gone. My idea was approved." She paused. "I'm moving in with Harry," she said with a smile.

He stopped dead in the hallway at that pronouncement. When she turned, grinning, he smiled back at her. "Almost had me there for a moment, Tonks. Really, what *are* you doing?"

She grinned back at him. "Living with Harry for the summer. He needs someone there for grief therapy, he needs a protector from the Aurors, and a certain group we know of shouldn't complain too much about a little added protection for him." She watched his eyes, and then said, "I'm serious, Remus. I'll be moving into his bedroom, enlarging it to the size of a small house, and we'll have privacy for him, a permanent guard, and someone to teach him over the summer."

"Are you aware of ... um, how do I say this as to not offend you?" Remus had his hand on the back of his neck, wincing in embarrassment.

"The fact that we both want to jump each other?" she said. "I'm not going to force it," *too much*, she added internally, "but neither am I going to stop him if I find him getting amorous with me. It'll be a damn sight better than having him moping around all day wondering if he should just kill

himself." She blushed furiously. "And if he gets amorous with me, at least he'll have a lover who actually loves him, not someone who wants to shag the Boy Who Lived." She smirked. "I'll wait for him to make the first move – unless it's obvious that he's ready, but is just afraid to say something. Boys can be that way."

Remus smiled at her widely, a toothy grin that she hadn't seen in a long time, and was surprised to see this recently after Sirius's death. "Then, as your cousin might have said, 'Go forth and sin some more,' Tonks. I can see that you do care, and that was my biggest worry." He pulled her into a hug. "Thank you."

She found herself surprised to be sniffing when the hug broke. "Now let's get you to Amelia, and she can explain things to you." They continued the walk to Madam Bones office at a brisk pace.

She was surprised to find both Arthur Weasley and Kingsley Shacklebolt outside her office. "Oh dear – bad time for me to come to her office again, isn't it?" she asked with some worry.

Just at that moment, the door opened, and Amelia Bones said, "Actually, Auror Tonks, your timing couldn't be better. Gentlemen, Miss Tonks – please come into my office."

The situation was explained to Remus, who agreed to secrecy once it was pointed out that Fudge might overturn it if it were known that a werewolf were the informant, as opposed to "a brave individual whose name we must keep confidential for his own safety". Amelia had chuckled at that wonderfully pompous imitation of Cornelius Fudge, by Arthur Weasley of all people. By the time that word might get out that it was a werewolf who had given the proof, it would be too late for them to overturn Sirius's acquittal, especially since Fudge was getting dangerously close to a 'no confidence' vote before the Wizengamot.

With Tonks, Shacklebolt, and Arthur Weasley there as witnesses to the questioning, Remus was asked about that fateful night during Harry's third year. Tears leaked from his eyes as he relived that night, and the horrible transformation he had undergone that had allowed Pettigrew to escape and return to Voldemort. "I blame myself for the death of the Diggory boy. If I'd but taken my potion, as I should have, then I would not have caused the distraction that permitted Pettigrew to escape. A family has no son because I was lax."

"You are not at fault for another's actions, Mister Lupin," Amelia said gently. "Or are you responsible for You Know Who's actions?"

"Of course not," Remus said.

"It was He Who Must Not Be Named who caused the death of Cedric Diggory. He could simply have allowed him to leave, perhaps to tell the world that He had risen again. Instead, You Know Who killed him."

"I'm partial to calling him Lord Thingy, as our darling Minister does," Tonks quipped. "Treats the guy with the respect he's truly due, if you catch my meaning." Remus chuckled, and the admonition died on Madam Bones' lips with an amused smile. "You know," Tonks said. "Harry

carries around that same guilt, Remus, and he's just as culpable as you are. Which is to say, not at all. I think you and I will have to hammer that one home to him."

It was only a short time later when Tonks left the room to go on her mission, another piece of parchment in her hands. She had tears in her eyes – tears of happiness, tinged with the sorrowful knowledge that the man this had all been for would never know what had been done for him. She cleared her mind with difficulty and Apparated to her home.

Once there, she packed a large bag with clothing, everything from clothes to work out in to clothes for going out for a night on the town, and even one negligee that she was quite certain would cause Harry some blood flow problems. A moment later she shrugged and emptied her entire wardrobe into her bag, shrinking the thing down finally for ease of carrying.

Shrugging as she looked around the place, she Apparated into Harry's bedroom. She was greeted by a fist to the stomach, which was immediately followed by a knee to the forehead as she doubled over. As she hit the floor, gagging out "Good ... reflexes," she heard Harry whisper, "Oh my God, what have I done?"

"Proven that you've got what it takes to survive, Harry," she wheezed as she tried to catch her breath. She took a deep breath and ignored the pain in her stomach. "If you were an Auror, Harry, I'd be putting you in for a commendation," she said, her voice gaining strength as she spoke. "You took advantage of an opportunity and incapacitated your target. Moody would be proud of you, and chewing me out for dropping my guard, as well he should."

"Yeah, but you don't hit your friends," he said.

"You do if they show up unannounced, knowing that you're also being chased by dark wizards who want you dead. If I was stupid enough not to send an owl ahead to say 'Wotcher!', then you should do exactly what you just did." She smiled. "I'm telling Moody what happened when I talk to him next."

"Please don't," Harry said, eyes pleading. "I don't want you getting a dressing down because you trusted me wrongly."

"Okay, stop right there," she said. "That's got at least two levels to it, and I'm gonna deal with 'em separately. First off, why did you lash out at me?"

"I had no idea who you were," he said.

"Exactly. I could have been a dark wizard bent on killing you, in which case you'd undoubtedly be standing over an unconscious person right now, since I know you wouldn't have stopped as you did when you recognized me." He nodded as he grudgingly agreed with her. "Now for the other one that I noticed immediately. I still trust you. You proved that I can, oddly enough, by doing exactly what you did. You struck out when you thought it necessary, but stopped when you recognized me."

She decided it was time for the truth. "Harry, I trust you enough that I'm trusting you with everything. I convinced my bosses to put me on guard duty with you for the summer. I'm going to be living with you in this room until September."

His eyes darkened. "Dumbledore's that afraid I'm gonna try something that he needs a minder that close to me?"

She laughed. "Old pointy hat doesn't even know about this yet. He won't find out for a short while, by which point it will be too late."

"Why?" he asked, puzzled. "Why are you doing this, then?"

She shrugged. "Multiple reasons. As I told my bosses – it's about time you got some actual grief counselling, and I think someone who can actually understand what you're feeling is best." She paused. "Oh, before I forget!" She reached into her cleavage (surreptitiously watching his reactions and pleased that he seemed slightly jealous of the parchment) and pulled out the proclamation of Sirius Black's innocence. "This is completely legitimate," she said. "I was there for the testimony proving that Pettigrew was still alive."

Harry stared at it for a long moment before he finally said, "Isn't Remus taking an awful chance doing this?"

"How do you know it was him?" she asked.

"Be honest. There are only two who know that Pettigrew is alive, and the other one would rather have his balls stapled to a flag and then be hoisted into the air before he did *anything* for Sirius, dead or alive." He suddenly realized that his outburst had been aimed at a female, and blushed furiously. "Um, I'm sorry about ..."

"I'll have to remember that description and quote it to the Order next time he's there," she laughed. "We're friends, Harry – never you mind about offending me."

"Still, it *was* a crude thing to say in front of a lady."

"I'm no lady, Harry – you know that." His face underwent the look of someone trying very hard not to say the first thing that came into his mind, and she smiled to inwardly. *He's not completely depressed. Either that, or he's really good at masking his true feelings.*

Finally, he cleared his throat, blushing furiously. "Um, you talked about living in this room with me. It's a bit small for that, Tonks. That bed is barely big enough for me."

She wiggled her eyebrows at him and put on an over-the-top smoky voice. "Sounds perfect for the two of us, then."

She got the response she wanted when he laughed, still blushing hot enough to light a fire, and responded, "I suppose so, if you get turned on by having an elbow up your nose in the mornings."

“Oh baby,” she purred in the same over-the-top voice before bursting into her signature braying laugh.

They silenced immediately when they heard Vernon pound up the stairs and throw the door open. “WHAT ARE YOU DOING IN MY HOUSE?” he bellowed. “GET OUT!”

Harry winked at her quickly, mouthing “Play along,” and said, “I’m sorry, Uncle, but you can’t do that. The Order decided that I should have round-the-clock guarding, and the best person to do that was my girlfriend. Since we’ve been sleeping together already, it was decided that she’d be the best one to guard me, since I’m so used to her presence already.” He put an arm around Tonks and pulled her close.

Vernon cycled between puce, purple, and some unnamed shade that threatened to be mauve before finally settling on red as he bellowed, “I’LL NOT HAVE YOU SHAGGING SOME TROLLOP IN MY HOUSE – UNDER MY ROOF ...” That was as far as he got, because Harry had lifted him off the ground and slammed him against the wall.

“I’ll not have you insulting any woman in my presence, Vernon, unless it’s your own wife, who truly deserves it.” His knee came up and impacted just to the side of the heavy man’s groin. “I won’t be as gentle with you next time.” He carried the gasping man to the door of his room and threw him out into the hallway. “I’ll also not be troubling you this summer. I’ll be here, but there will be no contact between us unless I wish it. And that is not a request.” He slammed the door on his stunned aunt and cousin.

“You didn’t have to do that, Harry,” Tonks said, unaware that her voice was throbbing with emotion. “You’ll have got in quite a bit of trouble with your uncle.”

“Pardon the language, but screw him.” He paused and then shuddered. “On second thought – ewww.”

Tonks laughed. “Seriously Harry, you really didn’t have to do that for me. I can defend myself.”

“I know, but I wanted to do it. You’re putting your career on hold to guard a teenaged boy for a summer. It’s a small way of thanking you.”

“Wrong, Harry. I’m spending the summer with a good friend of mine. The fact that I can also get paid for spending a summer with my friend, being there when he needs me – well, that’s just icing on the cake, so to speak.”

“All the more reason to do it. It’s bad enough to call a woman he hardly knows a trollop, to her face, but when that woman happens to be my friend? He’s lucky this time. If I could do magic during the summers, he’d have had a permanent problem.”

She whistled tunelessly and pulled another parchment from her cleavage. Handing it to him, she watched as an evil grin crossed his face. He grabbed his wand and murmured, “Oh Vernon?” before setting it down. He frowned suddenly. “Um, Tonks? I know I asked you to play along, but

I really shouldn't have ... well ... that sleeping together comment. That was out of line, and I'm sorry for that."

"Why?"

"Well, for one thing, it led to Fatty Senior calling you a trollop. Second, well ... um ... I wouldn't ... uh ..."

"Why not? Seeking for the other team?" she asked with an impish grin

"No!" he shouted, although she had to admit that it sounded more like a squeak.

"Then no harm done, Harry. We're friends, and friends joke with each other, and sometimes get each other involved with practical jokes." She grimaced. "Which sometimes backfire ...". She grinned again. "Is the concept of sleeping with me so distasteful?" His furious blush told her all she needed to know.

He finally shook his head to clear it and asked, trying to change the subject, "So, how are we really working this summer's scenario?"

Tonks grinned and pulled out her own wand from the same place the parchments had been, and saw him mouth "Damn, I wish I could be that lucky." She began to wave the wand around, saying, "Watch and learn." As he saw what she was doing, Harry's mouth dropped open in surprise.

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Harry Potter and the Paradigm Shift

Chapter 2

He knew the spells she was casting existed, but he'd never actually seen the spell to enlarge a room in effect. The room stretched out about fifteen metres in both directions. Her eyes flickered to the ceiling, and it rose another three metres above their heads. The size change out of the way, she grinned and began to swish and flick and jab her wand in various places – where she aimed, walls appeared, a kitchen came into being (complete with full island and hanging pot rack above it – he'd once heard someone refer to that setup as 'storm chimes', since it would take a major storm to make those pots start to clang together), a fireplace appeared in the area she had obviously decided was the common room-cum-office, and then he noted the bed. It was no longer the small thing barely large enough for him – it had become a king-sized four poster bed, in the Gryffindor colours – right down to the fringe along the edge of the bed.

He looked around the room in wonder, realizing that she had just shown him the real reason for studying. There was a great amount of detail in what she had done, and he was utterly astonished at how easily it seemed to be coming to her. The bed was covered in a thick comforter – alternating squares of Gryffindor red and gold, quilted with gold thread – and the posters on the bed looked carved with Gryffindor lions and the occasional phoenix. The canopy was the same Gryffindor red as that on the quilt, with exquisite short tassels in what almost appeared to be actual gold.

The rest of the place was equally as amazing. The fireplace was not brick, but red marble, and shone as if it had been polished by someone whose entire life was spent doing nothing but that one task. It had a wide mantel above it, gold in colour – again appearing as if it were the metal. Before the fireplace sat a piece of furniture that he'd always heard called a love seat, and never understood why. As his eyes flickered momentarily to Tonks, and then back to the seat, a quick vision of the two of them cuddling in that chair came to his mind, and he finally grasped its meaning. It looked comfortable, and he found himself hoping to spend a night or two with Tonks having fallen asleep in his arms in that chair.

Get real, said a voice in his head that sounded as if he were talking to himself. *Do you really think someone that amazing is going to even look twice at you as anything more than the child she has to mind? Yeah, she's your friend, but get real. There is no way you'll ever end up with a Tonks in this lifetime. You're more suited to a Pansy Parkinson.* He shuddered momentarily at the thought of waking up next to Pansy, and wondered if he'd have the courage to open a vein if *that* came to pass.

Harry, that's not terribly nice, Hermione's voice admonished him inside his skull. *She can't be all that bad.*

She's a Malfoy sycophant! he replied to 'her'. *Lips that have touched anything on Malfoy's body will never touch mine, if I have anything to say about it!*

Hmm, I can understand that, 'Hermione' replied. *The issue is whether or not you should pursue*

Tonks. I think you should. 'Go for the brass ring,' the phrase is? 'Nothing ventured, nothing gained'? What do you have to lose?

Her friendship, he answered sadly. I think I fell in love with her somewhere along the line, but ...

Face it, you're not worthy of her, his mental alter ego chimed in. You never will be.

"You're right," he murmured.

"What's that, Harry?" Tonks said over her shoulder as she continued to walk through the room. Harry had to admit that he was beginning to think of it as their apartment for the summer, rather than a simple room.

"Oh, nothing. Just talking to myself. I'm admiring the magnificent work you've done here, Tonks."

"Thank you, good sir. Wait until it's all completed." With that, she went back to working on the apartment, and he went back to admiring the decor. He suddenly realized that she has actually carpeted the floor with a soft carpet, in the same Gryffindor colours as the bed, fireplace and furniture. "Were you perchance a Gryffindor?" he asked with a laugh.

"What gave it away?" she laughed back at him.

"Your figure. Gryffindor always has the cutest girls in the school." It suddenly connected with him what he'd blurted out and turned an interesting shade of pink at the realization.

"Nice one, Harry," she said, coming over and kissing him on the cheek. "Thank you. It's nice to know I'm appreciated." She went back to working on the place.

He reached the kitchen, and somehow the change in colour scheme wasn't as jarring as he would have expected. This seemed to be the only room so far not decorated in red and gold. Instead, it was in the Ravenclaw colours of blue and black. The walls were pale blue and a brighter sky blue that made the area seem larger than it already was, with dark charcoal grey and black accents. It had a large stove, the wizarding equivalent of the Muggle refrigerator, a wizarding ice box, and a number of other things he'd never seen. He was astounded at the care at which she'd shown decorating this room and all the others. The cabinetry was already packed with pots, pans and other utensils. "All we need to do is a shopping trip for food, and we can eat here all summer, and never even bother your ... ahem ... family." she called, grimacing momentarily. "After I finish the bath-slash-water closet, I'll be done, and you can finish admiring my handiwork." She stepped through the door to the room in question, and Harry kept looking around. He turned to the wall opposite the fireplace and found a pair of beautiful roll-top desks in a dark, rich brown colour. "Hmm, need parchment too," Harry mused out loud. "Gonna need a trip to Diagon Alley, Tonks. I need more supplies for whatever you're going to teach me."

She came out of the room she'd been finishing up and smiled at him. "And how do you know that I'm planning on teaching you anything?"

"Because no one is likely to waste the chance to teach me more stuff over the summer," he laughed. He looked around for his trunk, and walked over to it. As he did, he felt his legs start to quiver slightly. "Stressful day, I guess," he said. A few steps more, though, and he found himself in actual pain, albeit quite low level. "What the ... what's happening to me? Why am I suddenly in pain?" The burning sensation in his arms, legs and back was getting steadily worse.

"Probably from lifting your fat uncle off the ground, now that I think about it," Tonks said. "C'mon. Let's get you into the bath room, and I'll put you in the whirlpool." At Harry's amused sideways look, she said, "If I'm living with a hunky Quidditch player for the summer, then I want all the frills. Whirlpool bath, marble fireplace, feather bed – all the necessities for a properly sybaritic lifestyle. And the cute guy to go with it, too!" she said, finally steering him through the door.

He stopped suddenly when he caught sight of the room – or, to be more precise – rooms. Placed unobtrusively enough that you had to look for it if you didn't know where it had been set (such as Harry at that moment) was the actual toilet. There was a shower with frosted glass walls. *Large enough for two people, I think*, Harry mused absently. *Four if they're friendly*. He looked again. *Really friendly*. Near it, under a window with the improbable view of a large snow-capped mountain somewhere, was a tub that she seemed to be steering him toward. Seating him on the edge of it, she began to run water, and then ordered him to strip. He blinked at her for a long moment, unbelieving of her request.

"Do you really want to be soaking those strained muscles in soggy clothing, Harry? Besides, I need you relaxed, and that isn't gonna happen with you just sitting there. So get undressed!"

"Um, Tonks? Could you ..." he asked, more than a little bit embarrassed.

"No. I'm your nurse right now, Harry, and I'm not about to leave you to your own devices where you might actually hurt yourself more. I can use magic to heal whatever damage was done to you, but you need to be relaxed, or else it will really cause no end of problems." She looked at him expectantly.

He shrugged and painfully began to pull the shirt over his head. She carefully helped him, not doing anything for him unless he simply was unable to do it himself, such as removing his trainers. Soon, he stood before her in nothing but his boxers, and she could tell that he was attempting to hide his reaction to being naked before her. "Harry? They'll have to come off, but I'll leave the room when the water is ready. I want you in that whirlpool in short order." She added a dollop or two of something that began to foam gently on the surface of the water. "For your modesty. I want you to know, though, that I'm also giving you a proper massage when you're finished with the soak. You strained quite a lot lifting that two-hundred-and-fifty stone whale." She laughed as Harry opened his mouth. "Okay, so I exaggerated by a factor of ten. I'm betting twenty stone isn't far off though, to be honest. But when you're not used to lifting that much, you hurt things. You pull muscles and damage tendons if you're not careful. Luckily, those are easy repairs for even me to handle – if you're properly relaxed."

He thought for a moment, and then removed his boxers while she was still in the room, displaying

both just how far down a blush can go on the human body, and also a rather pointed interest in the woman before him. As quickly as he could, he climbed into the water.

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Great Morgana, how does he have enough blood in his body to do anything else when that ... that thing is standing up like it is? she thought with more than a little heat firing through her. *Thank the gods, whoever they might be, that I'm a metamorphmagus and can change to accommodate that wonderful monstrosity! Does he even know how ... gifted he is?* She grinned. *Now to surprise him yet again.* She reached to her waist and pulled her shirt over her head, displaying the neon pink brassiere she wore. At Harry's wide-eyed look, she laughed. "You'll see in a second that the knickers are part of the set."

"What ..." he strangled out. "What are you doing?" he finally said.

"Couple things, Harry. I like to be comfortable. When I'm not expecting anyone, I'm likely to lounge around my apartment in bra and knickers. Might as well start getting used to it. More importantly for right now, I'm going to do an extremely low level massage, supplementing the mild jets I'm sure you can feel in the water? I don't want wet clothes any more than you do."

"But I'm ..."

"Stiff as a board? Hard as a rock? Standing up like a flagpole? I noticed, and I'm flattered, Harry. And I'll be dead honest with you; if I weren't going to be working on you in a personal trainer slash nurse mode, I'd be more than a little tempted to help you out with that problem of yours in a manner that I'm pretty sure we'd both end up enjoying." She stepped out of her shoes, which were rapidly followed by the cargo pants she'd been wearing, and she smiled to herself as she saw his breathing speed up and become shallower. "I'm not trying to be a tease, Harry," *Like hell you're not!* "But I'm not stopping there."

"Tonks ..." he said in a voice that sounded thicker than she'd ever heard him speaking in. "Please don't. I ... you can't trust me if you're in this tub with me. I'm afraid of ... I'm afraid, Tonks. Please don't."

She looked at Harry, and saw the tears in his eyes. *I never expected to tell him as fast as this seems to be going, but I need to.* She undid her brassiere and let it fall to the floor with the rest of her clothes, and she slid the knickers down, kicking them over with the pile. "Harry? I'm stating this to you clearly and as concisely as I can. I seriously doubt you'll be able to do what you say you're afraid of doing to me, given what you did to yourself lifting Vernon, but I promise you one thing in case you *do* have the capability. No matter what you do to me, it won't be rape. And raping me is what you're afraid of, isn't it?"

He nodded violently, his eyes seemingly unable to move from her pubic hair, which was the same brilliant bubble-gum pink that all her other hair was. She grinned and changed her hair colour to a brilliant red colour – even redder than the familiar Weasley red – and changed the shape of her nether hair to a heart shape. His eyes bugged out slightly, and finally rose higher, but stopped

when he reached her breasts. *I wonder if he understands what it means when a girl's nipples are as hard as mine are, since the temperature isn't that cold in here?* She looked down and giggled slightly, which she knew would make her small breasts jiggle slightly. *They do stick out a bit when I'm horny, don't they?*

“Tonks?” he asked. “Why are you risking this? I can't promise that I'll be able to keep my hands ... I mean ... oh hell ... I'm sorry ...” His hands came up to his face, and he began shuddering.

She suddenly realized that he was trying hard not to cry, and climbed into the jacuzzi behind him, forcing him forward. She put her arms around him and gently pulled his head back onto her shoulder so that his face was pointed at the ceiling. “Let it out, Harry. If you need to, just let it out. Cry, scream, whimper ... hell, if you can get your feelings out with an earth-shattering belch, then do it!” She felt him start to shake against her, and then heard the chuckle slip out of him.”

““An earth-shattering belch'?” he asked. “Not usually a way of releasing frustration.”

“Sure it is! The frustration of having each a large, gassy meal! One good, house-rumbling belch, and I guarantee you'll feel better almost immediately!” She laughed quietly as to not deafen him. “See, Harry? You're in the same water with me, and you didn't turn into a ravening sex maniac bent on screwing me to the floor.” She sighed. “Harry ... you need to understand that feeling desire does not make you a potential rapist. Rape has nothing to do with desire, and little to do with sex other than that sex makes a damn fine weapon. Rape is about ugliness, and control, and violence, and wanting to kill another person's self-esteem. Sometimes revenge figures into it, too. Do you feel any of those things toward me?”

He shook his head vehemently.

“I didn't think so. Do you feel like perpetrating violence on my fair person? Are you emotionally capable of that?” Another headshake. “Do you even think you physically *could*? Remember, I'm a trained Auror, and you by your own admission haven't gotten half of the training you think you should have. Plus you've got a back wrenched six ways from Sunday and you couldn't even reach your feet to take your trainers off a few minutes ago. I guarantee, if you tried anything I didn't like, I could take you down so fast your head wouldn't have time to spin.”

He was silent a little longer than she expected, and she let her hand slip down below his waist, 'accidentally' brushing across his rapidly re-stiffening organ. “Harry, I appreciate the thought. You're in no condition right now, or honestly for the next few days, to be doing anything more than thinking about it.” She paused. “I'll be blunt. If you want me to, I can make myself scarce for a while later on after I've healed you, so that you can ... ah, relieve the pressure?”

He was blushing so furiously that she was surprised that the water wasn't boiling. “That might be an idea,” he whispered.

“Consider it done then, Harry,” she said. “At some point during this summer, we're going to have to work out all the tensions – grief, sexual, anger, hurt, and any number of others. Tonight, though, we'll simply work on purely physical.”

“What’s the exact reasoning for my needing to be relaxed when it comes to healing?” Harry asked, grateful (she assumed) for the chance to change the subject from what she really wanted to talk about.

“Honestly? When working on injuries, if the patient isn’t relaxed, then it can cause all sorts of problems that I don’t understand, since I didn’t go into healing as my chosen career. Ever notice how often you woke up feeling all nice and relaxed in the hospital wing? Pomfrey tends to clobber you with a muscle relaxant as soon as you show up. You’re easy to work on then.”

“Hmm. Never thought about that. Makes sense, I guess.” He groaned as he moved, and she could guess that his muscles were complaining. “I’d say that you should remind me never to do that again, but I’ll be damned if I’ll let him insult any of my friends ever again.” He laughed a little painfully. “Maybe I can do a little training with weights so that I can properly lift and throw him next time.”

She laughed quietly again. “Consider it one of your classes this summer, then. In the meantime, you need to work on relaxing.” She could feel him tensing up beneath her hands again.

She heard him take a ragged breath, and start to speak. “Tonks? You’ll hate me for this, I know, but ... well ... I can’t relax with you in here with me.”

“Why not?” she queried, knowing full well the real reason.

“Because it makes me want to do things I can’t, okay? Can we *please* leave it at that?”

“Why should we? Perhaps it’s something I can help you with.”

His pause was long – long enough that she was afraid she might have pushed too hard. “I won’t say, because it will alter our friendship, and I doubt it will be for the better. I’d rather be tense than lose one of the very few friends I have.”

“You’ve got to have more friends than you think, Harry,” she said simply.

“Not people I trust at my back and who I can tell stuff to. Hermione, Ron, Ginny, Fred, George, and you.” He laughed. “I’m not sure if you should be insulted or not. You’re the only adult on that list.”

“Remus isn’t on that list? Why not?”

“He cares for me – heck, I think I could safely say that he loves me like a son, or a nephew. But with the exception of you, every adult I know seems to have that attitude of an agenda in regards to me. Dumbledore is probably going to blow a blood vessel, you know, when he finds out what you’ve done behind his back. Worse, he’ll become remarkably disappointed in you in that wonderful way he has.” Harry scowled darkly as he finished that statement. “Blaming Sirius’s death on the fact that he wouldn’t stay in the house, implying a certain level of stupidity about not doing something that was for his own good. Hmm, where have I seen that attitude before?” he

growled. “Has Dumbledore ever been locked away in one place for a long period of time, forbidden to go anywhere? Of course not! He’s the most powerful wizard in the world! And a hero to boot! Who’d be stupid enough to try that?”

He took a deep breath and continued. “I’d like to see how the old fart would react if someone forced him to live in a damned cupboard for ten years! See how he handled it if he was forced to stay in a single room for twelve years, live on the run after that, and then be locked into a house for a damned year! But no, he sits there in his plush little office, popping in and out of Hogwarts wards, and just generally running everyone’s life that he’s ever come across.” Harry was breathing hard through his nose. “Let’s not started on Molly Weasley. I love the woman – she’s like a mother to me – but that’s the problem. She smothers. I’m too young to join the Order. It’s too dangerous. Excuse me, but who’s been fighting Voldemort for four of the last five years, and doing a job worth bugger-all because no one will train him?” he yelled. “Who has to face the snake in the next few years, and pray that he survives it, and that he can take the bastard out?”

“Leave that to us, Harry. The Order will work on that. You should be enjoying life as a teenager.”

“I’d like to, Tonks,” he said. “I’d like to be like all the other guys my age, trying to get dates and getting my face slapped for the trouble. Problem is, I can’t until Voldemort is dead. That’s one of those other fun things I just *love* about Dumbledore. Did you know that there’s a prophecy about me?”

“The one that broke in the Ministry, right?” she asked, puzzled where this was going.

“Yup. Thing is, there’s another copy. It’s in Dumbledore’s head, since he’s the one who heard it.” Harry closed his eyes to think. “*The one with the power to vanquish the Dark Lord approaches... born to those who have thrice defied him, born as the seventh month dies ... and the Dark Lord will mark him as his equal, but he will have power the Dark Lord knows not ... and either must die at the hand of the other for neither can live while the other survives ... the one with the power to vanquish the Dark Lord will be born as the seventh month dies ...*” He reopened his eyes and turned slightly to look at Tonks. “Guess what? You’re in the tub with Target Number One.”

She smiled and metaphorically laid her cards on the table. “And you’re afraid that if you even think about doing what your body seems to want to do, that’ll make me a target as well, right?”

“Like you’d even seriously think about that,” he murmured under his breath.

“About what, Harry? About maybe making you hard again, by doing a strip tease, and then dropping to my knees in front of you and trying to take that gorgeous cock of yours into my mouth? About maybe laying back on that bed out there and begging you to come over and shag me so hard that I can’t move afterwards?” She grinned at his shocked look. “Harry, I may ruin our friendship by admitting this to you, but it’s my intention, sometime this summer, to do exactly what I just said.”

“Don’t you know that knowing me might kill you?” he asked, horrified. “Ask Sirius! Oh, I

forgot, you can't, because my stupidity *killed him!* ” He inhaled a shuddering breath. “If it's at all possible, Tonks, please don't do anything more than a desire to have sex with me. Following through, or making the mistake of falling in love with me ...” He scowled again. “Yeah right. Arrogant little arse, aren't I, assuming that a woman like you could fall for me?”

“You'd be right, though,” she said quietly. “Because I already did. Why do you think I'm here, Harry? Yeah, everything else I said is true, but there's the extra agenda of finding out if the feeling is mutual.”

She felt his entire body stiffen beneath her hands, and he suddenly jumped from the tub and ran from the room. She stood to follow him, and heard an incoherent roar of rage and pain, followed by a loud crash and the splintering of wood. She left the room, dripping, to see Harry taking out his feelings on one of the roll-top desks. He was doing a fairly good job of destroying it as the chair he held, made from the same mahogany that the desk had been made from, kept swinging down to crush more and more of the offending piece of furniture into flinders.

“Why?” he was crying. “Why did she have to fall for me?”

CRASH

“People who love me get hurt!”

CRASH

“Ginny, with Tom's diary!”

CRASH

“Hermione and the basilisk!”

CRASH

“Ron and those brains!”

CRASH

“Sirius! The veil!”

CRASH

“My parents ...” With that, Harry seemed to suddenly run out of steam, and the chair fell to the floor with a resounding crunch onto the pile of what once had been a beautiful desk. He looked up and noticed Tonks standing there. “Don't love me, Tonks. I'm not worth it. I'll only hurt you.” His gaze fell on the rubble he had created, and he managed to deflate even more. “Look at what I did to your beautiful handiwork, Tonks. All I do is destroy. Do you really need that in your life?”

She walked over and grabbed her wand, flicking it toward the pile. “*Reparo.*” The pieces shot

back together as if they'd never been apart. She repeated this with the chair, also damaged in Harry's outburst. "Good as new, Harry."

He shook his head. "You shouldn't have to clean up after me, Tonks. I'm simply not worth it. My job is to fight Voldemort, assuming Dumbledore decides this year to actually teach me something worthwhile."

"Excuse me, Harry," she replied quietly, "but I'll thank you not to go around telling me whom I should and shouldn't fall in love with." She paused. "Besides, it's already too late for that. I'm already in love with you." She kissed his cheek.

She stood and offered her hand to him. "Come on, Harry. I need to get you more relaxed, especially after what you probably did to yourself while taking your frustration out on the poor helpless furniture. I offered you a massage." She flicked her wand again, and a massage table appeared. "Lie down, and I'll start working on you."

"But what if I get, uh, you know ... again?" he asked, with some embarrassment.

"For one thing, you'll be lying face down. Second, I have no intention to jump you today – you're too damned fragile. It would do you far more harm than good, and I will not do that to the man that I love."

"I'm only fifteen, Tonks," he said quietly as he climbed onto the table, which instantly moulded itself to him.

"And more of a man than some others, such as Severus. You know how to forgive. He doesn't."

She began a very gentle kneading of his shoulders, and felt him begin to calm almost immediately. As she worked her way down his body, she felt him calm more and more, and chuckled as she heard him begin to purr (it was the only word she really had to describe the sound) under her gentle ministrations.

As he lay there, under her fingers, she felt him tense slightly, and realized that he was about to ask a question. "Hey Tonks? If what you did is so easy, why don't more witches and wizards do it? I mean, the Burrow could be significantly larger. Why don't I see more of it?"

She chuckled. "Ah, one of the areas that no one ever really teaches the Muggleborn. There are a lot of problems with doing something like that and making it permanent. All sorts of fun spells, like weight reduction and the like." She sighed. "Damn, I could probably spend a school year describing this, but I'm going to give you the nutshell version. First, let's start with the increased space in here. It doesn't really exist, Harry. It's here, but it's not. We're sort of connecting to ... I don't know ... somewhere. We're pinching off some of that space to do stuff in. Unless you use those permanence spells I mentioned, this place will go away in about two weeks. I'll renew it before then, never fear for that. And putting a permanency on it causes other problems. We'd need to do weight reductions on this area if it were permanent, because then it would have real weight. When you make it permanent, you sort of steal the land from the Other Place, which

means that the weight comes along for the ride." She paused her ministrations for a moment. "Hermione could probably make a career of researching where weight goes to when we reduce the weight of something."

She shook her head, laughing, and went back to the massage. She conjured up some oils and gently spread some on his back. "Don't worry – it's just to make the massage easier. Anyway, where was I? Oh yeah. That pretty well explains the space, but now we get into McGonagall's area of expertise. Conjuring and Transfiguration. You do know the difference between a real object and a transfigured one, not to mention conjured ones?"

"Real is permanent, transfigured turns back if you cast a *Finite* on it, and conjured simply goes away eventually."

"Exactly. It's the reason that you don't wear conjured clothing, unless you happen to *want* to let everyone see the real you," she chuckled. "Knew a girl at Hogwarts who wore conjured knickers on those dates she intended something to happen. Anyway, that's one of the biggies."

"Interesting side effect of conjuring something is that no one other than the conjurer can transfigure it once it's been made. I think that also explains one of the reasons not to eat transfigured or conjured food. Conjured food is literally empty calories, and you'd starve to death. Yeah, you can create an apple that's just as tasty and just as nutritious, but it will eventually disappear, and that's even after it's broken down and entered your system. And if it does that after having actually been assimilated by the body? It can get *very* ugly when that happens. You still see the occasional case arrive at St. Mungo's, and it takes them forever to fix the damage. Transfigured is even worse, since you'd probably take something inedible, like a rock, in order to try to make it edible."

It was at this point when she had finished with his lower spine, and decided to keep working lower. *I need to keep working, but he may react badly when I massage his bum. Oh well, can't be helped.* She carefully began to move the kneading lower, finally touching him directly on his posterior. *Oh gods, I really want to get sexy with this massage, but that's for another day. Morgana give me strength – he's got such a great arse!* He didn't react, so she relaxed and kept massaging. "Now, again, it's perfectly edible that way, right? Now cast a *Finite* on the person. Watch them try to digest gravel. Even worse, wait a few days for the body to have used all that wonderful fuel before casting your *Finite*. Make sure that you have a coffin nearby, just in case."

"Of course, I have seen it used to eat something that you simply could not stand. Liver, for example. Lots of iron in it, and really healthy for you. I can't eat it worth a damn. So, if I can't get out of eating liver, I'll Transfigure it into a steak or something, and then cast *Finite* on myself afterwards. Edible to edible is just fine. Parents making their children's spinach into applesauce, and then doing a *Finite*."

She grinned. "Now to blow my own horn." *I will not tell him that he's long and large enough, not to mention limber enough to ... heh ... blow his own 'horn'.* "How impressive the conjuring you do ends up looking depends purely on how good you are at visualizing. I'm a metamorphmagus, and I have practiced for years on noticing the little things that make the up difference between

being the duplicate of a person and being someone who could pass for their twin. As you can see around here, I can visualize down to some damn fine details. Which is why my conjurations tend to make jaws drop, just like yours did." She stopped her massage for a moment. "So, what do you think of my quick and dirty lesson, Harry?" She laughed softly to herself as he answered her with a very quiet snore. Through that gentle snoring, she finished her massage, cast the healing spells she needed to, and gently levitated him to the bed.

Looking at the clock, she discovered that it was only twenty-thirty, but she found herself rather tired. Summoning her clothes, she dropped them in a hamper and found a pair of simple pink cotton knickers. *Bad enough on his psyche that he'll wake up in bed with me, but if he at least realizes I was wearing knickers, and they're still on me, then I can head off that problem.* She slipped them on and slid into bed with him.

His arm unconsciously came over her and pulled her closer, so she carefully rearranged herself to be in the spoon position, her derriere pressing lightly against his groin. He released a sound of contentment as she settled in, and she felt her heart swell in her chest. *Thank you, whoever you are out there,* she said silently. "Good night, my sweet prince," she said to Harry, and slid quickly into a deep slumber, feeling safer in his arms than she had felt in more years than she could remember.

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Harry Potter and the Paradigm Shift

Chapter 3

Tonks moaned softly as she felt her lover gently squeeze her right breast, playing absently with the stiff nipple that felt as if it throbbed beneath his touch. She felt throbbing elsewhere – the fire between her legs – and her lover ground against her curvaceous rear end, moaning gently as he did.

She opened her eyes gently to carefully realize that it was no dream. Harry's hand was still over her, but in the night, he had cupped her breast and had apparently begun to play with it. He'd apparently been at it for a while before she awakened. Her nipples were almost painfully hard, and she moaned.

She then realized that she could feel Harry's erection pressing insistently against her knickers, and that he was slowly and gently rubbing against her. She bit her lower lip, and decided to roll over carefully. As she came to press against him, face to face, she bit down a bit harder as she fought with herself. Somehow, impossibly, he was still asleep, although that was a condition that wouldn't last much longer. The raging hormones running through her were demanding that she lose the knickers and bury what was now pressing against her stomach deep inside her. She knew that Harry would never forgive himself if that happened right now, however.

An evil smile crossed her face. *If I help him come, and make sure he's damned aware that my knickers are quite firmly still in place, maybe we can deal with some of these problems. Deal with my ache, his ache, and get him started down one of those self-pitying paths that I know he'll take, so that I can explain things very carefully to him.*

She gently rolled him onto his back, and then straddled his hips, his length of his erection throbbing firmly against the cloth-covered entrance she so wanted him to plunder. She began to gently rub against him, revelling in the feeling of both the insistent pulsing of his manhood against her, and the equally demanding and delicious throbbing of her clitoris against the now extremely damp cloth, and against his erection.

As the sensations became more powerful for both of them, she felt his pulse rate climbing. Her hands came up to tease her straining nipples, and she began to moan very quietly. "Oh gods," she panted. "If he feels this good doing only this, I may not survive when I finally get him inside me for the very first time." She chuckled a throaty chuckle. "But what a wonderful way to go!"

She suddenly felt him swell beneath her slightly, the pulsing of his blood into his cock reaching a fever pitch, and he simultaneously opened his eyes and thrust upward as his orgasm began to explode from him. He couldn't help the continued upward thrusts as he came, and Tonks' moaning certainly wasn't giving him incentive to think about what was happening, apparently. As his orgasm wound down, the teasing she was doing to her own nipples, the throbbing in both his and her sexual centres, and the knowledge that Harry had awakened at the last moment drove Tonks over the edge as well, and she whimpered her surprisingly quiet orgasm into the air above Harry, before finally falling forward, barely catching herself before her forehead collided –

potentially rather painfully – with Harry’s.

“Oh my gods,” she moaned against him. “If this was that good, I can’t wait until I take you inside me, lover-boy. That was fucking magnificent!”

“Tonks, I’m sorr ...”

“Don’t you dare finish that statement, Harry James Potter. You have nothing to apologize for, and once I’m recovered from this orgasm, I’ll tell you why.” She panted a few times before saying, “Hot damn, that was fun!” with a grin on her face. The grin was contagious, she noticed, because Harry had one as well, and also a look she thought she might classify as pride.

Finally she caught her breath enough to talk clearly to him. “I am not going to stand, or sit, or lie around here all day and listen to you apologize for what just happened. First off, an orgasm like that does not happen when I’m an unwilling participant, so you can shut the rape comments I can hear you formulating. Remember what I said last night. You can trust me on this – there was nothing angry about that, and the only thing that could be considered violent about either of us was the power with which our orgasms tore through us.” She paused. “I have never been raped, by the way, before you build up a head of steam to rip someone’s throat out with your little fingers, since I can see your face hinting that your thoughts are tending that way.” She shook her head. “I have had some cock-arsed, clumsy lovers, though. Never mind that, though. Second, think about the position we’re in, sexy. I’m on top of you. I pushed you into that position and straddled you, in order to put out the fire you had so deliciously started. Can you think of any legitimate method of forcing me that would allow for you waking up to me rubbing along your wonderful length?”

She sat up. “Third, look at me carefully, especially where I’m sitting on you. Notice that I’m wearing knickers? I rarely wear them to bed. I did last night, knowing that this was a possibility. I thought it was more remote a possibility, but you’ll not hear me complain about what happened!” she laughed. “But you need to think about what I just said. I knew that what happened was a possibility if I climbed into bed with you after I put you to bed. Rather than create a second bed, I put on knickers and climbed in with you. Think *carefully* about that specific titbit of information. I climbed into bed with a man I knew is sexually attracted to me. I climbed into bed with a man who may well someday fuck my brains out while he’s sleeping, with of course a little help from me. What does that tell you?”

He looked at her for a moment, and then reached up to put his hands on her shoulders and pull her down into a gentle hug. She could feel his heart hammering in his chest. “It means that you’ll hurt me if I try to apologize for giving you a mind-blowing orgasm?” he asked with a small laugh.

“Worse. I’ll tease you mercilessly with my obviously nubile body, until you’re driven to ravish me all night long.” She grinned widely at him.

“This is a torture?” he said quietly enough that she was sure that he hadn’t intended her to hear him.

"It is if I'm teasing you in a public place, gorgeous, knowing how hard it's gonna make you," she purred at him, grinding her hips into him. He moaned and started to stiffen again.

"Let's get us both cleaned up, lover," she said, climbing off him carefully. "From the amount you released, I think you've been holding that orgasm in your whole life." As she passed by her bag, she bent over to pull out the case from her job. Enlarging it, she grabbed a vial of contraceptive and emptied it down her throat. "Just in case," she said, turning around to see Harry staring in rapt wonder at her.

He shook his head, blushing. "I ... uh ... sorry for staring." He was no longer merely semi-erect.

"I've been told that my arse is my best feature."

His features softened, and he walked up to her. "No. Most people can't see your best feature."

"Harry!" she squeaked, actually embarrassed that he was suddenly being so forward and wonderfully raunchy.

"What?" he asked, perplexed. "I was talking about your heart. That wonderful, caring heart of yours." He cocked his head at her. "What did you think I was talking about?"

She blushed furiously. "I thought ... well, it's still covered by my knickers." Now it was Harry's turn to blush brilliantly, and his mouth moved without sound escaping. "I should have known better, Harry. Can you forgive me for thinking you'd say something so crude to me?"

He snorted. "I only wish I had. Maybe then I could be considered a normal teenager."

She kissed his cheek again, this time leaving her face close to his. "I wouldn't be in love with a normal teenager." He turned to face her, and she slid forward very slightly to brush her lips across his. "Now let's go get that shower," she purred, standing up and walking away from him, a little extra sway to her hips.

Harry groaned, not only because it was such an incredible sight, but because he had really wanted to deepen that kiss. It also didn't help that the kiss had sent the blood flowing rather insistently below his waist. She stepped into the bath room, and then popped her head back out. "Coming love?"

He grinned weakly. "Actually, I think that's one of the things we were going to clean up."

She clapped. "Yes! He can make a dirty joke now and then! He's human!" She came back out, and it became obvious that his brain was no longer initiating higher functions, such as thought. *Never thought the sight of a little hair could shut a man's brain down, she mused. Then again, we're talking Harry. He's never known love since his parents died, and I'd lay large sums of cash that I'm the first girl he's seen nude.* She walked over and gently took his hands and led him into the room, and into the shower, which was already running. As the water cascaded over their bodies, she flowed into his arms and kissed him properly, her left hand behind his head and her

right snaking down to grab his butt as she ground against his erection gently. He moaned against her, opening his mouth unconsciously, and her tongue gently teased his. He seemed to be a quick learner, because within three minutes of kissing him, he was returning the kiss and caresses although both of his hands had a gentle death grip on her arse. Her heart was pounding in her chest. *Oh goddess – if he wants me – all of me, there’s no way I could consider stopping him. I want him so much that ... oh goddess ... we need to stop before ...*

Harry broke the kiss suddenly, panting furiously. “We need to stop, Tonks, or I’m going to ... I’d be tempted to ... oh gods, you’re naked, I’m naked, and we’re both pretty damned ... uh ...”

“Horny?” she asked breathlessly. “I would like to wait for at least a month, Harry, before I wrap my lips around you. Well, *those* lips, at least. It’s too late to keep from doing *anything* sexual with you, but I think I’d feel better if we waited until you’re sixteen before I jump your bones and screw you into next week.”

“I agree, Tonks. I want you, but ... hell, if word gets out that we’ve gone *this* far, you may lose your job.”

“Who do you think gave me the contraceptive potions?” she asked with a grin. “Look, let’s just have a hell of a lot of fun washing each other, and I’ll teach you where to touch me, while I learn how to touch you, okay?” He nodded, and she pulled the soap over and built a lather in her hands and began to wash his hair. As the foam slid down his body, she followed it, discovering that he apparently had nipples as sensitive as hers when her fingers drew lightly across them, pulling a gasp of pure lust from him. “Well, that’s going to be fun,” she said, washing his chest clean before very gently teasing one with her tongue and teeth. She continued lower, her heart pounding as she got closer to his erect manhood. With an evil grin, she lathered her hands up again and began to carefully clean his penis with long firm strokes of her soap-slicked hands. She covered the tip and began to stroke harder and faster, bringing him close to an orgasm, but stopping before he went too far. She let him back down a bit, then directed a gentle stream of water from the shower head to rinse him off. Under this new sensation, he moaned and started to plead with her to let him come, but she whispered, “Not yet, my love. Not yet.”

With that, she leaned forward and took the tip of his organ into her mouth. *I am going to have to morph if I don’t want a broken jaw.* She concentrated slightly, and it suddenly became easier to slip him inside her mouth. She slid him as deep inside as she could go without gagging, and then began to slide back and forth along that length, adding a mild suction to the out-stroke. Her hand, still holding him, began to gently stroke him as well, and she could tell that he was getting close again. “Gonna ... in your ... mouth ... if you’re not ... oh my God ... I’m gonna ... Tonks ... I’m ...”

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He couldn’t say anything else that was coherent after that as the orgasm he was trying to warn her about came boiling up from deep within him and exploding out, into her mouth. Rather than pulling away, she seemed to be enjoying it, and was even speeding up her ministrations, which made the problem worse for him. He fought with himself to keep from trying to thrust deeper into

her mouth, as much as he truly wanted to.

He felt his knees starting to buckle, and fought extremely hard to keep from falling. She finally seemed to stop as he seemed to stop, and she released him from the erotic capture she'd performed.

“What the heck just happened?” he asked in happy shock.

“I just gave you a blow job, sexy!” she murmured. “The first of many, I hope. Someday, I'll have to teach you to give me the woman's equivalent. But for now, I just want your fingers teasing me.” She stood, sliding erotically against him, and even though he'd just orgasmed, he felt the desire rise inside himself. She turned around and pressed her body against him, and his arms came up to hold her.

Grinning, she took one of his hands and led it to her breast. “Play with this for a while,” she moaned at him quietly. He brought the other hand up to cup the other breast and teased her slick nipples mercilessly for a time. She ground against him as he did this, and he was shocked to feel himself rising to the occasion again, as it were, for a third time this morning. It was good to be fifteen! He let his right hand slide down her body, teasing gently as he moved, until he found the patch of hair that so enthralled his sight when she faced him. “Oh, Harry – please. Please touch me. If I can't have your cock there, at least let me have your fingers.” He slid the hand a little further down, finding the slight cleft between her thighs, and also finding it quite damp and hot. As he gently probed with his finger, he felt her wiggle against him, and he moaned in her hair. He felt an insistent throbbing against his middle finger, so he began to search for it. He knew the instant that he found it, because she nearly screamed, “Morgana, yes!” He began to rub against the throbbing little nub that he'd found, which caused her to grind harder against his erection, which was nestled between the cheeks of her magnificent arse. He began to grind against her even as he teased the nub he'd found, and soon felt the familiar pressure building inside himself. *Good God*, he thought, *at least I'll die happy, 'cause this girl's gonna kill me!* His ministrations reached a fever pitch, and she began to buck against his hand. The motion of her hips as she thrust herself forward, however, meant that her fine, soap and water slick arse was no longer pressing against his cock. This was a state of affairs that could not be tolerated. He pulled her back against him, surprised at the effort it took, and held her tight as she quivered and shook in his arms. She spoke no words, but was making the most erotic mewling noise Harry could imagine anyone making. Finally, she stopped thrusting against his finger and started to relax. Harry couldn't help himself – his hand came back up to her breasts and gripped as he began to thrust against her, enjoying the slickness as he felt himself roll over the edge into sweet erotic oblivion again.

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She felt Harry orgasming yet again, and waited until he had stopped before gently turning around, letting his arms fall slowly down her body until they rested gently on the same arse he'd just been humping. “You've definitely got the motions down right,” she grinned, more than a little breathless. “I can't wait for the chance to feel them where they really count.” She kissed him sweetly. “I think we need to get dressed, lover. We do have things to do today, and if we stay like this, we'll end up having sex before the day is out.” She stepped away from him, and suddenly

grinned. “Hey, ever want to shower with Hermione?” She did a very quick morph before his eyes, and when she looked, he was covering his face. “What’s wrong, sexy? It’s still me.”

“Yeah, but it’s her body, and she’s never given me permission, so I won’t look. Please switch back.”

She was stunned. Usually, guys she dated wanted her to take on the form of some girl they’d always fantasized about, yet here was Harry, offered a chance to shower with the form of a girl that Tonks *knew* he was interested in, having seen some of the looks that he’d steal when he thought no one noticed. Rather than taking advantage of this, he required that the girl in question know that he’d be looking! She hadn’t thought it possible to fall any more in love with him.

Finally reverted to her natural form, she said, “It’s safe now, Harry. I’m in my base form – no tricks.” He opened his eyes and raised his eyebrows. She leaned forward. “Don’t ever change, you wonderful man.”

“Is this really your natural look?” he asked. “White hair and sky blue eyes?”

“Yeah. One of the reasons I was so glad when I discovered what I can do. I hate being a freak like this.”

He looked at her shyly. “I think it’s even sexier than the pink haired form.”

“That must come naturally to you,” she murmured.

“What?” he asked, confused. “What comes naturally?”

“The ability to melt a woman by saying the truth as you see it.” She hugged him quickly, and then released him completely.

The finished their shower fairly quickly, Harry stepping out first. As Tonks stepped out, she walked into a large fluffy towel that Harry was holding out for her. He wrapped it around her and then stepped back. “You look cute, Tonks,” he said with a grin.

She noticed that his eyes didn’t hold all the humour she saw in his smile. “What’s wrong, Harry?”

“I’m thinking something through right now. I’ll tell you when I’ve got it a bit better in my head, okay? Shouldn’t be long.” She nodded, and they completed their drying in silence.

It was when Harry grabbed his clothing and headed back toward the shower that she began to realize just how serious he was in his thoughts. She dressed in silence – bra, knickers, camouflage cargo pants, and a T-shirt with the logo “Veni, Vidi, Visa: I came, I saw, I charged it” – while Harry stepped out in his usual Dursley clothing – too large and too ugly. “We’ve got to get you better clothes,” she said quietly. “You need things that fit you.”

“We can worry about that later,” he said softly. He walked over and took her hands for a moment, and then reached over, took her wand from the table and handed it to her. “Tonks, I have some

things that I need to say to you, and I'm probably going to deserve to be hexed for them, so I thought I'd make it easier on you."

She started at that comment. *This is not good*, she mused as she leaned forward and placed the wand back on the table. "Okay, Harry. If you think that they're important enough to be willing to face me hexing your balls off – literally – then say them. No reprisals."

He took a deep breath. "Tonks? What's *your* agenda? Everyone I know has an agenda. Hell, even I have one! What's yours?"

"To keep you safe!" she answered, getting a little annoyed at the question.

"So how does giving me three admittedly magnificent orgasms help keep me safe? By lowering my barriers faster to help me trust you quicker?" He paused and took another deep breath. "You've been here less than twenty-four hours, Tonks, and in that time, we've become lovers. Before this last twenty-four, we were friends who nodded at each other and shared laughs – now we're counting the days until we can fuck?" She took a physical step backwards at the surprising use of profanity from him. "Be dead honest with me, Tonks – is it me you want, or is it The Boy Who Lived that you want to bag?"

She saw red at that question, and found her wand in her hand again. When she became aware and in control of herself again, she was looking down at a thoroughly unconscious young man, who looked surprisingly peaceful, even with a bright purple face and a hand growing from his forehead. She cancelled both curses and *Ennervated* him before sitting heavily on the bed.

"I'm sorry, Harry. You have a free shot at me. I lied when I said no reprisals, dammit. All I ask is that you not use an Unforgivable." She put her head in her hands. "Damn it, what's wrong with me?!?"

"I don't know, to be honest. I'm stupid when it comes to human relations – those ... ahem ... 'people' downstairs didn't give me much experience. Don't mistake me on this – I enjoyed what happened this morning, but I just don't know how to handle it. And I'm serious about what I said, too. We *all* have agendas. Mine is to stay alive, and maybe someday be able to find out what love really is. Hermione's is ... Merlin only knows – maybe to learn everything that there is to learn in the world. Who knows? Ron's is probably to be able to do something that puts *him* into the forefront, instead of being behind everyone. I mean, think about it – he's the youngest boy. Then a sister comes along; the first female Weasley in a few generations. He's always been pushed to the back burner by everyone. Then he goes to school – and meets the fecking Boy Who Lived In A Cupboard, not to mention the smartest witch in at least a generation. Sidekick time again. It's not surprising he's gone off in a jealous snit a couple of times. What surprised me is that he came back."

"But that's my point. I keep using the word, but it fits. Agendas. What is Dumbledore's? What is McGonagall's? What is Remus's? And what is yours, especially in regards to me?" He stepped back a single footstep from her. "Why are you *really* here? Why is it so important that we – well, you're the one who started the sexual part of the relationship. What's so important that you're

willing to risk your job and Azkaban for what I think they call 'contributing to the delinquency of a minor'? Love isn't the only answer. Think about what you did – that's considered something like statutory rape, or whatever the thing is called."

Tonks sat on the bed, looking at her hands. "I'm not used to you being like this, to be honest. You – you used to be the clueless boy that everyone smiled at. Here you are looking at me and asking the questions that you should be; ones that I don't know if I have the answers to. The most obvious one is that ... Harry, I didn't just say it to get you to let me ... well, Harry, I really did fall in love with you. I don't know when or how, I just realized one day that it was the case. As for ... the rest ..." She fell silent for a long moment. "You've been without any love of any sort for so long, Harry. I just ... well, if it weren't for the fact that the feelings are definitely *not* motherly, except in the sense of trying to become one ... I just have this sort of motherly-slash-protective thing for you." She laughed softly. "And the fact that I want to shag you senseless ..."

"You're pushing too hard, Tonks," he said quietly. "Let the relationship flow as it will." He blinked. "Is Hermione here, or was it *me* who just said that?"

"It was you, Harry," she said with a smile. "So where do we go from here? It's hard ... it's difficult to back down from where we were a little while ago."

"What tends to happen if we ... hmm, what's a good phrase ... what would likely happen if we stay the course – build from where we are right now?"

"Because I was a horny idiot, we'd likely burn through our passions very quickly, without ... dammit!" she said, starting to cry. "This is how every relationship I've had ended, and ended badly. I let my hormones go, and they all go down in flames!" Her face went into her hands and she continued to cry.

He let her cry for a moment, before kneeling in front of her and taking her wrists very gently. "Tonks? Tonks, look at me." She looked up, sniffed a sort of *SNURK* sound and blinked through the tears. "I'm used to being deprived of things, especially after being introduced to them. It's a way of life for me." He reached out and brushed away a few of her tears. "Besides, the possibilities are wonderful if we do hold off. I feel something for you, and I want to learn if it's love or not. I really don't know what love *is*, Tonks. I want to learn." He cupped her cheek in his hand, and she leaned into it unconsciously. "If you want to look at this whole thing as a contest, then there's certainly a worthwhile prize at the end of this." He brushed his hand across the cheek he was holding, and let his thumb graze her lips. "And anything worth having is worth waiting for."

She looked at him in shock, before finally weakly laughing and saying, "Who are you, and what have you done with Harry Potter? He's never been this poetic that I've heard."

He laughed in response. "I don't know where that came from, other than from the heart. I ... I'm usually pretty bad with words, but that was just too important for me to screw up. So I didn't let myself screw up."

"So, where do we go from here?" she asked him.

"Well, as much as I'm going to miss the best night's sleep I've ever had, not to mention possible repeats of that wake-up call, I think it best if we sleep in two separate beds, and maybe even slightly separate rooms."

"Why the separate rooms?" she asked.

He blushed furiously. "I may be stopping us from ... well ... uh ... but you still ..."

The *Lumos* spell went off in her head, and she blushed. "There are always silencing charms, Harry. It's just that ... well, I'd feel better if it were easier to get to you than having to run through two doors to get to you." She looked at the bed and cast a *Finite* on it, and then rebuilt the bed as it had been before, only on smaller scale. She then made an exact replica right next to it, and situated them close enough to each other that one person could walk between them. "I want to be able to get to you fast if Old Moldie sends you one of those nightmares in the middle of the night, Harry. Someone to talk to immediately after is good, too. Might remember more of it."

"You'll have to cast those silencing spells, since I don't want Hopkirk and Fudge swooping down and snapping my wand if I happen to cast a *Lumos* to get downstairs."

She grinned. "Remember the second thing I pulled from my cleavage yesterday?"

He slapped his forehead. "Sorry. I was paying more attention to the cleavage itself."

She laughed. "Thank you. All I ask is that you remember to cancel the *Silencio*, because I want to be able to respond if you start to have a nightmare."

He was blushing. "It's just embarrassing to know that whenever you're not hearing noise of any sort coming from my bed, that ... well ..."

She blushed as well. "You are aware that I'm likely to be casting my own as soon as I hear yours? Don't hear, actually, but remember what I think about you. Mutual wankage, I'd say."

He stood and helped her to her feet. "Okay, cutie, what's on the agenda for the day?"

"Well, to be honest, we need to find a place for you to practice your spell work, since I have every intention of training you in duelling. We're also going to need to go out somewhere and buy some supplies, since we're going to need to eat at some point. Nobody's going to be complaining about how skinny you are this year if I have anything to say about it. And I still want you to get some decent clothes. You could fit two of you in the ones you're wearing. So, why don't we pop to Diagon Alley, step out into Muggle London, and then get our groceries? We can talk about places to work on your magic while we're out."

He crooked his left arm to her, and said, "Shall we head out, then? I'd like to do a little magic later today." He smiled sweetly at her. "Well, a little different style magic than we've already done." She blushed again and took his arm before Apparating the both of them to Diagon Alley.

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Harry Potter and the Paradigm Shift

Chapter 4

By the middle of July, Harry looked radically different from the boy who had gotten off the Hogwarts Express. This young man was well-fed, well-dressed, and tended to draw the attention of the girls when he walked by, although he didn't realize it. Tonks was just possessive enough of him to let them know that he was with her, but not so much so as to keep him from looking at other females. What was surprising her was the fact that he didn't seem to be looking at all.

As for a place to duel, Harry had eventually chosen the shed where Vernon had all the lawn equipment stored. She could still remember the reaction to that little announcement.

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“ARE YOU OUT OF YOUR MIND, BOY? I'LL NOT HAVE YOU DOING ANYTHING UNNATURAL TO MY EQUIPMENT IN THAT SHED!” Vernon had exploded, his face in what seemed to be its natural colour.

“Could you speak up, Vernon?” Harry had asked. “I don't think the people in Hawaii heard you.”

“What was that?” Vernon asked, his voice suddenly low and dangerous.

“I asked if you could yell a little louder. I'm sure all our neighbours now think that I've been shagging the lawnmower while you're at work.” Tonks snorted her laughter, and all three of the Dursleys looked at her, afraid to say a thing, especially after she'd explained to them that they weren't part of the statutes against displaying magic in front of Muggles, since they were raising a wizard. “You know, if you were really serious about keeping things a secret, you'd be a bit quieter about it. Anything the neighbours know, they know because you've yelled it at the top of your lungs.”

“Why you ...” Vernon started to say as he rose from his chair, but thought better of it as he saw two wands pointed at him. Vernon had gone smug at the sight, however. “You can't do anything during the summers, boy, or else they'll snap your wand.”

“Really?” he said, sounding astonished. “You mean I can't ...” He picked up one of Petunia's good plates and threw it to the floor, where it shattered quite noisily to her anguished gasp. He pointed his wand at the shards and said, quite clearly, “*Reparo!*” Once the plate was sitting whole on the floor, he said, “*Wingardium Leviosa!*” and gently lifted the good china on to the table. He grinned at Vernon. “Now, let's sit here about fifteen minutes for you to be sure that no owls will arrive to deliver the awful summons.”

Vernon turned such a pasty white that Harry felt mildly nauseated at the sight. “It won't be coming either, Vernon. I have special dispensation this summer to learn and cast magic, since I have a dark wizard chasing me who has no problems murdering Muggles. Especially magic-hating Muggles like you. Since you're protected by my living here, and I can now do things like

finish the transformation that Hagrid started on Dudley when I was eleven, you might want to consider being nicer to me. Since that's impossible, you might want to simply ignore that I exist, and maybe get your killer whale to do the damned chores around here."

Vernon's reply was to act like a moustachioed codfish for a time, and then rise from his chair, storm out to the auto and leave in a squeal of tires. Petunia sniffed diffidently at Harry. "Why must you be that way, Harry?" she asked in the voice of a woman who wished to give someone a dressing down, but needed to give that person just a little more rope with which to hang themselves.

"Be what way? Casting magic? A wizard? I can't help that, Petunia. I was born that way."

"I'm your aunt, Harry. I'd appreciate you not being so familiar with my name."

"If you're my aunt, then act like it, you stupid bint!" he bellowed at her. He sparkled slightly as he yelled, causing enough of a wind to flow at her that her hair ruffled as he yelled. "I am the last remaining tie you have to your family. Rather than deal with it, and treat me like family, you chose to treat me as your slave."

He stood and walked away from the table, glaring at Dudley, who decided that he had someplace else that he needed to be – anywhere but near Harry. Harry turned to face his slack-jawed aunt. "I wasn't lying to Vernon. There is a dark wizard out there who killed my parents and wants me dead because he thinks I can do something against him. The blood protections I get from living here protect you as well as me. But you know something? Next year, when I turn seventeen, that's the last year that I protect you. After July 31st of next year, you lose your protection from Voldemort." Petunia gasped at the name. "Big deal, so you know it. Would you like to know something else, Petunia? Because of the treatment that you and your husband and killer whale gave me as I grew up, I won't give a damn when Voldemort comes to kidnap and torture and eventually kill you. He will, you know, because he has this misguided thought that since you're family, you can be used as bargaining chips. When he discovers what I've known for years – that the entire lot of you are useless – then he'll kill you, either by letting Bellatrix Lestrange *Crucio* you into insanity, or else he'll just cast the Killing Curse at the three of you and be done with it."

He hung his head. "It actually pains me to realize that I'm quite likely to throw a party when I hear the three of you are dead. I simply can't care about you – any of you – and if you were actually willing to be honest with yourself, you'd be able to know exactly whose fault that is." He looked at her again and shrugged, throwing the entire matter away, metaphorically speaking. It was obvious that the matter didn't weigh on his thoughts at all. He turned to Tonks and said, "Would you care to see the bedroom I used for the first ten years that I lived here?" Without waiting to see if she followed him, he stood and walked into the hallway just outside the kitchen and waited.

She stood, interested in Petunia's white face and wondering whether it was Harry's rant or what he wanted to show her that was making her quake in her shoes. She walked into the hallway, surprised that Harry wasn't moving now that she was here. Rather than move to take her somewhere, he bent over and opened the small door in the wall. "I'll guard that cute butt of yours

as you take a look, Tonks. Take a look at the room I lived in from fifteen months until the day I got my Hogwarts letter.”

Her eyes widened as she realized that he was talking about this small cupboard. She knelt on the floor and stuck her head in, and then decided to crawl the rest of the way in. She found herself squashing herself into the triangular space under the stairs, and trying to imagine growing up in such a space. She finally worked her way back out of the area, and stood, shaking.

Harry looked at her and pulled her into a deep hug. “Don’t bother, Tonks,” he said conversationally. “She’s simply not worth the red tape you’d have to go through. When I’m seventeen, I’m out of here, and that’s that. Unless she does the unthinkable and changes her attitudes toward me, I simply will forget about them after I’m gone. And they can go back to their drab magicless lives and forget that Lily Evans ever even existed. Assuming Voldemort lets them.” He shrugged. “Let me get to a couple chores, and then we can get to our training.” He walked into the bathroom and said “*Scourgify!*” followed by a repeat performance in the kitchen, causing Petunia, who had remained sitting there in outrage, to stare at the room in horrified shock. “Okay, I’m done with those chores. Let’s go.” He walked out into the back garden calmly.

They headed to the shed where Tonks enlarged it back about 20 metres, and then built a wall where the old one had been. Once in the new room, she widened it to the same 20 metres and padded the walls and floor. "This should do a good job for us. Plenty of room to fly, to fall, and generally practice taking down old Snake Face."

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He’d been as good as his word. He’d shown no interest whatsoever in what the Dursleys were doing. They returned from their walk to the park and back toward their workout area, where Harry quickly stripped from his jeans and short sleeve tee and changed into a karate-style gi. "Shall we begin today's training?"

She smiled and altered her own clothes. "Interesting that you can strip like that in front of me, Harry. You'd be more shy than that, I'd figure."

"You've seen me naked, Tonks," he laughed. Following that with a snort, he added, "More than merely seen, if I remember rightly." His grin was impudent.

"I don't remember any complaints from you," she replied equally impudently.

"Did I say that I was stupid?" he laughed. “I’m just trying to treat this like I would treat changing in the Quidditch locker room.”

He walked toward the middle of the room, Tonks a few steps behind him. Harry jumped suddenly to the left as Tonks fired off a spell at his back, spinning in mid-air to face the Auror, landing and firing off a spell of his own, one that she avoided, but only barely.

"Nice jump, Harry," she said. "How'd you know?"

"The sound in the room changed. Your breathing altered slightly. It always does just before you fire off a spell."

"You pay that much attention to your surroundings?" she asked, rather obviously impressed.

"Well, I'm rather attached to my skin, and I'd like to keep it in one piece and as undamaged as possible." He laughed. "Besides, it was you doing the breathing. I like listening to you."

She smiled. "Thank you. Do you pay this kind of deep attention to Hermione or Ginny?"

He stood rock-still suddenly, silent. "Whether or not it's the case, I don't think I should answer you. It's not fair to you or them, especially with them not being here to be part of the conversation."

She smirked. "If you're not paying that kind of attention to them, then as far as they're concerned, how can it be unfair to me?"

"Because you seem sure that there's someone else that I'm interested in. If it's not them, then you'll search around for more names. Cho Chang. Hannah Abbot. Susan Bones. Millicent Bulstrode. Pansy Parkinson." He shuddered as he mentioned the last two names. "In the meantime, you'll be fighting with the idea that I shouldn't be with you." He deflated slightly. "I want to explore us, Tonks. Whether or not I have any feelings for Hermione, Ginny or even Ron, for God's sake, you were here first and stated your interest. We explore us. I consider other women only in the unfortunate circumstance that you and I don't work out together."

"Harry, you're sixteen. Given how drop dead gorgeous you are, shouldn't you be out there trying to talk every girl in existence out of their knickers, rather than settling for one woman? You've got your whole life ahead of you!"

"Yeah. And my life may end before my sixth year starts. I think I'd rather spend that time learning about a woman who is teaching me that love is a wonderful thing that I just might be worthy of and that I strongly suspect I feel for her, rather than worrying about whether or not Ginny is a B-cup or an A-cup, or whether Hermione has the decidedly kinky streak that someone that repressed has to have."

"A-cup," Tonks answered automatically. "She looks like me when I was her age. I have the feeling that before the year is out, though, she's going to be a C or a D-cup, if she takes after Molly." She paused. "Do you ... do you really feel that way? That even if you do want to shag the three of us until we're all unconscious, you'll forgo the chance to start a love affair with either girl because you're with me? Even if I give you permission?"

"Yes. You'd give me the permission hoping, in a way, that I'd find someone else, proving that you're right about yourself. Remember, I understand feelings of worthlessness, so I have an idea of how you think."

She shook her head. “You are not the Harry Potter I know. Who are you, and what have you done with the old one?” She grinned to take any possible sting out of the comment.

He grinned as well. “Just getting lazy. Figured I’d get it all out in the open, rather than take up all this time dancing around the situation before we get to the heart of the matter.”

She laughed. “Laziness works as a reason. Now, shall we get down to duelling proper?” She stepped away from him and stood prepared for a duel.

“Sure. I have a question for you, though. How likely is it that Voldemort and his Death Munchers are going to stand by and duel fairly? Isn’t it more likely that they’ll just come in fast and hard and do what they need to do?”

“You’re absolutely right, Harry, but duelling in this manner allows me to find out what your skills are like. Once I’m sure you’ve got a good feel for most of those, we’ll work on more sneaky methods of fighting. I want you alive at the end of this, Harry.”

“Hell, I want me alive at the end of this.” He grinned. “*Then* I can run out and shag every girl in existence!” Getting a more serious look on his face he added, “As long as they’re all you.”

She blushed and then looked up quickly. She fired off an *Expelliarmus*, immediately following it with a *Protego* even as the *Expelliarmus* flew at Harry. He laughed and threw up his own *Protego*, following it with a familiar red beam that took down her shield. She was impressed that he had immediately fired another spell that the red glow of his *Stupefy* had masked when the Jelly Legs hex struck her, and she wobbled around for a moment. Rather than take immediate advantage of the situation, he took the time to prepare himself, and suddenly fired off, as one word, *Rictusempra-PetrificusTotalis-Incarcerus!* ” She smiled to herself as she realized, firing off multiple *Protego* spells, that she simply was not going to be able to block them all, and found herself a moment later thrown back and bound with silk ropes. She was also chuckling at the almost epileptic moves that Harry had done in order to do his spell-work. “And I never even had to use any of the spells you taught me that you shouldn’t have, Tonks.”

She verified that the ropes were in fact silk and decided to twit him lightly about it. “Oh, into bondage are we, Mister Potter?” she purred at him, and was rewarded with a slightly noticeable change to the way his clothes were fitting.

He gulped slightly before saying, “Okay, I guess I deserved that. Gods, Tonks – do you have any idea how beautiful you are?” he asked thickly before casting “*Finite Incantatem!* ”

She stood and walked over to him. “I get the idea every time I look at you looking at me and see the complete shock in your gaze that I might find you attractive, let alone be in love with you.” She grinned again. “What made you say it while I was bound in ropes, though? And don’t think I didn’t notice that yours were silk, and not the usual rough hemp ones every other person seems to use.”

He blushed furiously. “I may be insisting that we wait until at least my sixteenth birthday, but it

doesn't mean that ... well, I dream about you and ... certain things." His blush actually deepened considerably, and his trousers became even tighter fitting. "And before you ask, yes, some of them involve you and silk ropes and that bed you created your first day here."

She felt her own shirt fitting more interestingly. *How in hell did he know that was one of my fantasies?!? Or am I just luckier than any one girl deserves to be?* "It won't be for our first time, Harry, but I promise to give you that fantasy – give it a chance to come true. I can depend on you not to abuse the inherent trust involved with something like that." She watched his eyes narrow, and the room became noticeably colder. "What? What did I say wrong?"

"Who was it?" he asked darkly. "Who abused you like that?"

"Fuck," she muttered under her breath. "Stressed a word I didn't want to." She stood straighter. "A fellow Auror. Wouldn't stop when I asked him to. He's been dealt with by the Ministry, though."

Harry snorted. "Yeah, a Ministry punishment for doing something wrong. Where did he get promoted to for raping someone?"

Something struck deeply within her, and she looked at him for a very long moment before speaking again. "I think I'm starting to understand something, Harry. You detest the concept of rape ..."

"Doesn't everyone?" he asked. "Everyone sane, at least?"

"Yes, but it bothers you more than most people. You look at things that most people wouldn't as rape. If you stretch certain definitions properly, you're right, too. I raped you on my first day here, and I'm sorry for that, and will make it up to you somehow."

"Can't rape the willing, Tonks," he answered.

"But remember – *you're* the one who called it rape that day."

"Because it's considered that under the eyes of the law! At any point, did you hear me screaming, 'Please don't'? If you did, the word 'stop' was immediately following it!" He began pacing the room, walking toward the nearest wall first. "I'm worried about *you*, Tonks! I don't want you losing your job when someone at the Ministry decides that it's good press or whatever to take potshots at me again. You're a good Auror – hell, you're even less clumsy around me here – and I don't want you losing your job because you got too close to me, and someone used me to destroy you! And you can't deny that it's possible – take a look at the Ministry's dealings since I walked back into the picture. What happens the day that Amelia Bones finds it easier to follow the Minister's lead than to buck him and actually enforce the law? If I'm sixteen when you and I happen, then I can see them complaining, but at least I'm legal. If it happens before the end of this month, all you have to do is fall on the wrong side of the wrong person, and they'll use *me* to send you to Azkaban."

She smiled sadly. “Why have you taken so much of the world on your shoulders, Harry?”

“The one with the power to vanquish the Dark Lord approaches...” he quoted at her. “It literally *is* on my shoulders. If I fail, the world deals with an immortal dark lord, most likely. I *can't* fail. And I can't let those close to me take too much damage for *being* close to me.”

“Let us make our own decisions, Harry.” She grinned at him. “You've had a lot of practice at redirecting conversations, I see, but I haven't lost the original thread I was going to say. You hate rape, and want to deal with anyone who fits your definition. You're also good at changing the direction of conversations when someone gets too close, unless they're a stubborn little bitch like me.”

“I'll thank you not to insult my girlfriend,” he said with a smile.

She beamed back at him. “I'm still a stubborn little bitch who happens to be the girlfriend of the sexiest teenager on the planet, who has a horrifying suspicion that she wants her beloved boyfriend to deny.”

“Okay, that's easy enough. I've never been raped.” He grinned at her impudently.

“That was easy enough. Now, tell me again, and make me believe it by telling it to me as the complete, unvarnished truth as you say it.” He opened his mouth to speak, but their eyes locked, and she could suddenly read him as clearly as if she were in his mind. *I can't say that to her. She'll know I'm lying. I can't lie – not to her.* He closed his mouth into a thin line and hung his head.

“I'm sorry, Tonks. I can't say it without lying to you.” He sighed. “I understand how you feel, so I won't hold it against you for finding someone else to take over for you. I will always remember this time we *did* have fondly.”

She smiled sadly and walked over to him, pulling him into a hug. “Harry? Look up at me – look into my eyes.” He lifted his head, and she could see some tears in them. She crossed her fingers, closed her eyes, and met his lips with her own, trying so very hard to push every feeling she had for him into it. She could feel his startled reaction to being kissed – he was obviously expecting a slap, or to be spit upon – and then felt him begin to tentatively return the kiss, his own emotions flooding through. *This can't be happening! She can't still love me – not after learning about what happened to me.*

“Now. The first thing you need to realize is that whatever happened, whoever did it to you, *it wasn't your fault.* You need to know that you're not responsible for someone else's actions, that it does not change anything about what you are, and that I will not be leaving you because someone else did a bad thing to you. Are we clear on that point?” She waited until he nodded, hope beginning to appear on his face, and then drew him into another kiss.

She felt the kiss deepen, and her tongue gently touched his lips, which parted to permit her entrance, and their tongues clashed thoroughly, yet delicately. She also felt certain other reactions

happening as their bodies pressed closer together, and she gently broke the kiss. “Harry? If we’re not careful, we’re going to ... well, we’re down here, and anyone could walk in on us. Besides, you said you wanted to wait until your birthday.”

He groaned as he separated from her. “You’re right, damn it to hell. I want you, Tonks, but I won’t have you losing your job because you got intimate with me too soon.”

She kissed him briefly, yet passionately. “If they’re that way after being the ones to suggest it, then I can tell you what I’ll tell them. ‘Take this job, fold it until it is all corners, and place it where it’ll do you a world of good.’ If they act that way to me, I promise you that I’ll quit, Harry. If it’s a choice between you and my job, the job loses.”

He blinked at her for a moment and stumbled backwards a step or so before actually falling to the padded floor, hard. “You’d ... you’d give up your job if they made you choose between us?” She smiled and nodded at him, which caused something that rather surprised her. Tears began to leak from his eyes, although she was quite certain that he didn’t realize it. “Nobody has ever loved me that way. Nobody has ever cared enough. Nobody has ever fought hard enough to say ‘The hell with what you say – I’m doing it’.”

“Get used to it, then, sexy,” she said. “I agree that we should probably avoid actual intercourse, but would you be against us at least pleasuring each other? As some Muggle author had his character say once, ‘From here I see a tongue and fingers – everything else is gravy.’ What do you think?”

“I think that we’ll have a lot more privacy upstairs than down here,” Harry murmured.

#####

Harry looked over at the beautiful naked woman next to him. This was another three-fer, as she’d called it. She’d managed to make him orgasm three times in decently rapid succession. *I could get seriously addicted to those hands and that mouth. I may not survive it when she eventually wraps those other lips around me, as she phrased it at least once. Wonder how she’d explain the big grin on my face, and the fact that the top of my head would have been blown off?* He chuckled, which made her look over at him.

“Something funny, love?” she asked, snuggling up against him on his bed.

“Just trying to imagine the explanations after we make love completely for the first time, since I seriously doubt that I’ll survive the experience. How will you explain the fact that you blew the top of my head off, and the big stupid smile I’ll be wearing?”

“Oh, you’ll survive me, Harry, I’ll be sure of that. After all, I’ll want you around for more.” She growled deep in her throat as her hand slid to lay across his organ, which almost immediately began stiffening. “Lord love a duck,” she whispered in awe. “Morgana, give me the strength and stamina to deal with a sixteen year old’s sex drive.”

He laughed and hugged her close. “I do love you, Tonks. I know that now.”

“Thank you, Harry. I don’t know if I can say how much it means to me to hear those words and know that they weren’t said just to get my knickers off.” She returned the hug after releasing her light grip on his erection. She bit her lower lip and said, “Harry? You know how you’ve been thinking a bit about some of the things you’d like to do to me, involving silk ropes and beds and such? I have a few fantasies as well, and I was wondering ... well, I had a lover once who introduced me to ... well, some people think it’s disgusting, but it was rather erotic for me the times we did it. Ever contemplate taking me ... well, you seem to like my arse so much ...”

He softened and stiffened simultaneously – his entire body doing the stiffening while a certain portion of it performed the softening. “Not in a million years, Tonks. I’m sorry. I can’t.”

“Why not?” she asked, and then hit herself in the head with the palm of her hand, hard. “Harry, I’m sorry. I’m an idiot and a jerk and ...”

“I said it earlier, Tonks. I’ll not have you insulting the woman I love. It was an honest mistake to forget it. I’d prefer that nobody else knew about that.”

“Who was it? When did it happen?”

“It started when I was about ten, and kept up until last summer. Dudley and his gang apparently began to *sexually* mature a bit early. I don’t think Petunia really knew about it, because I think she would have put a stop to it, if only to find a way to blame what her Duddikins was doing on me. Further proof of my freakishness, I guess.” He shrugged. “He’d hold me down and ... well, let’s be blunt. He’d fuck me with his thankfully small ... thing ... and then leave me alone to clean up. He was aware that he didn’t want Mummy or Daddy to find out about it, so he’d let me clean things clear of his doings. He got his gang involved in it as well. Piers Polkiss was worst, because he’s ... um ... kinda large. At least they used something for lubrication when they did it. Didn’t want to hurt themselves, I guess.”

Her eyes were flaming – almost literally. “They still – they were doing this to you last year?”

“Yeah. Early in the summer, anyway. After a bit, I guess I kind of spooked them,” he said simply. “Why?”

“Why? *Why?*” she asked, sitting up. “They were been abusing ... they raped ... you had to deal with ...” She was apparently at a loss for words. “Why didn’t you say anything to anyone?”

He shrugged, but his casual posture was belied by the anger in his voice. “Why? To whom? Why would I have assumed anyone would help me? I’ve always been on my own. No one helped me when I was six and Dudley broke my arm with a fireplace poker. No one helped me out the very first time Dudley raped me, before I even knew Hogwarts existed. What reason would I have to assume that anyone would help me after the wizarding world knew I existed? Especially after that Heir of Slytherin thing, how could I imagine that anyone would believe me? It would have been even worse after the Tournament, when everyone was convinced I was going crazy anyway. And

last year, the Order bozos never saw any reason to help me out. I understand that there was a watch on me last year?"

Her face fell. "Yeah. I was part of it, occasionally. I need to take some blame for it."

"Why? Would you have prevented Dudley and Polkiss and the rest from beating on me? Don't answer that," he said as she opened her mouth, "it's a rhetorical question which has an answer of 'Yes.'" He sat up himself and kissed her. "So, since you would have, it was someone who didn't care, or wasn't there when he was supposed to be. Is it safe to assume that Mundungus Fletcher was one of my rather common guards last year? Or Snape, for that matter? Dung would be off stealing something, and Snape would conjure up some popcorn and sit back for the show."

"I'll find out," she said darkly. "I'm also going to deal with that cousin of yours. As far as when, do you remember dates and times? Probably not, given the fact that it's been a year ..." Harry heard her stop as he stood and walked over to the roll-top desk. "Damn fine arse," he heard her mumble, and turned to face her with a grin, and winked at her. He sat down and wrote out a series of dates and approximate times.

When he walked back over to her, he said, "Unfortunately, that sort of thing is permanently seared into my brain. I'll not soon forget any of the gang's ministrations. Here's a list. Going to check it against the schedules of my so-called guards?" She nodded.

"Tell you what, Harry," she said, getting up from the bed. "As much as you hate anyone else knowing, I think we should ... I think Dumbledore needs to know about this, and we can get clearance to do some ... rearranging of Dudley that the Order won't bitch about. Sound good to you?"

"Well, Dumbledore said he was going to try to patch things up by being more open, so maybe this can be the first way he can prove it. I'd like Dudley and the gang unable to do this to anyone else. Let's get dressed and visit him." He walked over to his armoire and pulled out black denim trousers, black silk boxers and a tight black T-shirt.

"Holy shit Harry, I'm getting horny just thinking what you're going to look like in that outfit," Tonks breathed. "Should I wear a bra or not?"

"Depends," Harry said with a laugh. "Do you want a normal meeting with Dumbledore, or one where I throw you onto his desk and remind you just what a good teacher you are?" He licked his lips, wiggling his tongue at her for a moment.

"Bra," she murmured. "Definitely a bra. As much as I want that, it *is* Albus's office. Must remind myself of that..." She continued to murmur as she stood and dressed as well, in a nearly matching outfit. Finally, they were ready, and headed for Grimmauld Place, from where they would contact Albus Dumbledore.

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Harry Potter and the Paradigm Shift

Chapter 5

The pair Apparated into Hogsmeade hand in hand, after Tonks reduced the appearance of her age to roughly sixteen. She settled on her natural white hair and blue eyes, if only because she knew that there was no one living in Hogsmeade who would recognize that look, and damned few Hogwarts professors, either. They made the walk slowly, Harry enjoying the sensation of walking with the girl that he loved around a place he thought of as his real home. He'd stop her occasionally and kiss her for no other reason than that he was happy to be with her, in so many meanings of the word.

Finally, they reached the castle, and were met by Minerva McGonagall. "Albus is waiting for you both," she said, turning and walking toward the Headmaster's office, making no effort to see if they were following.

Once they had reached the office, McGonagall murmured "Aero" and motioned for them to go up the stairs as they appeared. The door to the office was open, and Dumbledore motioned them inside. "Nymphadora! Harry! Good to see you!"

"Sir," Harry said, nodding. He was still having some problems with Dumbledore, remembering merely a month ago, but having Tonks near him this summer had helped him immeasurably. Being a close relative of Sirius's, both by blood as a first cousin once removed, and also as someone who simply cared a great deal for the man, she'd been able to cry with him while he mourned, and help him get a proper grasp on the fact that Sirius simply had not been the type of man to sit around the headquarters and do nothing all day, especially after so many years in Azkaban, and that this had strongly influenced his actions. "I owe you an apology for the ..."

"Harry, that is in the past," Dumbledore said with a smile as he raised a hand, "and you need trouble yourself no more about it. As I may have said then, I have too many things as it is, and if breaking some of them helped you work through your frustrations, then it was worth it." He motioned around the room. "Besides, nothing happened that a simple *Reparo* wouldn't fix." His look became more serious. "I understand you have something of some importance to talk about." It was quite obviously not a question.

"Yes sir," Tonks said. "I found out today a rather disturbing fact about Harry's childhood, and the fact that the situation in question continued up until the beginning of last summer." She paused, looked over to Harry and reached for his hand. "Harry, from about age ten until last summer, was repeatedly raped by his whale of a cousin, Dudley, and that gang that he hangs out with."

"Last summer? How is that possible? He was being guarded by members of the Order."

"I'm betting we'll discover that it was either Severus or Dung guarding him," Tonks grumbled. "Dung is about as reliable at a job as Binns is good at keeping students awake in his classes." She looked at Dumbledore. "If, by some happenstance, it's discovered that any of the rapes happened on Severus's watch, I'm giving you warning right now that I'm going to disembowel him with a

pickle fork, sir.”

Albus Dumbledore blinked for a moment at that pronouncement. “I ... shall keep that in mind, Nymphadora. I cannot believe that Severus would permit such a thing, whether or not his feelings for the boy are, shall we say, less than charitable. Let me see the list, and I shall compare it against our records, which are scanty at best, I am afraid, but I believe I can match up the guard with some certainty. If it is Mundungus, can I at least request that you not use a pickle fork on *him*?” he asked with a slight smile on his face.

“Oh, I can guarantee that,” Harry said. “I’ll just *Legilimens* him and make him experience what he caused me to go through. Nothing too major, I think.” He could see the worry in Dumbledore’s face. “Oh, don’t worry, I wouldn’t abuse that kind of spell, even if I could cast it. I will insist that you take the person in question off any truly important duties, since they’ll have proven that they weren’t up for what was basically the most important job they could be doing, and that’s not arrogance speaking either. After that prophecy, I have no choice but to believe that I am the most important thing that the Order can be doing. If I don’t defeat Voldemort, the world deals with an immortal maniac.” He thought for a moment, and then started to laugh. “Let me rephrase something. I don’t want the Order doing me at all. One specific member, perhaps,” he said with a twinkle in his eyes, “but not the entire Order. I am the most important mission, however.”

“Agreed,” Dumbledore said. He looked at the two of them for a moment and said, “May I speak to both of you, but separately, please?” They met each others eyes and Tonks nodded. Harry stood and walked to the entrance to his office and stepped outside the door, closing it softly behind him, and made a chair to sit on. He concentrated on the spell that he had insisted they cast before Apparating.

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“Yes, Albus?” Tonks said. “What can I do for you?”

“What is happening with Harry? How did you discover this information?”

“Simple. As I’m sure your guards on the young man show, I’m there quite a lot. Well, I got Madam Bones to authorise my basically living with Harry for the summer, in order to help him through the grief he was feeling for Sirius. I think I’ve done a fair job of that. He spent a few days railing at the world, and me, and you, and anyone else he could think of, but when he saw that I was crying for the old bastard ... sorry, Albus, but I still miss the old dog ...”

“That is quite all right, Nymphadora. He was a fine man, and I also miss him.”

Tonks blew her nose somewhat loudly. “As I was saying, though, Albus, I helped him through his worst grief for Sirius.”

“I notice that he seems to look to you as more than merely a friend.”

“Yes,” she said, her voice slightly colder.

“Is this a wise thing to allow to happen, Nymphadora? He is but sixteen years of age, and you are but twenty-two.”

“It’s between us, Albus, I have to say. It’s no one else’s business except ours, unless it starts to interfere with my job as an Auror, and currently, as per the head of the Department for Magical Law Enforcement, Harry *is* my assignment. The fact that we happen to have fallen in love is an added bonus.”

“Has a sexual element entered the relationship yet?”

“Is that even any of your business, Albus? Don’t try twinkling at me – I know what that twinkle means. You remember that one of the things we Aurors get taught is Occlumency. *I* should have been teaching him, or any other Auror, not Severus. Harry picked up in about a week what he needed to know – what it took Severus *how long* to *fail* to teach him?”

“Be that as it may be, Nymphadora, the question is vital. If such is the case, not only is he in danger, but the person he is with could potentially have their mind opened to Voldemort at the height of passion, and if it is an Order member such as yourself, many plans that we have become open to him, and lives are put at risk. I must ask you again whether or not your relationship has taken a turn to the more intimate.”

“And I once again will inform you that whether or not we have is none of your business. You know that the amount of power it would take for you or Severus to read me, even during an orgasm, would burn out my brain.” She laughed. “They test that at the Auror academy, did you know that? Wanking is a required skill during Auror training, since you may well be required to get information horizontally on occasion, and you don’t want your mind opened up to your victim ... uh, lover if he happens to be a Legilimens.”

“Again, be that as it may be. You have twice avoided answering my question. I have no choice but to assume that the answer is actually in the affirmative. I have no choice but to craft a missive to Amelia Bones reporting that you have been engaging in intimacy with an underage wizard, and require that punishment be meted out.” He sighed. “I am sorry, Nymphadora, but the fate of the wizarding world lies in the balance.”

“I’m sorry, too, Albus. This is going to have effects you’ve never foreseen, and I’m quite certain that you’ll grow to regret it someday, but by then it will be too late to mend fences with Harry. In fact, it may already be too late, once he learns of what you’ve done.”

“I can but hope that he will understand my reasons. I regret the necessity, but fear that there is no choice. Ah well, I had so recently repaired everything in this office.”

“Somehow, Albus, I think that your things are going to be the least of your worries. Shall I send him in?” she asked calmly.

“Yes,” came the sad answer.

#####

Harry stood and vanished the chair and waited for Tonks to leave. With his eyes, he could read her asking him to keep as calm as he could. He nodded and mouthed, “I love you, Tonks,” as he entered the headmaster’s office.

“Harry, I am glad you brought the abuse to my attention finally. I understand the desire to protect others, and I ...”

“Honestly, sir, let’s cut to the chase. What will be done about it?” Harry sat back in his chair and crossed his arms.

“Well, first we have to be sure who it was. Then he’ll be – well, we have the problem with Obliviating whoever it is, since they have put so much into the Order. They will be dealt with, I can promise you that. Punishment will be difficult, but proper.”

Harry nodded at the answer. “So, what else is there to talk about, sir? I can see that you have more to say to me, as uncomfortable as you are in that chair. So let’s get it out in the open where we can work on it together.”

Albus slumped forward slightly. “Harry, I don’t know how to say this, but I have some bad news for you.”

“Well, that part of it was easy enough,” Harry said. “Just say what needs saying, and we’ll go from there. Work for you?”

Dumbledore frowned slightly as he looked at Harry. Harry could see that something was bothering the elderly wizard, but that he didn’t know what the problem actually was. “Yes, I suppose that makes the most sense, Harry,” Dumbledore finally responded. “It refers to the relationship you have with Nymphadora Tonks.”

“She’s the best thing that’s ever happened to me,” Harry interjected. “She got me through Sirius’s death – I still mourn for him, but it’s not the deep, shocking, ‘I don’t want to do a thing’ depressed thing I was in at the end of the school year just a few weeks ago. She’s taught me no end of things on how to duel, and trained me to be sneaky with the spells I know.” He grinned suddenly. “They’d beat the hell out of me, but I’ll bet I could surprise most of the rest of the students here at the school in a duel.”

“Excellent!” Dumbledore replied. “That craftiness will serve you well when you eventually must face Voldemort. However, I must still refer to your relationship with Nymphadora.” The elderly wizard sat back and removed his half-moon spectacles, rubbing his eyes for a moment before he slowly returned the spectacles to the bridge of his nose. “As much as it pains me to do so, I must request that the relationship with Nymphadora end, for your own safety, for her safety, and for the safety of the Order.”

#####

Tonks stood suddenly as the explosion made the castle shake. She shot through the door into the headmaster's office, and found herself forced to laugh, despite the seriousness of the situation. There was a tremendously large hole in the wall that led to the outside, while a large number of Albus's papers, books, and the remains of most of his mysterious little devices were scattered around the room. Albus himself sat behind his desk, his hair standing on end and covered in soot, and his face as well was covered in soot. His eyes blinked twice, slowly, the only movement he could make in his shock. *Reminds me of one of those Muggle cartoons Harry showed me these past few weeks.* "I warned you, didn't I, Albus? Now you have a long road ahead of you in order to clean things up. Here in your office and with him as well."

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Harry appeared in his room at Number four Privet Drive, Fawkes on his shoulder. "Thanks, Fawkes. I think you'll want to be getting back soon, though." The phoenix trilled for a moment, and Harry started. "Are you sure about that, Fawkes? I mean ..." Fawkes interrupted him with a long trill that sounded almost like a gentle chiding tone, and Harry laughed at the end. "Oh, all right. If you insist." He looked about the room. Quickly pulling out his trunk, he opened it and cast a rather powerful spell on it, making the inside large enough to fit a considerable portion of the room's furnishings. He said "Pack!" and the armoire gently vomited out its contents into his trunk, the clothes folding on the way to the wizard space contained within the trunk. He repeated the performance with the roll-top desk, since the quills and parchment were real. He carefully performed this around the room, grabbing whatever was his and packing it into the trunk. When it was done, he shook his head and grabbed a notebook that he'd had lying around and wrote a quick note.

He shrank the trunk and stuffed it into a pocket. "Well, it's time I head to Gringott's, I guess. Willing to take me there, Fawkes? Your call." With that question asked, the phoenix trilled out what was obviously a laugh and disappeared from Privet Drive, his claws gently grasping Harry's shoulder.

#####

Tonks,

Sorry, love, but I needed to get moving. I left the room as you built it, rather than cause you a serious splinching problem. I need to leave. Dumbledore's right, but not for the reasons that he thinks. I'll see you again at some point, but for now I need to get out of the old bastard's clutches.

Yeah, Albus, I called you an old bastard, and were it not that I'm writing this to a woman, I'd call you a great deal more. You've proven that your word is worthless, at least as far as I'm concerned. I'll return to the British Isles again when I get proof from people I trust that you're dead.

Don't think I'm joking, either.

Goodbye for now, my beautiful Nymph. Good riddance to you, you vile bastard, Dumbledore.

Harry

#####

His appearance in the lobby of Gringott's caused more than a little surprise, resulting in several goblins immediately pointing rather deadly looking spears at his chest. "Eep," he said quietly, raising his hands to make it quite obvious that he was not making even the slightest move to cause a problem.

They quickly lowered their spears when Fawkes began to trill, seemingly chiding the goblin guards for not noticing that he'd arrived by phoenix travel. One of the goblins that ran the interior of the bank came over to verify that things were completely under control.

"Sorry, it's my fault, sir," Harry said. "I didn't realize that Fawkes would take me quite so literally when I asked to come to Gringott's. I thought he'd bring me to the street outside. I have a lot that needs to be done, and a hideously short time in which to do it. Is there any way in which I ... no, that's not fair to the other patrons who have been waiting a while." He stood in front of the goblin, fidgeting as he obviously tried to think of something.

"I assume that there are those whom you wish to prevent knowing that you are here?" the goblin asked.

"Yeah. Right now, damned near everyone in existence. I've ... I can explain, but not in a public place."

"Understood, Mister Potter," the goblin murmured quite quietly. He looked up the phoenix on Harry's shoulder and trilled for a moment, and suddenly Harry was in a nearby office. A few moments later, the goblin he'd been speaking to walked into the office. "Much better. Now, what is the situation? Before you ask, if anyone comes looking for you, the most information that they will receive from us is that you were sighted in the lobby. Now, how may we at Gringott's help you?"

"I need to leave Great Britain completely, which means that I need to convert my entire vault into Muggle bank cheques."

"Might I ask why you need to leave?"

"Honestly, I've had an extremely bad situation crop up, and need to get out from underneath it before it gets out of my control."

"Understood. Have you contemplated where you might go to, Mister Potter?"

Harry sat back in his chair and laughed, slightly hysterically. "Let's put it this way, sir – I had the situation crop up no more than ten minutes ago at Hogwarts. I haven't had the time to do much more than contemplate leaving, pack up all my belongings," he said, patting his shirt pocket, "and

get here. I'd still be trying to get away from Hogwarts if not for Fawkes here."

"I thought I recognized the headmaster's phoenix." He was interrupted by Fawkes trilling at him. "Indeed?" The phoenix bobbed its head as if to nod. "I stand corrected. I recognize *your* phoenix, Mister Potter. While Fawkes is not truly yours, apparently Dumbledore has done something to lose him the loyalty of his most trusted advisor."

"Curiouser and curiouser, as Alice once said," Harry mused. "Forgive me, sir, but I still feel some sense of urgency in regards to this."

The goblin sat back in his chair, obviously thinking for a long moment, before sitting forward again. "Mister Potter, do you trust us?"

"Depends. In regards to money and the secrecy and such involved, of course I do. Brain surgery? Well, you'd have to show me you had some idea of what you were doing." He smiled a weak smile, realizing that the goblin might not find it funny. *Honestly, I don't find it funny – I was just dumb enough to try to lighten the mood.*

To his surprise, the goblin sat back in his chair and bellowed out what could only be laughter, which brought several other goblins into the room quickly. They were quickly waved away, but Harry noticed that they all seemed to look at him with some sense of interest. Finally, the goblin he had been talking with recovered enough to speak again. "Mister Potter, forgive me. That is perhaps the most honest opinion any wizard has ever dared to give us, and I found its phrasing to be amazing. I have a suggestion for you, and we can see where it may go."

"Please sir, I'm listening," Harry said, leaning forward eagerly. The goblin smiled at this.

"Go to the United States. We have major branches there in New York City, in Chicago, and in Los Angeles, with many minor branches throughout the nation. I would recommend that you go to the New York branch and leave immediately. I would also contact the Aurors over there, or whatever they call them, since I do not believe that they use the term Auror anymore. Inform them that you are on the run from those who have held you captive for these past several years, and that they should discourage those attempting to find you from gathering further information about you. You should call it political asylum. I can guarantee that they will help you."

"It's a good idea," Harry said. "My problem is getting there. I'm fairly certain that trying to get across the Atlantic would rather solidly tire Fawkes, and I won't do that to him. And also I'm quite certain that by the time I reach Heathrow, Dumbledore will have pulled out all the stops to keep me from leaving England. No train, ferry, plane, or ship will be able to take me to anywhere without him knowing."

The goblin grinned a rather wide grin. "Would you be against the concept of being treated as a commodity for a short time, Mister Potter?"

"What else is new?" Harry snorted. "That's all I've been to Dumbledore all these years. Why?"

“If we treat you as valuable goods, due to the secrecy involved, we just need to show that we have a list somewhere of what was shipped. What it would take for Dumbledore to force those records to be released if we choose not to release them would cause him to burn every favour he is owed, and would cause him to incur several debts that he would someday be forced to pay off.”

“How long would shipping me take?”

“No more than ten to fifteen minutes travel time, and that assumes that the connection is busy. Most likely considerably faster.”

“Then I accept. If I can ever return to England and survive the inevitable confrontation with Moldie, then I’ll do everything within my power to avoid any further Goblin Wars. You guys are treated like crap, and the wizards of the world simply don’t get that.” He chuckled. “Besides, History of Magic is boring enough as it is, and after fifteen or more Goblin wars, one forgets whether Marbag was chieftain during the twelfth or thirteenth one.”

“Eleventh, as wizards count them. As valid a reason to avoid a war as any – history is a difficult subject to make interesting. I believe you, Mister Potter.”

“Please – call me Harry. You’re possibly saving my life, I think you can get away with calling me Harry.”

“Call me Rackspit, Harry.” He laughed as Harry’s eyes widened. “I see you recognize the name.”

“I’ve been talking to the head of the Goblin Confederacy?” Harry asked weakly. “Gods, what a fool I must have sounded.”

“Actually no. I found you refreshingly honest.” He chuckled. “Shall we work on the paperwork to get you access to your money far more easily across the pond, as you humans say?” He snapped his fingers, and three goblins walked into the room. “Ah, I had forgotten that. It is slightly unusual, but it will be against your best interests to return to Gringott’s for the reading of Sirius Black’s will. Shall I explain to you the terms within his will?” At Harry’s somewhat numb nod, Rackspit flipped through the paperwork and said, “Ah, his name being cleared caused a large number of changes, all for the betterment of the main recipient.” He looked up. “That would be you. There are payments to be given to a Remus Lupin, including the renovation of a house in Hogsmeade, a payment to be given to a Nymphadora Tonks and one to her eventual husband, with a particularly rude suggestion from the deceased about finding one. A Hermione Granger has a bequest, as do the individual members of the Weasley family. Narcissa Malfoy and Bellatrix Lestrange are mentioned under certain conditions being met. All remaining moneys, which are rather considerable, are to go to the main beneficiary, Harry James Potter. You can expect a sizeable sum to become available on the thirty-first, especially since your parents’ will takes effect that day as well.” Rackspit looked up. “I do not violate confidentiality to inform you that on your sixteenth birthday you become our largest individual customer. There are businesses with greater sums available, but no single investor.”

Harry sat back in his chair, hard. Fawkes chuckled slightly at him, and chirruped in his ear.

“Yeah, I know. Sirius and my folks would want me to enjoy it, not mope around.” He snorted. “In Sirius’s memory, maybe I ought to build a proper bachelor pad?” He suddenly thought of something. “Is Number twelve Grimmauld Place one of the properties coming to me?” Rackspit nodded. “When the will is read, is there any way to hide who the main beneficiary is?”

“Of course,” Rackspit replied, smiling. “I believe that I see where you are going with this. Logic tells me that the property in question is important to Dumbledore in some way. Am I correct in assuming that you wish to hide your identity from them, and forbid them access to any of the Black family properties that you own, come your birthday?”

Harry nodded. “Where do I sign?” he said with a somewhat nasty grin.

“It shall be done as you have asked, Harry. They will be denied access to your properties come your sixteenth birthday. Is there more I can do for you?”

“Actually, yes. I want to give four people unlimited access to my accounts, under the assumption that they will sign a magically binding contract that the information they will be given will stay with them – they can tell no one.”

“Quite easy to set up, Harry. Who are they, and what do you wish to say to them?”

“Nymphadora Tonks, Hermione Jane Granger, Ginevra Molly Weasley, and Ronald Bilius Weasley. I want the contract to actually prevent them from telling anyone, if that’s possible.”

“Again, easy. You have not had the chance to design magical contracts, have you?” Rackspit chuckled. “Shall I give you parchment to write these messages? The parchments can be set for self-destruction, and the contract will prevent even a Legilimens of Dumbledore’s skill from reading the information.” Harry nodded and wrote out his messages to each of them, labelling each of them for its recipient.

“I guess I’m ready,” Harry said finally. “I’d like to thank you for your help, Rackspit ... what honorific would be appropriate to refer to you by, sir. Just using your name seems disrespectful.”

“Another reason we help you, Harry. I speak for all goblins when I refer to you as Goblin-friend. The use of my name is sufficient, but if you feel an honorific is required, then I supposed Mister will do.” Rackspit reached out and tapped the area of Harry’s forehead that some called the Third Eye. “There. All goblins will see that and give you proper respect, Harry.” He paused. “I hope you do not mind, but we have contacted our New York branch and asked them to contact the American Auror branch. When you step through, you will be given those things you will need to function in America, and then the Aurors will talk to you.” Harry began to get a bit worried, but Rackspit calmed him. “We are on better terms with the American wizards, Harry. They listen to us as equals. If you are as serious as I believe you to be, then you would do well to learn the lessons that you do not know the Americans are teaching you.”

Harry blinked for a moment, and then laughed. “Do you have Seer blood in you, Rackspit? That was as clear as any prophecy I’ve ever heard.”

A goblin came to the door before Rackspit could respond. “Milord? There is an Albus Dumbledore here, requesting an urgent meeting with you.”

“Understood. Well, Harry, it is time we part ways for a while. Good luck in the United States.” Harry was led out a second door from Rackspit’s office, and into a vault.

“This will be sent in roughly two minutes, milord,” the goblin said, bowing.

“Harry,” he corrected mildly. “Your people are helping me out of a very sticky situation when you don’t need to. I think any milords are a little out of line – I’m nobody special.”

The goblin backed away and closed the door. A minute later, her heard the door opening, and said, “Forget something?”

“No, milord,” another goblin said. “Your trip to New York is complete. If you would, please?”

#####

A few minutes later, Harry was sitting in a comfortable Auror’s office in Lower Manhattan, over one hundred stories above the pavement. “Okay, let me see if I have this correct,” a man who reminded him extremely strongly of Kingsley Shacklebolt (minus the earring) was saying to him, “You have been forced to live with abusive relatives by Albus Dumbledore, the headmaster of Hogwarts?”

“Sir, I’ll take Veritaserum to prove that I’m telling the truth. My parents were murdered by Voldemort when I was fifteen months old, and I was forced to live with my relatives, the Dursleys, until I effectively ran away from home today. If not for the goblins, I’d still be trying to figure out how to escape England. I don’t intend to return to Europe until Dumbledore is dead. By that point, I’ll be an adult, and they won’t be able to force me into anyone’s home to live.”

The man chuckled. “Understood. If not for the goblins and that mark that they put on you, you’d still be trying to convince us *not* to send you back, rather than having me asking you if you wouldn’t mind living with one of our Auror families until the thirty-first, at which point you become the richest mage in England, and also an emancipated minor here in the United States, if you so choose. Certain things you won’t be able to do, like drink or smoke or drive, but beyond that, you’ll effectively be an adult. Won’t even have to go back to school, but I’d recommend that you continue your studies. Other British mages have discovered that there are a *lot* of concepts taught in our schools that they never learned.”

“My recommendation is that you go out to the West Coast. We can see to it that you get tested for the Joshua Norton Technical Institute, and see if they’ll take you as a student. More immediately, while we wait for the thirty-first, we find you a home to stay at, preferably out of the New York City area.” He scowled for a moment. “To hell with this.” Picking up the telephone, he dialed a number and waited for a moment. “Hello, San-Francisco-Charlie-Watson-speaking, this is New York, Reginald Walker speaking. Yeah, Charlie, long time no. Got a sitch here, and we need your help. How soon can you get here? Okay. Two sugar, heavy cream, right?” He hung up the phone

and chuckled. “Went through the academy together. Roomies.” He got up, poured a cup of coffee and added the sugar and cream. He held out the cup. A moment later, a tall man that looked amazingly like a Weasley appeared in the office, took the cup that Reginald Walker held out and drank deeply.

“Ah, you still make the best damned office coffee I’ve ever tasted, Reggie. So, what’s up?”

Reggie thumbed in the direction of Harry and gave the newcomer a quick rundown of the situation as he understood it. Charlie Watson simply nodded at every new point, and then said, “Gotcha. We’ll move him to Frisco while you guys give the Brits the run-around for the next few days. Get him a home for the moment, and maybe help him locate a house for himself in the meantime.”

Harry interrupted. “If they send Nymphadora Tonks as one of their Aurors, try to get her alone and tell her I’m okay.”

“Anything else?” Reginald Walker asked knowingly.

Harry blushed. “I think she’ll understand completely if she realizes that you pulled her aside for just that purpose. Oh, tell her to pull Hermione, Ginny and Ron aside for the same message. I don’t think anyone will have to tell her not to trust Dumbledore.”

“Classmates?” Charlie asked.

“If not for Tonks, I’d have given some serious thought to trying to date either of the other two girls. And Ron’s the first friend my age I ever had.” Both men’s faces shut down as they heard how blandly and simply Harry made that statement.

“Right,” Charlie finally said. “Let’s get you en route to the West Coast. You just keep jumping earlier and earlier. You left England at about three P.M., which got you here at ten A.M., and you’re about to jump three hours earlier. If you can stay awake for another fourteen hours without chemical means, you’ll do loads better on your sleep schedule out there.”

“I can see there’s a bunch of small things I need to get used to. ‘Skedyule’ as opposed to the ‘shedyule’ I learned.” Harry grinned as he said it.

“Hey, the girls will go crazy for the British accent over here.”

“Only girl I want to go crazy over me in any way already has one of her own,” Harry replied sadly.

“Sorry,” Charlie said. “I have a tendency to open mouth and insert foot a lot.”

Harry waved a ‘forget about it’ at the redheaded man. “As for the sleep, insomnia and I are old friends. Fourteen hours I can handle. Shall we head west, then?”

Reginald grinned at them and said, “Go west, young man,” and the two disappeared.

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Harry Potter and the Paradigm Shift

Chapter 6

He walked home from the Apparation point feeling a bit more tired than he'd felt in a long time. Between his early morning classes and the setup work for the mage business he was planning to start, it was taking a lot out of him. He waved at the people he passed, Carly Thomas still trying to get him to give her more than a passing glance. Today's outfit was just barely covering all her salient points, and he reacted the way he always did – "Afternoon, Carly," and walk on by as if nothing was unusual or daring in her outfits. *She's not going to speak to me for about a week now, I think. It's been four years – I didn't react to her at Norton, why would I notice her now as more than someone who wants into my trousers?*

Mrs. Noriega was shaking her head. "Girl never learns, does she?" she asked Harry in her gentle accent. "Chasing you since you moved here, and still hasn't learned."

"I could say that about a lot of people, Mrs. Noriega," he chuckled. "At least one of my old classmates back in England was that way. Never learned that it was a bad thing to get me annoyed. I had 'issues', you see." The chuckle became a full laugh, which she joined.

Changing the subject, she said, "You need to get more sleep, Dan. You're running yourself ragged, and it's not doing you any good."

"Should just be a couple more weeks, ma'am," he said. "I'm just about ready to start the business. Since it will be manufacturing in the beginning, that will leave me a couple weeks to do nothing but sleep."

"You've never run a business before, have you?" she laughed.

"Well, I won't have the storefront problem – it's mail order. Specialized PDAs for specific applications. There are a lot of businesses that need special things, and I'll be dealing with that need. Not enough call for the average person to want them, so storefront was never a consideration."

She nodded. "Well, I won't keep you anymore – you go home and get some sleep, Mister Radcliffe," she admonished him sternly, but the twinkle in her eyes took the sting from it.

"Ah, Mrs. Noriega, if only you weren't married ..." he laughed.

"I still wouldn't stand a chance against that girl you left behind. Now go!" She laughed as she made a shooing motion with her hands. He held up his own hands in acquiescence and continued down the street, finally making it to the door of his renovated Victorian after stopping to talk to some of his other neighbours.

Opening the door, he saw a note on the table and chuckled. *Of course you're out until later!* he laughed to himself as he read it. *Well, looks like I need to get my hands on something to nosh and*

something to drink – it's been a long day.

He smiled to himself as he sat down with a sandwich and a Dr Pepper. *I wonder if they're still looking for me in New York City? Of course, I'd imagine that looking for Harry Potter is getting them a whole lot of nothing. Daniel Radcliffe would get them somewhere, but why look for him?*

#####

It was nearly six when he heard the knock at the door, and realized that it had awakened him in his chair. *Well, I guess Mrs. Noriega was right. I did need some sleep.* He walked to the foyer and looked carefully out the windows along the side of the door, and felt his jaw drop. His wand slid into his hand before he opened the door.

He was mildly amused to see that the oldest of the group was staring at him in shock, and some barely disguised lust. She was in her base form and was still as beautiful as the last day he'd seen her, four years ago. At the moment, her hair was black as sin, straight, and hanging down to just above what he remembered as a particularly curvaceous arse.

Behind her stood three others, all of whom surprised him. Ron Weasley was easily six-foot-four, with the build of a marathon runner. He'd let his own hair grow long, and he'd grown into that nose of his. Beside him stood his sister, who hadn't grown into the D-cup that Tonks had suspected, but had grown into a woman who was as astonishingly beautiful as he thought Tonks's base form was. Her hair was also long, although not as long as Tonks's. Last was Hermione, who was still as remarkably attractive as Harry remembered. Her hair, while still bushy, now appeared to be under her control.

"Won't you come in, please?" he asked of the group, who stepped gingerly inside the door. "So what makes you risk Dumbledore finding me?"

Before they could answer, Harry heard noises coming from down the hall, and knew what was coming. He was looking forward to this "Dan? We got visitors?" From down the hall a tall man appeared – long black hair and a prominent nose. "Hey, Tonks! Good to see you!"

"Sirius?" was all Tonks managed to gasp before the blood rushed away from her brain and she fell in a faint.

Harry's Seeker reflexes were still there. Despite not being the closest one to her, he still managed to swoop in and catch the woman on her way to the floor, and swooped her completely into his arms. He walked into the living room, where he gently placed her on the couch. She began to regain her consciousness as he was letting her go.

#####

She looked up into the sad eyes of her once-hopeful lover, and was certain that she knew the reasons for the pain and loss deep within them. Without even realizing she had started it, she answered his worries the only way she could – she threw her arms around him and kissed him

hard. After a moment's shock, he began to return the kiss, but after a moment, she was surprised to feel him shuddering against her.

She released the kiss and looked at him, and was surprised to see tears in his eyes. "Harry? What's wrong?"

"I thought I lost you for good, and now here you are." He hugged her.

"We thought you were gone, but ... damn, I must really have wanted to see you bad. I'd swear that I saw ... but why would I see him when I wanted to see you?"

"Who?" Sirius Black asked with a grin. "Could it be that my beautiful cousin, once removed, was overcome at the sight of my incredible handsomeness, and has decided to throw over her stylishly scarred boyfriend for a close relative? Who, I might add, is rakishly handsome."

"Zounds, you forgot modest!" Harry laughed in what he called his 'radio announcer voice'.

"You're dead," she said breathlessly. "Harry saw you fall through that veil. Dumbledore told us you were dead – that no one had ever returned from the other side of that veil."

"And we all know how trustworthy the old fuck is," Harry grumbled. The four visitors blinked at the use of the strong profanity. "Sorry. I've never forgiven him for intentionally deciding to destroy the relationship that Tonks and I were building. Did he ever do anything with the rape information I gave him?"

Hermione went white. "Oh my ... Morgana's blood – please tell me that it wasn't true. Please tell me that I don't have to go back to England and feed Dudley Dursley through a sausage grinder."

It was Harry's turn to blink. Trying to make a joke out of it, he said, "Well, as long as you're feeding all of him through. His own sausage isn't big enough to make the effort worthwhile."

Ginny and Hermione both looked about to faint. "Sorry. Was it something I said?"

Sirius was looking at him. "Is there some reason, Dan – sorry, in this group, Harry – is there some reason you'd know the size of that whale's ... ahem ... sausage?"

"Dudley had these urges, you see," Harry said simply. "Unfortunately, I'd imagine that there are some girls out there who also suffered at the hands and ... other things of Dudley and his gang."

Sirius was speaking quietly, something that Harry had learned was a danger sign. "Do you mean to sit there holding my cousin's hand and tell me that Dudley fucking Dursley *raped* you? *Repeatedly?*" He ended the question shouting, in a towering fury.

Tonks gaped in response. "That's why he left England! That and the old fart trying to break us up. Don't tell me he didn't *tell* you?"

“And you didn’t tell *us* !” Hermione was outraged. “We could have done something about it!”

“It wasn’t for me to tell!” retorted Tonks.

Harry’s answer to the increasing cacophony in his living room was to whistle. In response came a quiet pop, and both Hedwig and Fawkes appeared on the coffee table. Hedwig hooted and flew happily around the room, landing momentarily on everyone’s shoulders to accept her due – their pleased cries of appreciation and a quick stroke of her soft feathers. Fawkes, on the other hand, flew over onto Sirius’s shoulder and began to trill. The song calmed everyone in the room. “Damn you, Fawkes,” Sirius finally said, gently patting the phoenix’s head. “I had a perfectly good mad going there.” Fawkes chirped happily and nipped at his ear.

“There’s a time and a place for it. Right now, all it would do is give all of us ulcers. When we’re in a position to do something about it, we will. Right now, though, running back to England would ruin one of our secrets.”

“Speaking of secrets,” Tonks said to him, “I’d like to know how my dead cousin, whom I happen to love dearly, but not in that manner,” she added, laughing at Sirius’s obvious fake lecherous grin, “happens to be standing in San Francisco with the temerity to not be dead!”

#####

Harry stepped through the doors of the Joshua Norton Technical Institute with a little worry, and not a little sadness. *I’d hoped to spend my last two years with Ron and Hermione. Another thing to lay at that bastard’s feet. My life is so important to protect that my mental well-being is meaningless. Keep me from my friends all summer for some reason that you refuse to tell me. Give me Occlumency lessons with a man who hates me, while Tonks, who I wouldn’t mind seeing my thoughts, teaches me in a week or so. But what hurts most is leaving my friends behind.*

You owe me, Dumbledore. Big time. He’d looked at the map and started to head toward the main office. It was a bit convoluted. He’d headed down three separate hallways before reaching a confusing intersection. He shrugged and chose the direction he thought he needed to go. He’d only gone down the hallway a short distance before being stopped by three males his own age, by appearances. “Look, it’s a newbie!” The speaker may have been a scruffy brunette, but his attitude was unmistakably Malfoy.

“Shall we teach him what we do to newbies around here?” a blond said. This one looked to be the Aryan ideal, except for the lack of intelligence in the eyes. Harry moved his eyes to the third in the set, a dirty-blonde slack-jawed individual.

“Not going to add anything to the conversation?” Harry asked calmly of the third, a slight smile on his face.

“Gonna wipe that smirk off, newbie,” said the first speaker. He and his goons moved in an orchestrated manner, obviously with the intent of grabbing Harry’s arms while the first one began pummeling. That may have been their intention, but Harry had been training with an Auror. He

dropped and swept his feet in a beautifully executed gymnastic manoeuvre, dropping first the Aryan and then the brunette. He flipped back to his feet in time to catch the fist that the slack-jawed one threw upon seeing him stand. He used the puncher's momentum to spin him and throw him into the first two, who were trying to stand.

It was as Harry dropped into a fighting stance that someone rounded the corner. "Mister Davis!" said the first speaker. "We were trying to bring this new student to the offices, and he decided to fight us!"

"Thank you, William. I'll take it from here." He looked to Harry with distaste. "What's your name?"

"Ha ... Daniel Radcliffe." Harry said, remembering at the last second that he had a new identity.

"Wonderful. New students so stupid they have trouble remembering their own names. What we teachers must teach," Harry heard him mutter. Louder, the man said, "I am Mister Davis, Mister Radcliffe. I fear that I am likely to be one of your teachers these years at the Institute. You have started your career here in a rather inauspicious manner, I fear, beginning a fight unprovoked. I'm surprised that you didn't simply hex them unconscious."

"Underage Magic Use laws, sir. I rather like my wand in one piece," Harry replied impudently.

The teacher leading him to the office stopped in the hall. "Might I ask how you managed to secure an admission to this Institute with such intense idiocy running rampant through your skull?"

With a cold voice, he responded, "Probably the same way you got your teaching job, sir. Intelligence obviously wasn't a criterion for it."

"How dare you?" Davis bellowed. "I am far more qualified for my position as Defence teacher than you will ever begin to understand!" He grabbed Harry's arm and began to drag him down the hall.

Harry dug in his heels, causing the man to spin. Harry used this chance to bring his hand up into the teacher's nose, which he felt break under the impact. The man flew backward, blood flying. "Defence is more than waving your wand around, jerk. I've dealt with enough teachers like you – I've had enough of it."

Davis was on his feet surprisingly quickly, a Coagulation Charm having obviously been cast. He was raising his wand toward Harry, and Harry decided that he'd had enough. He leapt into the air, spinning as he rose. One foot caught the arm that was rising with the wand in hand, while the other snap kicked into the man's face. He'd never managed that high a kick before, and it showed in his landing – he landed hard on his side. He rolled quickly to his feet, wincing in pain from what was at minimum a hard bruise to his rib area.

Teachers came boiling up the hall at this point. *Great, he thought. Couldn't be here earlier when*

this thing started?

“What happened here?” seemed to be the overpowering question from the teachers.

“I’ve gotten myself expelled before I started classes,” Harry said. He gave his address to one of the teachers and said, “I’m living there, with the Watson family, at least for the time being. I’ll wait patiently for the police there.” He turned and left the hallway, retracing his steps back to the front.

It was as he reached the front steps that he decided that he’d had enough. Not in an angry fashion, but in the sense of being totally overwhelmed. “Why?” he said to the sky as he sat down hard on the cement steps. “Where did I sign up for all this, hmm? I obviously signed some damnable contract somewhere, so all I ask is to see it.” He stood again and began to walk around in an agitated fashion.

How did this come to pass? I hate this. I can’t even make it into this Institute without screwing things up. I have no friends, no family, and the woman I ... ah, who the fuck do you think you’re kidding? You’re in sex with her. You just miss the chance you had to spread her legs. Stupid fool.

Well, at least you’re an emancipated minor, given that you certainly can’t go to this school anymore. He shook his head. *Need to get moving before they call the police to get rid of me for trespassing.* He started to walk down the steps when he heard a voice, somewhat out of breath, shout, “Stop, please!”

He turned around to find a young woman whose demeanour screamed ‘school administrator’ coming down the stairs toward him. “I’m sorry, ma’am. I was just leaving. I figured it would be much simpler this way, rather than having gone through all the paperwork to have enrolled me, just to have to expel me now. This way you have no extra paperwork.”

She stared at him for a long moment – long enough, apparently, for an ambulance to come to the school. “If I could find a way to do it legally, I’d kill Davis,” he heard her mutter. “Mister Radcliffe, I want you to know that expulsion is the last thing we’re contemplating.”

“True. I’m not a student. Can’t expel someone who never actually was in a position to *be* expelled.” He frowned at her. “Just let me head back to where I’m staying and I’ll be out of your hair.” He turned to leave again.

“What *did* they do to you at your previous school that made you so sure that we’d expel you automatically?” she asked, horror changing the timbre of her voice.

“Got a month for me to start? My old school has its own Davis – his name is Severus Snape. If you’re a Gryffindor, such as myself, you automatically start your school career at a minus. He has a particular hard-on for certain students ...” he said, and then realized what he had just said and blushed furiously. “I am terribly sorry, ma’am. That was inexcusable, as was my attack on Mister Davis. I should have been able to prevent his attempt to drag me to the office without breaking his nose, which led to his rightfully pulling his wand to defend himself from an unknown

quantity such as myself.”

“Bullshit,” she said bluntly. “If you’re willing to press charges on him and your first attackers, then we can finally get him out of this school.” An automobile pulled up in front of the school, light flashing. A very familiar redheaded man climbed from the auto. Behind them came an ambulance.

“Dan! What happened? Are you a witness to the attack?”

“You could say that, sir. I’m the attacker.”

His eyebrows rose. “Okay, who did what to you?”

The administrator’s eyebrows rose. “How do you automatically know he’s innocent?”

“Got a room we can ward the hell out of?” Charlie asked.

She led them inside, and down to the main office. Once inside her personal office, she cast a handful of spells. “There. Not even the standard Department Question Mark spells will get through these wards.” She turned. “So you’re Harry Potter. Impressive.”

He was suddenly standing, his wand in his hand, covering her. Charlie laughed. “God, I love your reflexes, Harry ... sorry, we need to remember that your name now is Dan Radcliffe, until you feel confident admitting that you’re here.”

“This school was chosen because Lissa here is ... well, it’s complicated. Let’s just say that she’s a go between for the school and Department Question Mark. She knows your story, and she’s the only one in this school who knows, unless you go telling everyone. So, tell us what happened.”

He repeated the story, from the moment he entered the building to the moment that Charlie had pulled up outside. Charlie chuckled. “I don’t think Davis is going to like what happens when We come down on his head. I trust you on this, and we can even mention the hints of abuse, which led to your defence of yourself in such a manner.”

“So I’m not expelled?” He practically sagged in relief. “One thing I don’t understand, though ... Mr. Davis called me an idiot for not hexing the three who attacked me. What about the Underage Magic Laws?”

“Underage ... ah, I understand,” said Lissa. “Davis probably assumed you had been here for a while, instead of being a new transfer, and didn’t take the time to find out. I’ve got good news, Harry. We don’t have those laws here. They just won’t work for us. We rely on training for control from an early age rather than imposing control from outside through fear. ‘With great power comes great responsibility, yadda yadda ...’ We’ve even gotten it into the Muggle culture. At least some of them seem to understand it.”

“Those three in the hall didn’t.”

“They’re probably not very bright,” said Charlie Watson. “I mean, who picks a fight with someone when you have no idea what their capabilities are?”

“Aloysius Davis,” said Lissa, promptly.

Harry grinned. “I think I’m going to like this country.”

#####

“This is interesting,” Tonks said, “but what does it have to do with getting Sirius back?”

“I’m getting there, Nymph. You needed some background on a couple of the teachers. Unfortunately, unions can be *very* strong over here, and his lawyer was good enough to get most of what they wanted to use barred, since it would require breaking my identity. So Davis stayed at the school as one of my torturers. At least Lissa Raines was someone I could deal with.”

“So, do I have competition?” Tonks asked in a sprightly manner, but her eyes showed some worry. “This Lissa Raines sounds like it. Young and pretty and available.” Her grin didn’t completely make it into her eyes.

“I think her husband and daughter might consider the term ‘available’ to be a bit of a misnomer. Besides, Tonks, the only girls I’ve ever known who could hold a candle to you are in this room.” He met eyes with Hermione and Ginny, both of whom blushed.

“So Davis plays into this again?”

“For two fucking years,” Harry grumbled. “It didn’t help that I continually humiliated the man in his class.”

“Why, Harry?” Hermione asked. “You had to know that would just make it worse for you.”

“He did it to himself, Hermione. I coasted through his two years of teaching. You learned more from me during the illegal D.A. meetings than you would have during two years of learning under this prick. He kept trying to humiliate me in class with the spells he knew, and I kept countering them.” He chuckled. “The D.A. rose again, you could say. I started inviting students over for small classes to teach them what Davis couldn’t. Fortunately I had Charlie and Lissa to teach me some *real* Defense and keep me sharp. And Sirius later, of course, which brings me back to how we got this randy old man back ...”

#####

Divination was a much different class than he was used to at Hogwarts, so much so that he searched out the teacher after his first class and apologized for his thoughts about the class.

"Thinking does no harm, Mr. Radcliffe," Miss Cybelle answered him with a smile.

"Thinking can lead to action, and prejudging you was wrong."

She laughed. "I've seen your transcripts, Daniel," she said. "I know who taught you. Does Sybill still predict the death of at least one student every year?"

"Especially once Harry Potter started going there. Woman seemed to take an unholy glee in predicting his death, and always seemed to get depressed when it didn't happen." He laughed. "I take it she's famous for just how *unlike* her ancestor she is?"

"Unfortunately for her, yes." She looked at him for a moment. "Have you ever had any sort of prophetic dreams, Harry?" She shook her head. "Sorry, the talk of Harry Potter kept the name on the tip of my tongue. Have you, Dan?"

"No, Miss Cybelle," he answered. *How do I tell her that I have, but that they were in regards to my being Harry Potter? Some secrecy if I go blurting it out to everyone.*

She looked at him long and hard, and then closed her eyes. Her eyes seemed to flit about under her eyelids, and then she opened them again. "Well, that was interesting. I apologize for ... given Trelawney, I can already see the rolling eyes from you ... I talked to some of the departed. Your secret is safe with me."

He raised an eyebrow in disbelieving curiosity. "James and Lily say they love you. Does that mean anything to you? She was a stunning redhead with your eyes, and he was as handsome as you, with the same unruly hair." He sat heavily in a chair.

"You really ... you really saw them?" he asked, tears coming unbidden to his eyes.

"Yes, and they're proud of you, and what you're going to do with your life. And you have something happening this Halloween that should make up for some of the things you've experienced in previous ones."

"You mean, things like losing them?"

"Yes," she said. She paused. "Lily says that the Halloween two years prior was an excellent one. She's blushing, too."

He thought for a moment and then burst out laughing. "I imagine it was fun, even if it led to me."

His teacher winced. "Oh, she didn't like that. I'm not going to repeat everything she's saying – no, I won't Lily, unless you figure out how to possess me – but suffice it to say that she's just a tad peeved at your comment, and wants me to inform you that you had nothing to do with their deaths – it was the Dark Lord." She cocked her head. "Interesting. She keeps stressing the term Dark Lord. I think she's forbidden to tell you an important piece of information. Oh my, yes! She's nodding furiously."

"This may be the oddest conversation I've ever had," he said, "and I've had some really strange ones in my short life. So my folks have been watching me? All the time?"

"Yes," she replied. "Lily's blushing as she says that your hair isn't the only thing you inherited

from James. Do you have any idea what she's talking about? Ah, that blush tells me that you do. They also say that you need to go to Gringott's to see what became yours on your birthday. More precisely, Prongs does. He says you'll understand that."

He shot to his feet and hugged the surprised teacher. "Thank you, ma'am!" He had tears in his eyes. "I've never known them, you see, and ... well, you gave me the closest that I'll get until I'm with them and Sirius again."

She cocked her head. "They're laughing. Sirius isn't with them, and they're laughing about it. 'Padfoot never could stand to be bored'? I assume that means something to you?"

He laughed. "That sounds like Sirius. I don't know why they're laughing, though. He's dead."

"All they're telling me is that you should wait until October thirty-first. You'll get it then." With that, she finally sagged slightly. "Sorry, Harry," she whispered. "Takes a bit out of me, but it was important. And by the way, when we're not in class, I give you permission to call me Moira."

"Thank you ... Moira. This seer thing is something we're going to work on, isn't it?" She nodded tiredly. "I'll pay more attention in class."

"I appreciate that." She looked at him for a moment. "It's funny, Harry. I'd love to meet the girl that you're pining for. Your parents kept chuckling, and ... well, not to sound arrogant, but I know how I affect male students, and you don't react, but neither do you react to the boys. Therefore, you've already given your heart to someone about as completely as you can."

"Yeah, and then abandoned her." He sat up straighter for a moment, and rubbed the back of his head. "Why do I have this feeling that Mum just slapped me in the back of the head?"

"Because she probably did. Listen, I know how fast you were enrolled here. It doesn't take a genius to realize that you're on the run from a very bad situation, and the fact that I'm now only the second person in school to know your real name tells me something else. Yes, we know your name over here, Dan. For you to have enrolled as fast as you did, with some help from somewhere else, means that you had to move fast. That's not abandoning her – that's quite probably protecting her."

"Doesn't mean I have to like it – I miss her, Moira. I miss her so much it hurts. Really. It's a physical pain, right here in my chest. I'm not whole without her or any of my friends." He shook his head. "I suppose it'll stop hurting someday. I know I can make new friends, but they'll never be the first friends I ever had my age."

Moira looked sadly at him. "Someday I hope you can trust me enough to tell me the whole story. I'm not asking for it now."

#####

"Let me guess – Moira's important to the story," Tonks said impatiently.

“Well, I could just stop telling you, grab you, snog you senseless, and repeat the performance with the other two.”

“Hmm, I like the sound of that. Problem is, you’d not be telling us *how the dead man got back*,” she said dangerously. “If you don’t start filling in the details soon, I may contemplate sending him back there the quick way.” Her eyes flashed dangerously.

Harry’s went cold for just a second, and then he winced and brought his hands to his face, covering it for a long moment. “I’m sorry, Tonks,” he said sadly. “Being here has been just as bad for me, I think, as being there in Europe would have been. I just ... I’m sorry. Let me get back to the story.” Before she could say anything, he was back telling his tale.

#####

They sat around a round table, and Harry/Dan tried hard not to scoff in his mind. He saw Moira look his way, and when he looked back, she winked at him. He rolled his eyes theatrically, and felt the girl next to him grab his hand. “Dan, this is so exciting! Do you think we’ll actually contact anyone?”

Harry looked over at Carly Thomas. She’d immediately latched onto him when she’d noticed him, and had decided that he was hers. He’d also discovered from the other girls that he apparently had no choice in the matter. Being Halloween, the students were all dressed in various costumes, and hers was a French maid’s outfit. To his chagrin, she hadn’t yet noticed that he simply didn’t care about what she was wearing; that he simply wasn’t interested in her.

He carefully disengaged his hand from hers and said, “Honestly, I know the dead hang around. My old school had quite a few ghosts walking its hallways. Our House ghost was Sir Nichloas de Mimsey-Porpington. A botched execution led to his getting the nickname as a ghost of Nearly Headless Nick. I was at his five-hundredth Death Day party four years ago today.”

“Come on, Dan, do you really expect us to believe that?” asked Rick Stone, his rival for Carly’s affections. *Personally, if he wants ‘em, Rick can have ‘em*, he thought.

“Actually, yes. The Bloody Baron was the Slytherin ghost, the Grey Lady was Ravenclaw’s ghost, and the Fat Friar was Hufflepuff’s. There were loads of others running around the place, and we had Peeves as well.”

Rick scoffed. “You tell a good story, but why should we believe you? This school has been around for almost a hundred years, and we’ve got no ghosts haunting the corridors.”

‘Dan’ rolled his eyes. “Hogwarts is more than ten times that age, Rick. How could they *not* develop ghosts around the place?”

“When they don’t exist? Easy. You went to school in a big thousand year old castle, that just looked as if it had to be haunted, so everyone sees things and hears things that aren’t really there.”

“This, of course, coming from a guy who waves a stick around and turns porcupines into pincushions. You are aware, of course, that doing that is impossible. Magic doesn’t exist.”

“What are you trying to say, Danny?” Rick said darkly.

“Simply that it’s a little ridiculous that you believe in the ability to wave around a stick and lift things in the air and turn a cow into a couch, but you refuse to believe that the soul might live on after death. We had a student being chased by a dark wizard who survived his own death. How can you ... never mind. Your mind is made up, I won’t confuse you with the facts.”

“What facts? All I have from you is assertions from you that you’ve seen and spoken to ghosts. What possible reason would I have to believe you?”

“Especially since the girl you want is chasing me, whether or not I’m interested in her.” There were gasps around the room, and he heard one girl say quietly, “Well, he’s just made two enemies.”

Harry shrugged at the girl. “Not the first time and it won’t be the last. I’m used to people not seeing something with their own eyes and calling me a liar to my face.” He met eyes with Moira, who nodded sadly and stood.

“This conversation is so far out of order that I’m not even going to begin to explain why, but I am going to insist that it stop now, even if Mr. Stone is bent on displaying his ignorance for the world to see.” She looked seriously at him. “I’ve seen them myself, Mr. Stone, and had conversations with the dead. I’ve invoked them before a crowd of adults. And maybe you’ll see some tonight.”

She clapped her hands together, once to get everyone’s attention, and then again to begin her invocation. She murmured words of Latin below everyone’s range of hearing, and Harry chuckled as he realized that there was also a modified *Confundus Charm* running during the invocation. The wards appeared blue for a moment and then faded away, and she clapped once again. “Good. The room is now warded to prevent entry or exit of anyone unauthorized. The Veil is thinnest at this time of year, for reasons we’ve never been able to fathom.” Harry blinked back some tears as the image of his godfather falling backwards through that Veil in the Department of Mysteries leapt into his head unbidden. “I will be lighting an incense which has already been spelled to help weaken the Veil even more, while preventing passage across. Watch the smoke for the faces of those who have passed on, and perhaps one of them will come close enough to talk to.”

She lit the incense, and Harry felt Carly lean into him. He sighed in resignation. *I’ll put up with her here, but I’ll be damned if I’m going to let her pull off the girlfriend thing she’s been aiming at. Why in hell did she choose me, anyway? ‘Cause I’m the exotic foreign student?* He pushed her from his mind and attempted to disengage from her grip. *Damn! She’s got a death grip on my arm!*

He gave up and cleared his mind as Tonks had taught him to do when she taught him Occlumency. His mind went once again to Sirius, and found himself hoping that he might make a brief appearance tonight. *If only I could see him and apologize to him ... even if Tonks worked so*

hard at convincing me otherwise, I still feel responsible for him dying.

The smoke from the incense wafted its way around the room, calming everyone, and Harry finally disengaged from Carly when she released her grip. It drifted through the air before coming mostly to the centre of the room, where faces began to play through the mist formed there. As thoughts of seeing Sirius just once tonight came to him again, Harry and the rest of the students were shocked as the smoke suddenly snapped into a very distinct form. “Sirius?” Harry gasped.

“Harry? Is that you?” the form said.

“Yes. Sirius, I’m so sorry that I ...”

“Screw that, Harry ... get me out of here!”

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Harry Potter and the Paradigm Shift

Chapter 7

The students all jumped back in shock. Moira Cybelle cleared her throat. “I’m sorry, sir, but you’re dead. We can’t bring you back.”

“Bloody hell you can’t!” Sirius barked. “I fell through that bloody Veil in the Department of Mysteries with my bloody body still with me! It wasn’t some bloody Knight bus hitting me, or some bloody rock out of the sky, it was my bloody cousin knocking me back through the bloody thing!”

“What are you talking about?” Moira asked.

Sirius opened his mouth to speak but Harry interrupted him. “Let me, Sirius. You’ll take twice as long, swearing at everyone.” He turned to his teacher. “Long story how we got there – suffice it to say that I was an idiot and went to the place he mentioned to save him when he didn’t need saving, and he came to save me when *I* needed saving. He fought with his cousin, who hit him with a *Stupefy*, and he fell backwards through a physical Veil. He ended up wherever he is right now. I was told he was dead, but apparently that information was less than accurate,” Harry finished, mentally chalking up another point against Albus Dumbledore.

“Wait, you mean that there’s a physical Veil?” Moira said. “You were alive when you passed through it?” The last was aimed at Sirius.

Sirius rolled his eyes. “Would you be terribly offended if I said ‘Duh’? I was as alive as my godson there is. I still am. I’m just stuck in this god-forsaken limbo. Now can you please get me out of here?”

The teacher walked over to her desk. She tapped a crystal and said calmly, “We’ve got a situation here at the séance. Get someone here.”

A few moments later, they heard a loud crack in the hallway and Moira opened the door to allow Mrs. Raines into the room, after cutting a hole in the wards with a charmed knife, and resealing it once the woman was in the room. Harry was talking to Sirius, while the other students listened avidly. “They acquitted you, Sirius. If I were going back, you could walk Diagon Alley without being arrested. I’ve still got the proclamation of your innocence, personally signed by Amelia Bones.” He paused. “I am so sorry for getting you into that situation, Sirius. If I’d just listened to Herm ...” His voice broke, and he leaned forward, tears in his eyes. “You’re over there because I was too stupid to realize I was being played by Voldemort.”

“You and I are going to have a long talk when I get back, Harry, and you might not be able to sit for a week after I get done kicking your arse for thinking like that.”

“We’ll have to figure out wherever that’s going to be, Sirius. I’m in San Francisco right now, and we’ll need to move immediately after we get you out. I couldn’t exactly hide my identity with

you screaming it out like that. So much for the Dan Radcliffe identity, though. I'll have to get a new name and start over again somewhere else."

"Why are you on the run – why aren't you at Hogwarts? You're safest there! Why are you in America?"

"Long story for when you're out. It's bad enough that these folks know who they're going to school with, let alone telling them why."

"We're going to have a *long* talk, Harry, and you won't be able to sit for *two* weeks. Dumbledore is the best person to watch out for your safety right now ..."

"Dumbledore is the *last* person I want watching out for my safety right now! Have you been watching any of what's been happening?"

"How? It's dull and grey here. Nothing. I float everywhere. Thank Merlin I don't need to eat while I'm here, or else I'd be with your folks right now anyway."

"Then I'd appreciate you not making judgements about my life when you *haven't any bloody idea what's going on in it!*" he yelled at the coalesced smoke. He thought about it for a moment, and then brought his face forward into his hands. "This is ridiculous. I'm arguing with the man who wouldn't be in this position if not for my stupidity. You're right, Sirius. We'll figure out how to get you out of there, and then head back to England. Coming here has probably killed several more people."

The room was utterly silent for long minutes. All that Sirius could do at Harry's outburst was blink – a disconcerting thing at best from a head built of smoke. Finally, there was a quiet cough from behind Harry. He turned to look at Lissa Raines. "I've already contacted some friends of mine. They should be here any minute."

At that moment there was a knock on the door. Moira opened the door to show Charlie Watson and a handful of other people outside the door in what looked to be the Wizard equivalent of hazardous materials gear – silver robes with shiny helmets covering the full head and face, silver gloves, and silver talismans sewn all over everything. A door was cut in the wards for them, and they carefully entered the room. "So, what do we have here?" Charlie asked.

"Might as well take off the helmet," Harry said. "If we're in here like this, you should be okay. Anyway, the head floating above the table is Sirius Black. He fell physically through a Veil in our Department of Mysteries, and apparently ended up wherever 'there' is. He'd kinda like to come back, if possible."

"So, how do we manage it?" came the irrepressible voice from the smoke. "I need to have a long talk with my godson, and explain to him that I've always had a tendency to speak before thinking, so he should take some of my rants with a large dash of salt."

Harry just sat back in his chair and closed his eyes. "I'm just tired of it all, Sirius. I want it gone."

I want it done. And that's just not going to happen any time soon, as far as I can tell. Is it too much to ask for a normal life? You know – finish school, get married, have a child or two, find a nice boring job, and not have to worry about some insane wizard who's not even human anymore and who wants me as dead as he killed my parents?"

"Voldemort died sixteen years ago," Rick scoffed.

Harry's eyes opened, and he stared coldly at Rick Stone. "Every time you open your mouth, Stone, you prove yourself an even greater idiot." He pulled up a sleeve. "See that scar? Basilisk bite in the arm, cured only by a phoenix's tears. Oh, I forgot, phoenixes don't exist, because you haven't seen one. I'll just have to go home and tell Fawkes to toddle on off somewhere, since he doesn't exist. And the basilisk didn't exist either, so I guess I was pretending I almost died." He showed another scar, a long one. "This one is from when his servant, the man Sirius supposedly killed, used my blood in an ancient spell to bring Voldemort back to the land of the living. Oh, sorry, you didn't see the spell actually happening, so it didn't happen, and Voldemort isn't running around getting into the Ministry several months ago. I guess the breakout of prisoners from Azkaban didn't happen either, or Dementors don't exist. Wait – you didn't see them get murdered by Voldemort, so my parents must actually still be alive! Do you actually believe in anything outside San Francisco, Rick? Are you really so self-centred that you think nothing exists until you personally have verified its existence?"

"Calm down, Harry," Moira said calmly.

"It's hard to be calm when I have an arse walking around calling me a liar about things I've seen with my own two eyes. I put up with enough of it at Hogwarts, and now I walk into this school and run into some jerk who belittles someone to make himself look bigger to the girl he wants. He can have her, for all I care! I don't love her and I never will! Do you understand me, Carly? I'm. Not. Interested." He breathed deeply. "I have seen Voldemort with my own two eyes. I was there at his resurrection – I was unfortunately a major ingredient in it, and yes, I did use the right word. I was there a few months ago when *he* fell through the Veil," he said, pointing his thumb at Sirius. "I have some damned prophecy hanging over my head, and idiots like him telling me that I haven't seen what I've seen. I'm just sick and tired of the whole business. I'm really at a point where I just want to chuck it all and walk away from the whole thing. I'm just sick of it, and I want it to end." He sat back and closed his eyes again.

"Whiner," muttered Rick Stone, which he immediately followed with an "Oof!" as Carly elbowed him in the stomach – hard.

"Well, as entertaining as that all was," said one of the people in the haz-mat suits, "we've at least figured out what's going on. We're going to have to open a rift to let this man through. I recommend that everyone be removed from the room, and everything not nailed down be packed away securely or removed as well, because there's likely to be a pressure difference between sides."

"Might as well drop the wards you have up, because what we're going to do will blow right through them. It'll make it easier to get all the kids out of the room, too." Moira nodded and

carefully lowered the wards that sealed the room, and opened the door. Only Harry remained seated as they moved everyone out. “Come on, son – you too.”

“No. I put him in there, it’s only fair that I help get him back out.”

“You could get sucked in there with him, and we won’t allow that.”

“Then you’ll have to stun me and carry me out, because I’m not leaving. My being at the Ministry caused him to be there for the last several months, so I am going to be here in case you need help getting him out. End of statement. Either stun me or start the removal process.”

One of the people raised a hand with a wand in it, but Charlie reached over. “No. He may be useful to the process. You know as well as I do that we’ll need some sort of an anchor for the process. If he’s here as someone that the man we’re trying to rescue wants to be with again, then that should help us out immensely.”

Harry could hear the sound of spell work in the hallway, and was curious. Charlie smiled at him and said, “Well, you were kind of obvious about who you are. We’re giving them the vague recollection of something odd concerning Dan Radcliffe and the spirit that was summoned, and that they were sent home for their safety. That way we can at least save the Radcliffe identity and let you stay on here if you want. We’ll start in a few minutes, after the last of them has been sent home.”

It was then that the Defence teacher, Mr. Davis appeared, stalking into the room. “You seem to have an inbred ability to ignore direct orders from your teachers, Mister Radcliffe,” he snarled. “As I understand it,” he added as if talking to a five year old, “You were told to leave the room with everyone else. Now move!” He grabbed Harry’s arm and roughly yanked him to his feet.

Harry pulled himself free from the teacher. “You will keep your hands off me, Professor Davis,” Harry said in a cold voice, “if you wish to keep all your teeth inside your mouth.”

“I will break you of that attitude, *Mister* Radcliffe, before you have left this school,” Davis hissed. “Either that or I will see you expelled.”

“Then it’ll have to be expulsion, then, *Mister* Davis, because the day I let a half-arsed wizard like you break me will be the day I cast *Avada Kedavra* on myself from the shame. Delores Umbridge was a better Defence teacher than you, and all she did was teach from the book!”

“You little ...”

“Language, Mr. Davis,” Mrs. Raines said dangerously. “I’d love to let you keep going on that, but I can’t have you striking one of the students when I can do something to stop it.”

“I will not put up with this attitude from a student.” He sighed. “Why do I have to get exchange students like him? Why can’t I get a student who actually cares for the subject coming over? Harry Potter would be a good example. There’s someone who apparently has an inborn

understanding of the concepts behind defence.”

“Y’know something, Mister Davis?” Harry asked, fighting to keep the smile off his face. “I know Harry Potter, and you couldn’t handle him. He’d wipe the floor with you, and smile about doing it.”

“I doubt that,” sniffed Davis. “I think he’d probably appreciate a fellow student of the fine art of defence.”

Harry snorted. “He’d laugh in your face about your hero worship.”

“Davis?” Mrs. Raines said. “I think it best if you leave. These gentlemen have a need for Mr. Radcliffe to be here, so your attempts at injecting yourself into the scenario for a little glory were unsuccessful. You might wish to go back to your office and work on your story of how *you* saved the day. It looks like you’re going to be successful with avoiding punishment for attacking Dan the day he came here to finish his registration, but don’t think we’re not watching you.”

Davis sniffed again. “Radcliffe is nothing but a troublemaker and hooligan, and I look forward to the day you realize that.” He spun on his heel and started to leave.

“Just shut up and leave, Severus,” Sirius said from the smoke cloud. Davis stiffened, but kept moving, and was quickly gone.

“Why do you keep pushing him, Harry?” Mrs. Raines asked.

“No offence intended, but I could teach the defence class better than he does. I *have* taught a defence class – illegally, when Umbridge performed her overthrow of the school in an attempt to mould the minds of the upcoming generations.”

#####

Hermione's jaw dropped. "Please tell me you did not pick a fight with a teacher and then tell the administrator that you could run his class better than him. Please tell me that."

"Okay, I could tell you that, Hermione, but I'd be lying to you. Remember how I said that I was teaching students how to *really* defend themselves? It was due to that Halloween that I started that. Since a club would need an advisor to run it, and the only real advisor for a Defence club was Davis, we decided to run it out of the house here. Moira decided to study Sirius's experiences, and if it just so happened that a number of students were willing to visit me at the time ... well, who were Sirius and I to stop them from visit during those visits from Moira?"

It was as he said it that the front door opened. "Dan? Sirius?" A woman came into view and walked over to Sirius and hugged him tightly. "Oh, sorry. Didn't know you had company."

Harry grinned. "Moira? We were just talking about you."

"I knew there was a reason I felt I had to come over. Now I can clear up any misunderstandings

these two have given out about me." She spun and shot a look at Sirius. "I'll thank you to keep a clean thought in your head right now."

"I thought you said you weren't telepathic!" he said indignantly.

Ginny fell off her chair laughing. "Sirius, it doesn't take a telepath to know you were thinking lecherous thoughts about her! Do you ever have any *other* kinds of thoughts?"

"Sure! There was that time with ... no, wait, I was admiring her arse. How about ... no, she had great cleavage ... hmm, you just might be right, Ginny!" he laughed.

"As long as the only cleavage you're doing *more* than admiring is mine," Moira said with a chuckle.

"Before this gets out of hand, Moira, let me introduce the people who mean more than my own life to me. You already know Sirius, and the occasional lack of silencing charms tells me that it's biblically." They had the grace to blush. "The only other male in the room, and only one of three men that I literally trust completely at my back, is my best friend Ronald Weasley ..."

"Sorry, we forgot to tell you," Ron said with a blush. "They gave us all new names as well when we came over. They wouldn't tell us where you were, but for some small sense of acting the part, we all got new names. I understand that she knows the truth, but when we step out into Frisco ..."

"San Francisco," Harry corrected automatically.

"... sorry. San Francisco. It would be best to use our new names. Hermione there is Emma Watson, and Ginny and I are Bonnie and ..." He grimaced. "I hate comedians sometimes."

"Tell me about it," Hermione grimaced. "I almost became Jane Greystoke! You becoming Orville Wright is pretty bad, though. At least they gave you a middle name you could use."

"Yeah," Ron said. "Bonnie and Bill Wright."

Ginny started to giggle. "I'm glad we both fought their first idea, though. I do not think I could have handled a last name of Grint." She fell to giggling again.

"I ask you," Ron said, looking affronted, although there was a twinkle in his eyes, "do I look like a Rupert Grint to you? Rupert, for Merlin's sake!"

Harry lost it then. "Jane Greystoke? Rupert Grint? I thought Dan Radcliffe was odd enough, but ..." He leaned forward, laughing. A few moments later, he got himself under control and said, "Okay. Need to finish the story of how Sirius got himself out while I sat there and looked stupid." He took a breath and started to speak.

"I never did kick your arse, Harry," Sirius said. "We're going to talk about this attitude of yours at some point."

"Let me," Tonks said. "I've got a four year old conversation that Harry and I *need* to have. In the meantime, he can finish the story of how Sirius came back." Harry nodded, the smile still on his face, but the light of laughter leaving his eyes.

"Okay, but there isn't a lot more to it. I'd just finished insulting the thundering git ..."

#####

The people in the haz-mat suits finished preparations that Harry hadn't been aware they were performing. "Okay, people," one of them said. "It's time for the main event. All the smart boys and girls have gone home, and just us crazy people are left behind. It's time to bring our smoky friend through."

The group pulled their wands and pointed them at Sirius, who looked as if he'd back up, if only he could. The air crackled and Harry lost the words that were being said through the noise. Suddenly there was a thunderclap, and the air in the room began tearing – it was the only description that Harry could come up with. As if did, the wind picked up, and began rushing toward the rift forming in the middle of the room. As it enlarged, Sirius's face blew away in the smoke – but he became visible as an actual form. Harry reached out and grabbed Sirius's hand as they both fought against the now howling wind. He began to pull – slowly, inexorably, relentlessly. Sirius began to slide out through the rift, and was almost through to the waist, when he suddenly began to slide back inside. "Sirius! What's happening?" cried Harry.

"Something's got me," gasped Sirius, kicking back violently at something unseen. He was pulled almost all the way back into the rift. "It's no good! Let go before you get pulled in with me!"

Harry braced his feet and tugged harder, but he and Sirius kept sliding.

"Let go! It's too strong!" screamed Sirius.

"No! Either you come out or I go in! There are no other choices!" Harry yelled into the screaming wind. "I put you in there, so I either get you out or join you!" Harry could feel the people in the haz-mat suits grabbing him and holding him, but even with the added help they could gain no further ground, and for a long moment Harry thought it might actually be useless. Then suddenly Sirius gave a yell and flailed around more freely.

"Hey! It let go! Whatever it was let go! Pull me out now before it changes its mind again!"

Harry put his back into it and got Sirius back at the edge of the rift, pulling him far enough out that one of the other people was able to grab a hand. It was short work at that point to get Sirius out through the tear in the very air.

As soon as Sirius was completely within the confines of the room, and no longer in that other space, the wind stopped completely, and the rift began to close slowly. Everyone shook themselves, and several of the wizards ran their wands across Sirius, and then unclasped their helmets. There were wide grins all around.

“Dorf?” came a voice from the middle of the room. They turned to see a small man who appeared Chinese wafting around the other side of the rift. He was quite obviously a ghost, given his appearance. He surveyed the scene before him, then pronounced, with satisfaction, “Dorf.” He drifted away from the rift, back into the void, at a lazy pace.

“What the hell was that?” one of the men asked.

“I’d say it was a small Chinese man who says ‘Dorf,’ but beyond that, I have no idea,” Harry said, boggled. He finally turned to face his godfather, and threw his arms around him. For the first time since running away from Hogwarts, he allowed himself to really cry. Giant sobs wracked his body as he held the man he knew that he’d killed those months ago – tears of loss, even though the man was right here holding him understandingly – tears of joy, that he could hold the man again and thank him for existing – but mostly tears of pain and frustration, that this job he was destined to do was just too big for him to handle.

Finally, he got himself under control, and pulled free of his godfather. “Sirius, I didn’t get to say it to you before, but I love you. You’re basically the father I’ve never had.”

“I love you too, Harry. I’m sorry for yelling at you. You were right – I don’t know the situation, so I have no right to be bitching at you.” Sirius stood and held his hands out to Harry. “Shall we head to wherever you call your home? You can fill me in there. I want to get as far away from that ... that place,” he said, glaring at the closing rift, “as possible.”

#####

“I was living with the Watsons at that point, but Sirius and I started to look for a house of our own right after that. That’s how we ended up with this huge Victorian. This thing is so damned big that you could all move in here with us, and we’d never see each other for a week.” He frowned. “That reminds me – how long are you guys in San Francisco for? If you don’t have a hotel, you could stay with us for your time here.”

“That’s up to you, Harry,” Tonks said. “We’ve left the East Coast to find you.” Her eyes decided to start sparkling at that moment with unshed tears. “We’ve lived for years without being able to see you, Harry, and we’re tired of it. We’ve moved out here.”

He blinked at them. “You picked everything up and just moved pell-mell out here?” The girls all nodded at him, their eyes suspiciously bright, while Ron simply gave him a look that seemed to say, “And this surprises you *why?*”

“Sirius?” Harry said, looking to his godfather for advice.

“All I’m saying to you is that I’m going to invite Moira to move in with us too, if you ask them. After all, if you’re going to have your girlfriends here, I reserve the right to have mine here.”

Harry was once again at a loss for words. “You ... you actually just left the lives you’d built in wherever – I think you said New York City, but I’m probably assuming – just to find me? Why?”

Tonks shook her head sadly. “I think I’m going to hunt down the Dursleys some day, and make them pay. Harry, we love you. End of statement. I left England to find you.” Her eyelids dropped halfway and she gave him a smouldering look. “I have a present I’ve been waiting four years to give you. You’re definitely old enough for it now.”

He gulped audibly. “Hey, how about dinner?” he said, doing an obvious change of subject. “I know a nice steak restaurant in walking distance.”

“Well, that was about a thirty pound segue,” Moira chuckled at Sirius, loud enough for everyone to hear.

“He’s embarrassed,” Sirius said conversationally. “He thinks he doesn’t deserve to be loved, because he thinks he abandoned the four people who mean the most to him. So when they show up to show him that they *do* love him, it unnerves him.” He looked at Harry and smirked.

Harry simply shook his head.

#####

As they walked down the street, Tonks listened to Harry’s conversation, describing the beauty of this city he had adopted as his own. She was surprised, however, when they approached one home and heard him call out a hello to the woman sitting out in her front yard. “Mrs. Noriega, I’m glad you’re out. I wanted you to meet ...”

“Dan, you’re the happiest I’ve ever seen you. Which one of these ladies is the ... oh, never mind, it’s obvious.” The woman walked over to Tonks and gently took her hands. “Thank you, miss. Just being here is making my Dan happier than I’ve ever known him to be. Treat him well.”

Tonks found tears springing to her eyes yet again. “I will, ma’am. He had to leave suddenly those four years ago, but I finally found him again, and I’m not letting him go.” She reached out and gently clasped Harry’s hand.

Looking over, she saw tears in his own eyes, and he suddenly pulled her into a heartfelt embrace. “Oh my God, Tonks, I love you,” he whispered in her ear.

After the embrace finally broke, Mrs. Noriega said, “Well, it looks as if Miss Thomas is less than pleased with the situation.” The crowd looked over to see the girl in question staring at them from the balcony of her house across the street, and for just a moment, a look of intense hatred could be seen being aimed at the crowd, which was quickly replaced with a smile as soon as she realized that the group was looking her way.

“Dan, honey, you must introduce me to your friends!” Carly cried out. She disappeared from her balcony and was out on the street a minute later. She was more dressed than she had been earlier, this time wearing what looked to be a very long tank top as a sun-dress, a simple gold chain as a belt. “Hi, I’m Carline Thomas, and I’m an old friend of Dan’s.” She held out her hand to Ron.

“Hi, I’m Bill Wright, and I’m Dan’s gay lover,” Ron said with a straight face. Harry leaned over and kissed Ron’s cheek at that, trying very hard to keep himself from laughing.

“I’m Bonnie Wright, and I’m one of Dan’s harem,” Ginny said, also serious in demeanour. She held out her hand to the stunned woman in front of her.

“But, if he’s Dan’s ...”

“Oh, Bill’s gay, but Dan’s not,” Hermione said. “Emma Watson. Pleased to make your acquaintance.” She held out her hand, and Tonks was hard pressed not to laugh, because this was pure Hermione – stun her with a sweet attitude while wanting all the while to throttle the woman.

Tonks was last, and introduced herself, “Shirley Henderson. Chief concubine. I’m pleased to meet you, Miss Thomas.”

“Likewise,” came the stunned reaction. “Um, can I look you up in a day or two, Dan? I need to talk to you about something, and now seems to be a bad time.”

“You know where I live,” he said cheerfully. “We’re off for dinner now. See you in a few days.” She nodded and disappeared back inside the house she’d erupted from. His face immediately fell. “She’d be smart to stay away from me, but she’s got it in her head that she’s my girlfriend. It’s cruel to say, but I want nothing to do with her.”

“Understood,” Tonks said. “Well, shall we get moving? It was a pleasure to meet you, Mrs. Noriega. Thank you for taking care of Dan for us all.”

“I didn’t do anything for him, miss. You did everything by showing up.”

“You’ve been his friend. Trust me when I say that he remembers his friends fondly. You have a special place in his heart, and that makes you special in my book.” As the woman opened her mouth to speak, Tonks added, “I’ll not hear another word about it.” She looked serious, but the twinkle in her eyes made the woman laugh and acquiesce. They took their leave of the woman and continued their walk.

Shortly, they came to a small restaurant that seemed to have quite the line outside. The woman at the door saw Harry and called out, “Dan! Get up here!” He carefully made his way forward, where he was informed that he and his party were going to be seated immediately, much to the chagrin of several people waiting in line. Harry was more than a little embarrassed by this.

As the others looked at Harry in curiosity, Sirius said, “Harry here has been making good use of the money James and Lily left him, not to mention the money I left him.”

“Ruddy bastard won’t let me give it back, either,” Harry grumbled.

“I’m dead, H ... Dan. You know how those contracts work,” Sirius smiled beatifically as he said this. “I’m more than happy to sponge off you for the time being.”

Hermione interrupted. “Are you trying to say that you own this place?” she squeaked.

“No. I just gave them some start-up money. Went to school with their son, and he was talking one day about the banks. They didn’t have enough credit history to get a loan from a Muggle bank, and the goblins at Gringott’s wanted a percentage of the business. I talked with them, introduced Sirius to them, and we all sat down and talked seriously about money. Next thing they knew, we were signing a contract for them to pay me back over a five year period. It was all paid back in exactly fifteen months and four days. I’ve been informed that I will never wait for a table in this restaurant in my lifetime for what I did.”

The waitress came over to the table with their menus and kissed Harry on the cheek. “Dad’s already said this meal is on the house, Dan,” she said, “so don’t argue with him.”

“C’mon Tina. This bill is going to run to over two hundred dollars – you and your dad know that. I won’t let you take a loss like that.”

“Are you arguing with my little girl, Dan?” asked a man as he came over to the table. “Your money’s no good here, you know that.”

“It was certainly good enough to get the place started,” he replied cheekily.

“And that’s why it’s no good anymore. We wouldn’t be *the* unknown steak house to go to in San Francisco if a young man who befriended my son hadn’t surprised us all by being filthy rich. You may see us taking a loss on your meals, but we make it back in spades, Dan.” He grinned.

“Besides, the only beautiful woman you ever walk in here with is Moira, and suddenly you grace us with three more at once? It’s obviously a special occasion, and you thought of us. Whatever the occasion, consider this meal our gift.” He looked around the table. “I’ll be offended if you don’t order what you want, no matter the price.” He grinned and walked away.

“He means it, too. I’ve never won that argument with him,” Harry said with both admiration and chagrin.

“One note,” Moira said. “He’s got a thing for faces – you’ll never pay for a meal in here either. He won’t let me pay, since I’m a close friend of Dan’s.” She picked up the menu. “Oh, be aware that you’ll get large portions here, and if you’re worried about quality ...”

“He wouldn’t bring us here if he thought it was bad.” Tonks looked to him. “Did you really think they’d let you pay?”

“I’ve never brought six other people. I thought that, just once, he’d realize the loss he might take and let me pay for the food.” He shrugged. “I’ll just have to make sure the advertising is already paid for. We talk about things related to the business, so I know when certain bills are due. I pay for advertising in all sorts of interesting places, like the internet, for travellers to San Francisco. I handle the advertising to the odder places that he might not think of. And the word of mouth around the mage community has been astonishing. We’ve had mages from New York City Apparate in for a meal.”

They ordered their meals and set to talking again. “You mentioned our peculiarity in a public place, Har ... Dan,” Hermione said with worry. “I know the secrecy statutes aren’t the same here, but ...”

He interrupted her. “Listen to the other conversations in the restaurant, Hermione. Really listen to them.” Tonks watched the girl cock her head, and listened as well. She could hear the murmur of voices, but could not make out any actual conversations, no matter how hard she tried.

“Impressive,” said Tonks. “Specialized charms for the restaurant environment.”

“Yup. Now, before I forget it again,” Harry said, “let me repeat something I said earlier. I offered you space in that house for as long as you’re here. If you’re moving here to be with me, then the offer still stands. If you can handle living with me, then I’m offering you the chance.”

“Is your bed big enough for all of us?” Ginny cooed at him, and then laughed at his stunned look. Tonks was in a position to see that shock hadn’t been his only reaction. She also noticed that a look of anger crossed his face before he shook his head and looked at her in apology.

“Okay, we need to get a few things out in the open, right now,” Tonks said. “Harry, midnight marks your twentieth birthday, and you already know one of the things I’m giving you. You also need to know about everything else.”

“Are you sure that this is a good time?” Ron asked. “It is rather public.”

“Honestly, Ron,” Hermione said, “it’s best to do it when we’re all feeling courageous enough to do it.”

“True,” Ron answered.

Tonks laughed out loud to see the very slight change in Harry’s body language. “Guys, you’d better explain the change in your behaviour. Unless I’m very much mistaken, Harry has just dropped his wand into his hand and is, at this very moment, pointing it at the two of you under the table.”

“Why?” Ron asked, eyes twinkling after a moment’s consternation.

“Really, Ron, is it that difficult to understand? We haven’t been bickering like we used to!” Hermione huffed back at him, crossing her arms in front of her chest. Her own eyes were sparkling with mirth.

“Yeah, well that was before we realized the real reason we were fighting!” Ron barked back at her, and then he turned to Harry. “Is that better, Harry?”

Harry laughed, and brought his wand hand back above the table, empty. “You guys are crazy, do you know that? Absolutely mental.” He picked up his glass of soda to drink, but asked, “So what was the reason you stopped bickering?” before taking a sip.

“Well,” Ron said, waiting until Harry had a good mouthful of soda, “we realized that we both wanted to shag the same guy.”

Harry’s reaction was priceless. He looked as if he wanted to perform the classic spit take, but realized that Moira, Sirius and Ginny would end up wearing it. He fought with himself for quite some time before he was capable of swallowing. “Gack!” he finally coughed. He coughed a few more times before he said, “At least I kept it from shooting out my nose. That can be as bad as orange juice.” He shook his head. “Are you serious, Ron?”

“Actually, yes,” was Ron’s reply. “I also happen to know that you don’t even remotely swing that way, as they say here on this side of The Pond. That was where quite a bit of my frustration was coming in. We finally worked it out one day when we had a rip-roaring fight, and Ginny stepped into the middle of it and just short-circuited the argument. And since then I’ve been the gay best friend that every girl should have.”

Harry blinked at him. “It’s when you say things like that – I mean, short circuited, not the other – that I realize that you’ve been here in the States for a while.”

“You mean using an *electrical* term?” Ron grinned. “See, I can even pronounce it properly, too!”

Harry laughed. “So, how long *have* you guys been here?” he asked as their meals arrived.

“About three or four days less than you,” Ginny said quietly.

#####

Tonks nearly ran into the Ministry and looked for Amelia Bones. When she found her, she handed her a letter and started to head for her desk.

“Auror Tonks? What’s the meaning of this?” Bones asked as she finished reading the very short letter of resignation.

“Dumbledore threatened my job, and he’s got the power to get what he wants, if it comes down to it. He said something to Harry in his office at Hogwarts that led to Dumbledore’s office now having an unexpected bay window, minus the glass, of course. I failed in my mission – I got too close to the subject, and thanks to Dumbledore’s interference, I have currently lost track of the subject. I need to find him, and I need to find him now. I need to return my supplies to the Materiel Department, clean out my desk, and then I’ll be out of your hair. I’d be out of Kingsley’s, too, but he doesn’t have any to be out of.” She chuckled nervously. “I’ve enjoyed being an Auror, but if I’m going to lose my job, I’d rather it be on my terms, and not Dumbledore’s, y’know?”

Amelia Bones nodded sadly. “We’ll miss you, Nymphadora. Be well, and Godspeed.”

Twenty minutes later, Tonks was at her apartment, with all the contents of her desk in one small box. She took five minutes to have a good cry, and then another five to make herself presentable.

Even being a metamorphmagus had its limits. She Apparated to just outside Gringott's and entered the building. She met Dumbledore as he was leaving. "Albus," she said calmly.

"You need not bother looking for him here. I have just spoken with Rackspit, and he assures me that, while Harry had in fact been sighted in this building, he is unable to tell me more. He does not believe that Harry is within the confines of the building anymore, however."

Her shoulders fell slightly. "Well, I came here for another reason, actually, but yours is as good news to expect. I know where *not* to look now." She shrugged. "Keep me up to date on your searches, please, Albus. No sense in wasting our time duplicating efforts."

"I am sorry for what I requested, but I truly do believe it to be for the best," the headmaster said. "I will do as you say, however." He turned and walked slowly from the building, as if defeated.

She got in line behind the other customers, and waited until she reached the head of the line – a surprisingly short period of time. The goblin in question took her name, and she quickly found herself speaking to Rackspit herself. "Miss Tonks? I have a letter here from a Mister Harry Potter that I am to give you under the condition that you sign a binding magical contract that you will tell *no one* of the information contained within the letter."

"That important, huh? Not to be insulting, but how do I know it was actually Harry, and not something Dumbledore set up?"

"Valid question. I will tell you that the letter contains information that Dumbledore would like, but that Harry would prefer he not have."

"I'll trust you guys and sign that contract." A moment later, she was reading Harry's letter to her.

Tonks,

I love you. That's why I'm leaving. I don't want that old bastard using you to get at me. I'm allowing exactly four people to have some concept of my destination. Dumbledore will probably eventually suss it, but for now...

I don't want you telling anyone, but it would be a good idea to bring Hermione, Ron, and Ginny here if you want to ever be able to talk to anyone about this.

I won't tell you what he said that made me blow out his wall – just telling me the relationship had to end wasn't enough to do that – but suffice it to say that it's the reason I won't say more than that the goblins are good friends and that I understand that New York City is beautiful this time of year. It can never be as beautiful as you, though.

I'm sorry to leave you, and I can never say how much it hurts to think that I'll probably never see you again. My life had just started to feel like it was worth something, and that bastard had to do something about it.

I love you.

Harry

P.S. – in case I forgot to tell you this, I Love You!

Her eyes were tearing up when she finished the letter. She wiped them quickly and said, “I expect I’ll be back today with more customers.”

Rackspit handed her a token. “Give the guards this, and they’ll bring you and the other three in directly to see me.”

She nodded and immediately Apparated to the point set up near the Granger home. Mere minutes later, she had a wide-eyed Hermione in tow with her as she Apparated to the Burrow and left minutes later with Ron and Ginny, leaving behind a sputtering Molly.

Twenty minutes later, they were sitting in Florean Fortescue’s establishment working on sundaes when Hermione said, “I don’t know about you, but I’m going after him.”

“How?” Ginny asked glumly.

Hermione grinned, holding up a key, identical to the ones that the other three carried. “We use some of his money to get to America and see if we can get their Aurors to help us find him.”

“What if that’s what Dumbledore wants us to do?” Ron asked suddenly.

The table was silent as they contemplated that. “We’ll take that chance,” Tonks said suddenly. “Albus would really have to settle into Death Eater tactics in order to successfully get Harry back, and then he’s got to figure out how to keep him here. I think he’ll let us be, and see if we can convince him to return to the British Isles before Dumbledore is dead.”

“He really said that?” Hermione asked in awe. “What made Harry react like that?”

“I have no idea.”

Three days later, they landed in New York City, at John F. Kennedy International Airport.

#####

“We talked to a really nice guy named Reggie, who recognized us immediately by our names, and he explained what had been done. We searched on our own since then.”

“Reggie’s a nice guy. If it hadn’t been a good idea to leave New York, I would have liked to have gotten to know him better.” Harry said as he finished the last of his meal, and then patted his stomach. “I keep saying I’m not going to eat their desserts, but they’re just too good to pass up.”

Hermione erupted with a surprising belch, which set the rest of the table chuckling, especially at the scandalized look on her face. Ron said, “The motion has been made and seconded. All in favour, say ‘Aye’.” They met each others’ eyes, and everyone else at the table burped at roughly

the same time, and then fell forward laughing so hard they began to cry.

Eventually, the waitress came over just as they were recovering and said, “Guys, you really need to cheer up. You’re depressing the other customers.” She had a huge grin on her face as she said it. Hermione simply shook her fist at the girl as she collapsed into another fit of giggles.

When the group was finally able to breathe again, Tonks looked at them all. “I think we should take this back to the house. Even with good charms on the tables, I think that there are some things better talked about privately. Shall we?” With a nod, the group stood and headed for the door, Harry dropping an affectionate kiss on Tina’s cheek as they left.

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Harry Potter and the Paradigm Shift

Chapter 8

The walk back to the Victorian home that Sirius and Harry shared was pleasant, especially since Tonks had taken his right hand gently into her left. His eyebrows rose ever so slightly as he saw the same happen between Ginny and Hermione, but the smile that came onto his face because of it was genuine.

They reached the house and Harry unlocked the door while the others grabbed their trunks from the car. Once in the house, Harry led them around the place, letting them choose their own bedrooms. Tonks, unsurprisingly, decided that the master bedroom on the second floor was the perfect place for her to sleep, as long as Harry came with it. With his stunned nod, she dropped her trunk there. Ginny and Hermione chose the room next door, which happened to have a rather immense closet joining it to the master bedroom – enough space for all three ladies to have their clothes, Harry to have his, and still room for more. Ron chose the room next to them.

After finishing the tour of the place, the entire group sat in the living room having coffee and talking and laughing and catching up with each others' lives. Harry was quite amused to find out that Tonks had been using her metamorph abilities to create "Harry sightings" at places as unlikely as baseball games and science fiction conventions, which had kept the British Aurors going in six directions at once. At length, they decided that midnight was a good enough time to wrap up the conversation. Sirius seemed to want Moira to stay, but she whispered something in his ear, kissed him on the cheek, and left to go to her own apartment.

At the top of the stairs, the group split up to go to their respective bedrooms. "I intend to have a little fun before going to sleep," Ginny said, letting her hand slip to Hermione's skirt, where she gently but firmly fondled the brunette's bum. Hermione pulled her into a quick kiss before they walked into their bedroom.

Ron looked like he was all for continuing the conversation in the hall for the next hour or so, until Sirius tugged him away. "Ron, let's let Harry have his night, hm?" Sirius said, leading him upstairs. "I'm sure we can find something to talk about" The door to his sitting room swung softly shut behind them.

This left a still slightly stunned Harry standing in the hallway in front of the master bedroom with Tonks. "Well, Harry, it's your birthday. "Mind if I give you the present I was going to four years ago?" she asked, tugging him gently into the room.

"Why? I abandoned you in England. I left you to your own devices while I ran to get away from Dumbledore's machinations. I realized later that he'd probably try to use you to find me, but ... I left you, Tonks! I don't deserve you."

She took the shaking man into her arms. "Harry, you ran to save your life. I truly believe that if you hadn't, something bad would have happened that summer. Instead, we all got away. I still love you, and if you'll have me, I still want you to make love to me."

“If I’ll have you ? I don’t deserve you.” She put her hands on her hips, looking angry. “Beloved Nymphadora, I’ve dreamed of you these past four years. I’ve been single by choice, because no one could measure up to you and those two. I’m glad to see they’re together, by the way. They deserve happiness, and if they find it with each other, all the better.”

“They’re giving me first shot at you, since I have the longer claim to you, but they have every intention of making love to you as well, Harry, and I intend to let them.”

“But ... aren’t they ...”

Tonks laughed. “The three of us girls are all bisexual, Harry, at least as far as each other is concerned. Ginny’s eyes rove quite a bit, but it’s only her eyes. Hermione only reacts that way to Ginny and me, and I fall somewhere in between, but closer to Hermione than to Ginny. I’ll admit that Moira’s a tasty morsel.”

“That’s certainly Sirius’s opinion, and from something I accidentally saw on the couch downstairs, he definitely knows what she tastes like. She’s a beautiful woman, and if not for you, I probably would have been like all the other guys in school, lusting after her.”

“Are you serious?” Tonks asked. “You didn’t lust after a lady that sexy because of me?”

“Ask her yourself next time she comes over.”

Tonks just blinked at him for a moment. “You didn’t ... you didn’t even date? Because of me?”

“As much as I know what it means, Tonks – I love you. Doesn’t mean that much if I go around lusting after and dating other women because you’re not around. It’s bad enough that I’ve had those kinds of thoughts about those two as well,” he said, motioning at the wall closest to the room Ginny and Hermione were sharing.

“Good,” Tonks said with a grin. “That makes the whole thing mutual.”

“What?” he asked, more than a little confused.

“Why do you think four people – three of them teenagers – would pick up their lives in England and suddenly move to the United States on just a moment’s notice?”

“I don’t honestly know, Tonks. All four of you uprooted yourselves, and I really don’t understand why. You really were better off in Britain.”

“Were we? Aside from the fact that any one of us could have been used to make you come back? The man we all love was here in the States, Harry. Ron’s feelings for you go beyond sex. Even though you’ll never return his desire, he loves you. Hermione and Ginny both took advantage of my metamorph abilities, and know what they’re *really* in for when they eventually seduce you. Which reminds me, Harry.” She quickly undressed, standing nude before the man she loved, and said, “I have their permission to do this, Harry. You can look. In fact, they want to know your reactions.” She slowly changed her appearance until Harry was looking at Hermione Granger, and

then slowly changed to be Ginny Weasley before slowly morphing into her natural white-haired, blue-eyed form. “They want you to see them nude, Harry – preferably under you, squealing with delight as you practice making babies.” She lowered her lashes at him again and said in a smouldering voice, “Your first lesson is right now, lover-boy. Get those clothes off.”

He looked at her for a moment and then grinned. “This is really going to happen, isn’t it?” he said as he undid his shirt. “I’m really going to make love to one of the sexiest women in the world?”

“No, but you’ve got me,” Tonks replied impudently.

“I ought to spank you,” he mocked growled at her.

“That’s for a later lesson, stud,” she laughed. “Gods, Harry, I *do* love you.” She moved toward him and flowed into his arms as he undid his trousers, which fell to the floor as he took her into his arms and kissed her with all the passion and desire that he felt for her.

“I meant it, Tonks. To me, you are the sexiest woman on the planet. The only two other girls who could get a similar reaction – well, I’ll deal with that revelation later. Right now, I just want to be with you.”

She slid the shirt off his shoulders and watched it as it fell to the floor. “Hmm, silk,” she murmured. “You have good taste, Harry – and remember, I know what you taste like.” She stepped back and looked at him. “One problem now – you’re still wearing boxers. I’ll just have to do something about that, won’t I now?” She teasingly pulled them down, kneeling in front of him. “Oh yes,” she breathed, looking at the erection before her. “This body is one temple I have no problems worshipping at.” She leaned forward slightly and ran her tongue along his length, drawing a strangled moan from his lips. “You’ve missed that, haven’t you, Harry?” she purred at him as she wrapped her right hand around the shaft and began to gently stroke him.

“Oh god, yes,” he groaned. She laughed and morphed her mouth very slightly and did as she had done in that shower four years ago – she began to gently slide her mouth along as much of him as she could take. She worked him slowly, and marvelled at the gentle touch of his hands on the back of her head, and the slight quiver she could feel. She knew he wanted to thrust into her mouth but was holding back, and loved that she was affecting him so much.

She released him and said, “How about we take this over to our bed, love?” Without waiting for a response, she stood, still holding him by his erection, and walked to the bed. She released him as she reached it, and climbed onto it, intentionally manoeuvring to give the best possible view of her rear end. She chuckled to herself as she heard him groan, and carefully lay down and rolled onto her back. “Now, I know you’ve enjoyed me wrapping my lips around that gorgeous piece of meat there, but I think you’ve waited for four years for a different pair of lips to suck you dry. I’d ask if you’re up for it, but that’s rather obvious.” She motioned him forward, and he climbed onto the bed and carefully lay next to her. She took him into her arms and noticed that he was shivering. “What’s wrong, Harry?”

“Oh, Tonks,” he breathed. “I still don’t feel as if I deserve to be given something so precious.

And I'm scared that I'll disappoint you."

"I'm not a virgin, Harry, so you're not getting anything special."

"Excuse me," he said a little hotly, and then immediately blushed. "Sorry. But *you* are precious. Your love is precious. Your decision that I'm deserving of you is precious. I'm actually glad that you're not a virgin. At least one of us has an idea what goes in whose ear." He grinned with the last comment.

She blushed at the conviction behind his words. "Okay, so you *are* getting something precious – I'll concede that, whether or not I agree. As for disappointing me – are you planning to enjoy yourself?" When he nodded, she replied with a grin of her own, "Then you *can't* disappoint me, if I know that you're happy when we're done." She gently pushed him onto his back and straddled him.

"Oh, this is a deliciously familiar scene," she purred. "But it's been improved." She gently slid along his length, feeling him shudder as he felt the wetness rub against him. "No pesky knickers in the way to prevent me from having what I so wanted four years ago." She slid all the way up, and then lay down atop him, chuckling as he greedily took one of her nipples into his mouth and began to nibble it so terribly gently. She moaned and writhed against the tip of his cock, which only made his suckling that much more insistent. His hands rose to her back, and then he surprised her by rolling them both over. He moved to the other nipple while his hands slid down her body. He moved off her slightly, to her mild annoyance, until she felt his fingers teasing her opening, at which she gasped out, "Please, Harry!"

His fingers danced enthusiastically across those lower lips for a few moments, driving her insane with want, before beginning a slow slide inside her. She realized that he was using his ring and middle fingers inside her as he gently teased her and thrust into her with those fingers, occasionally sliding out to find her clitoris and torture it sweetly. All the while, he kept up the gentle torture upon her nipples, teasing one and then the other with his tongue and now his teeth, gently nipping at the hard points to her breasts, but not so hard as to cause pain. She began to groan in a low voice, which gained volume and pitched as his fingers and tongue played their erotic tune with her body.

She felt it begin to roll through her, her entire body starting to tense, and this only seemed to make Harry's ministrations that much more insistent. Her back arched suddenly and she began to shudder violently, and was fairly certain that she was nearly screaming something, but what she had no idea.

Harry's grinning face was the first thing she saw when she was capable of conscious thought again. "And what are you so happy about, Mister Potter?" she panted, enjoying the fact that his eyes kept sliding to her heaving breasts.

"It may be silly, but it feels really good knowing I could do that to you."

"You can do something else to me, too." She reached over and gently grasped him again, guiding

the tip of his cock to her extremely wet centre. “Take me, Harry – I want to be completely yours. I want to feel you inside me. Please?”

She felt him shudder slightly, and realized that there was a part of him that simply wanted to plunge as deeply into her as he could manage. Instead, he began a tentative pressure into her, and she felt herself stretching as the thickness of the organ began to slide deeper into her. He was maddeningly slow, but she was pleased by this, because it gave her the time she needed to be able to fit him completely within her. She was damned if she was going to leave any part of that delicious monstrosity currently plundering her outside her body.

She gasped as she felt his pelvis touch hers, and his own eyes were wide. Before he could say anything, she gripped him tightly with her legs and said, “Harry, I want you to fuck me, be it hard and fast pounding or slow and sensual gliding, but I want you to come in me. Don’t worry about me – worry only about your own pleasure. I can promise you that you will *not* be the only one having an orgasm.” She kissed him briefly, but quite deeply. “I want these to be the last coherent words either of us say for a while,” she said after breaking the kiss.

He smiled and pulled out slightly. She could feel her body pulling at him, trying to keep him inside, but he kept pulling out slowly. She marvelled at the fact that she could feel his rapid heartbeat as it made his cock throb furiously. He pulled almost completely out before beginning the slow thrust back to deep within her body. His speed picked up slightly with each thrust but remained slow and delightful. She’d thought it before, but the only word to describe the way she felt as his cock stretched her so wonderfully was that she was being plundered – and she would have it no other way.

She felt the familiar burn begin at her clit and spread through her, followed by the tightening, coiling feeling below her navel that always preceded her favourite feeling in the entire world. For the first time she could ever remember, she felt her core begin to pulse against him, trying valiantly to pull the release he had not yet gotten to deep inside her. She always knew that it happened, but it was the first time that she could actually remember experiencing it. The pleasure tore through her, though, and washed away any conscious thought as she thrust against him, fighting hard to drive him even deeper into her than he already was. All she knew was that she could feel her hips crashing against his own.

He came to herself to see him grinning madly down at her, his cock still throbbing madly inside her. She opened her mouth, but he shook his head negatively, even with the grin on his face still, and slid his hands to her arse. He began to thrust in earnest at that point, and she heard herself gasp out, “Oh Morgana *YES!*” as another orgasm tore through her immediately behind the first one. She could vaguely hear the slapping sound as their bodies met more violently than before, and marvelled that he was the first lover who seemed to be able to keep her coming.

Time seemed to stop suddenly as she felt him swell inside her, and then the clock started as the long awaited explosion happened. He pressed against her as tightly as he could as his throbbing organ fired pulse after pulse of his release deep inside her. She gasped as she realized that it didn’t seem to be stopping – he was spending more time coming inside her than any other man she’d ever taken into her bed and into her body.

Finally, he seemed to stop pulsing inside her, settling down to the throbbing heartbeat she enjoyed so much. She wrapped herself around him again and let him pant in her ear for a time. She could feel him softening, but if she had any say in the matter, he wasn't going to be slipping out any time soon. She realized that he was about to speak, so she stopped him. "Harry, I say this truthfully – you are the best lover I have ever had. I definitely want more of that – preferably several more years worth of it."

"I was inspired by the most beautiful woman in the world, remember?" he said, grinning. "Am I really the best ..."

"To hell with your ego on this, Harry. I have never, with any other lover, had so long and sustained an orgasm, let alone one so powerful in the missionary position! Closest I've ever come to that level was with a lover fucking me from behind!" His face went odd, so she quickly said, "Cock where yours still is, sexy, but just taking me from behind. Wonderful on a bed, but still a great position for a quickie, bending me over a table or something like that. Great hammering thrusts that'll have me walking funny for a week." She closed her eyes and bit her lower lip. "Take a shower with you the way they're meant to be – my lover behind me, hands on my hips, your cock so wonderfully deep inside my pussy, fucking me with abandon as the water makes our bodies so deliciously slippery – oh Morgana, I love it, and I think I'm coming again just thinking about it ..." A delicious shudder passed through her body. She opened her eyes. "Not quite, but certainly enjoyable." She laughed; a throaty chuckle. "So, lover-boy, what do you want next? Another go around? A shower? Go invade the girls room and show 'em your manhood? Oh, you twitched inside me. Something tells me you'd like to fuck them senseless too, am I right?"

He looked at her for a very long moment before speaking. "I'm with you, Tonks, and that's the end of it. I've been without you for four years, and I'm not going to jeopardise it by making love to another woman." He kissed her deeply.

"Harry, you silly git – I *want* you to make love to them! I ..." She blushed deeply. "I had an Auror friend who used to let me hide in a special closet when she and her lovers had sex. The room was soundproofed, and I think you can tell why, with the noises I was just making. I like to watch, Harry, and I know that you love me. I *know* that you love me. I feel it in your heart. I feel it when you kiss me – you'd rather cut off the thing so deliciously stiffening inside me if keeping it meant hurting me. Let me state it plainly – Harry, if you want to fuck either or both of the girls, then all I ask is the right to watch sometimes. Maybe after this is all over we'll stagger when we have babies by you, so that you don't undergo a dry spell by all of us being due at the same time."

He was staring at her blankly. "Did I say the wrong thing?" she asked, suddenly afraid.

"You ... you want to have my baby someday?" he asked in shock.

"Babies, Harry," she replied. "Multiple, if you'll let me."

His jaw dropped, and suddenly tears appeared. "No one's ever loved me that much," he said in awe.

“Wrong. We have these past four years. Actually, I think Hermione and Ginny have loved you longer than I have.”

“Tonks, I’ve been in hell these past four years without you. Now that you’re back, I am terrified that acting on what I have admittedly dreamed about – well, it’s one thing to say it, and another to actually do it, beloved. Could you, under Veritaserum, promise me that my making love to either one of those ladies would not destroy what we have?”

“Yes, she could,” came a voice from the closet doorway. He spun his head to see Ginny and Hermione standing in said doorway. The speaker, Ginny, walked forward. “She’s been in a bisexual relationship with us for as long as we’ve been legal here in the U.S. Speaking as the youngest of the bunch, I might add that it was remarkably frustrating. I got to watch a lot.” She grinned. “A *lot* .”

Hermione giggled. Tonks could tell that Harry simply was not used to a giggling Hermione just yet. “You can turn over, Harry. We know what you look like – Tonks satisfied *that* curiosity for us.”

He looked to Tonks in alarm. “Sorry. I explained your views on my morphing into them, and they promised me then and there to let you see them as they are right now.” She looked at the girls. “Part of him is mortified that you’re looking at his bare arse, but I can tell you quite seriously that you’ve also made him rather hard. His heart is pounding.” He eyes twinkled as she added with a small moan, “Trust me, that’s not all that’s pounding.”

“May we see it for real, Harry?” Ginny asked tentatively.

Tonks kissed him gently on the cheek. “Harry, if you want me to, I can make a mage’s oath that this will not break us up. I’m a weirdo – I get turned on by watching other people make love. I would honestly prefer that those other people be ones that I know and love. And by the way – I’m not using that word lightly in this case. I am in love with these girls, the same way that I am in love with you. Even if I were not with you, I would be with them.” She smiled. “Love is one of those wonderful things. The more you have of it in your life, the more of it you have to give.”

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He gently uncoupled from her and turned around, blushing furiously. The girls' eyes grew so wide that, for a moment, he was afraid that they might fall out of their heads. "My God," Hermione breathed. "Tonks wasn't joking."

"Looks like we need that spell book that Sirius left you, if we're going to fit that inside us," Ginny moaned. "And if you think I'm going to forego the pleasure of *that* thing inside me, you're crazy."

His jaw fell. "I sound like a broken record, I know, but – why? Why do you love me? I abandoned the four of you to Dumbledore's machinations while I ran for safety."

"Hmm, let's see," Ginny responded. "Run away from a man who informed the both of you, doing

it separately, mind you – now that you'd found love, you needed to end your relationship or else he'd end it for you. If it were me, they'd have walked into his office to find me with his throat in my teeth – and I'd be across the room from his body. You showed remarkable restraint in not killing him, Harry."

"He flat out told me that I couldn't afford to put someone else at risk in this situation, and that if I insisted on continuing the romance, that he would, and I quote, 'For her own good and safety bring the fullest extent of wizarding law down upon her, which would likely result in a sentence of up to six months in Azkaban.' That's when I lost it and did some remodelling. I mean, did the old bastard really think that I didn't realize that her going to Azkaban was a death sentence? He's not stupid – he just thought that I'd roll over and play dead like I did all those other years." He looked at the girls before him. "Umm, Hermione? That's a little unnerving, you know."

She shook her head, tearing her gaze from his now only semi-erect penis. "I'm sorry, Harry. I've never been good at talking about my own feelings – just causes. But right now, I want ..." She blushed furiously. "I want you so badly right now, Harry, that it actually physically hurts. Not intense pain, but just a little."

"Where?" he asked, honestly unsure.

She blushed. "My nipples, mostly. They *are* rather hard right now."

Tonks grinned and sat up beside him. "Ever hear the phrase 'Kiss it and make it better'? I'd suggest that treatment right now while I go locate that spell she's going to need shortly."

"Hmm?" Harry asked her, confused.

"Harry, you're tremendously gifted, shall we say? If you were a Mundane, there isn't a woman in the world who could handle your entire length, and very few who'd be willing to experience the pain that a rod that thick would cause them."

Harry looked down at himself. He had never bothered to play the comparison game in the locker room himself, so had no idea, really, how other men were built. "I thought bigger was better?" he asked, genuinely puzzled.

"There are limits, dear. But you have never allowed yourself to be limited. Fortunately, being lovers with witches and metamorphs makes a – pardon the pun – huge difference in the situation. She's going to want that inside her, and I'm going to cast the spell to make it possible." She pushed his shoulder slightly. "Now get to kissing her pain away, sexy," she said as she climbed from the bed and began walking away, somewhat weakly. Ginny's eyes widened, and she turned to Harry and saluted, bringing a laugh to both him and Hermione.

Harry looked at Hermione and bit his lower lip. Ever since Hogwarts, he'd had dreams in which he and the bushy-haired beauty before him were far more than friends, causing him to wake up with sticky sheets more than once. Now, here she was before him, and the reality of her nude form was far superior to anything his mind had been able to invent. "Hermione? Are you sure

about this?"

"I love you, Harry, and I was afraid I'd lost you, and now I've found you again and I intend to stay with you, if you'll have me."

He blinked back unexpected tears. "If I'll have you? You were the *first* girl I ever started having *those* dreams about. Even when I was sort of with Cho, I never had those kind of dreams about her. A while later, I suddenly noticed Tonks about the same time that I noticed that cute little freckle-faced sister of Ron's had become a sexy freckled goddess. There were a few times when I wanted to just grab either one of you, rip off your clothes, and have my way with you. Of course, I wouldn't have known what I was doing, so there wouldn't have been much of a way to have," he laughed.

Becoming serious suddenly, he said, "Girls, if I have any understanding of what love is, it's because of you three. And I love all three of you. I am *in* love with all three of you, and part of that bothered me, no matter how happy I was with Tonks those four years ago. Now I get to be the luckiest son of a bitch in both the mundane *and* wizarding worlds?" He put his hands out, took Hermione's face between his palms and pulled her closer to him. "I've wanted to do this for six years now," he murmured, and gently brushed his lips across hers. She gasped and threw her arms around him, immediately deepening the kiss. Their mouths opened together, and their tongues gently touched and began to explore.

Harry moaned as he felt her hand tentatively reach out to touch his once again hard organ, and he reached down to wrap his hand around hers, trying to tell her that she could grip tighter. His other hand slid to her right breast, where he began to very gently roll the extremely hard nipple between his thumb and forefinger. He discovered quickly that it caused a delightful reaction, both with her moaning, and with her stroking of his cock. The kiss continued to deepen and their mutual ministrations continued to develop until Harry felt the very beginnings of the deep seated burning that signaled an orgasm in the next few minutes. He broke free of the kiss and released her breast, panting furiously. "Honey, if you don't want to be wearing what you're doing to me, you need to stop. I'm ... wow ... I'm not sixteen anymore. I don't think I could do justice to you properly if I let you stroke me to my orgasm, and I sure as hell wouldn't be able to with Ginny." He paused. "Hell, I still may not be able to."

"Ah, that's where this little beauty comes into the picture, Harry," Tonks said, walking back into the room. "Quite a few spells in here to make the night go wonderfully for us all, and one of them is a stamina spell for you. After that, if I read it right, you'd be able to finish off Hermione with a flourish, drive Ginny to a magnificent explosion, and then do the same all over again for each one of us, lover-boy. If I read it wrong, the absolute worst reaction is that you'll be able to make Ginny as happy as you made me." She flipped a few pages. "Which reminds me ..." She looked at the spell in the book and laughed. Putting it down, she waved her wand in a very simple pattern and then pointed it at Hermione, and then repeated the performance with Ginny. "Such a ridiculously simple spell," she murmured. "If they taught that one at the school, some student could surprise the hell out of Hagrid some morning ..."

"Are we going to need to cast that every time I want to make love to these ladies?"

“For now,” Tonks said with a smile. “I take it that you’ve decided to listen to me?”

“You three swear that there won’t be any problems. I’ll never forgive myself if there are.”

“There won’t be,” Hermione said. “If I thought I’d be jealous of Tonks, rather than the minor envy that I had for her, then I’d never let it happen. I value all of you too much to lose you.” She grinned. “Now, shall we do what I’ve been tiring my fingers out dreaming about for six years?” Without waiting for an answer, she laid him back on the bed and crawled atop him. “Harry?” she asked. “May I take you inside me now?”

“I should be asking you if I may be granted such a miraculous boon, Hermione. Please – make both our dreams come true.” He laughed. “Gods – where is this bad poetry coming from?”

She chuckled. “I don’t mind, as long as it doesn’t become your normal mode of speech.” She positioned herself very carefully and began to slide him inside her. As she did, Tonks came up to them, and cast some spell on Harry that made him jump slightly, which drove him deep into Hermione; roughly half his length now resided inside the brown-haired woman.

“You girls deserve the same type of explosion I got,” Tonks murmured to Ginny, so I cast one of the ... ahem ... ‘fluid replenishing’ spells.”

“He’s going to come bucketfuls, isn’t he?” Ginny whispered.

“Maybe not bucketfuls, but certainly a respectable amount. It should last long enough for Hermione and you both.”

Harry groaned as he overheard the conversation. “Are you ready for that, Hermione?”

His answer was a growl deep in her throat, and what could only be described as a backward lunge, which drove him the rest of the way inside her. She actually howled as their pelvises touched, but it was quite obviously *not* a sound denoting pain. She looked down into his eyes as she began to writhe gently atop him, and his hands came up to cup her breasts. “Oh my,” he was all he could murmur, and closed his eyes for a moment to revel in the delicious sensations running through him. She leaned forward slightly, pressing her breasts into his hands, which he moved slightly to capture the nipples in the hollow between thumb and forefinger. As he gently rolled them between his fingers, she began to bounce. The more he rolled and teased the hard tips, the more pronounced the bouncing became.

She began to grunt in an animalistic manner with each bounce, getting louder and more like a cry with each successive one. Harry could feel her heartbeat – steady, strong, and powerful – as she throbbed against him. He had no idea what this spell was doing to allow him to fit completely inside her, but the sensations as she pulsed across his entire length made him decide that this was definitely a spell worth remembering.

Suddenly, the muscles surrounding him tightened almost painfully for him, and the grunts and cries became a wail that went right down Harry’s spine and into his groin. She was orgasming,

and telling all who could hear that she was doing so. The sheer joy in the sound, as well as the tight rhythmic spasming against him drove him over the edge, and he felt himself explode into this woman that he had cared about for so many years. He moved his hands to her shapely buttocks and gripped them tightly as he thrust into her, trying to ensure that every drop of the apparently copious release stayed inside her.

He came to his body again in time to hear her pant into the room, “*That ... was definitely* worth the wait.” She slid slowly down until her breasts were against his skin and said, “Thank you, Harry, for making my first time so wonderful.”

He looked at her in shock. “I ... I was your first?”

“I didn’t want any other man to have me before you had a chance, Harry. I told you, I love you, and that’s that.” She kissed his lips gently, but no less passionately than before, this time without the searing command to ravish her.

He looked to the side slightly and saw Ginny with both of her hands busy at her breasts, while Tonks stood behind her nibbling at her neck and letting her fingers play in the red hair between the petite girl’s legs. Hermione giggled, and he realized that he was already starting to stiffen again inside her. “They cause the equivalent reaction in me when they do that, Harry. Perhaps we should disengage, and you could take over for Tonks?”

“How did I get this infernally lucky?” he asked with wonder in his voice. “I thought the world was perfect when Tonks told me that she loves me, but now the only two other girls I have ever looked at and wanted to make love to tell me the same thing, and one has given me the most precious thing she had.”

“And the other is going to,” Ginny panted as she reluctantly disengaged from Tonks. “To be blunt, Harry – get over here and fuck me. I’ve waited for so long for you, and I’m not going to give up my biggest dream now that I’m so close.” Hermione laughed and climbed off him, obviously as reluctantly as Ginny had disengaged from Tonks. She helped Harry to his feet and gently pushed him at Ginny. They collided with a gentle bump, his surprisingly erect cock between the small girl’s breasts.

She reached out with her tongue and licked the tip, causing him to moan. “Mmm, you taste of Hermione – one of my favourite flavours. I’ll just have to lick this Hermione-flavoured sucker now, won’t I?” She began to languorously slip her tongue along his length, drawing a loud moan from him before she’d even finished a complete downward stroke. “Hmm, baby seems to like that,” she said in a voice that was half purr and half growl. He twitched against her. Leaving her voice in that register, she said, “What do you want me to do, Harry? I’m all yours, but I need you to tell me how you want me.”

“Oh gods, I shouldn’t be this fired up this fast,” he groaned. “I just want to ... I want to take you into the bath room, have you grab that sink, and lift you into the air and take you from behind. I want to bend you over that night table and pound your brains out. I want to just hold you with you surrounding me and make sweet gentle love, Ginny. My god, I don’t know what I want – all I

know is that it's *you* that I want right now."

"Well, sexy," she growled, "you mentioned the room with the view first ..."

"Any room with any of you ladies in it is a room with a view," he said earnestly.

"I'm already horny enough," she purred at him. "You don't have to keep trying." She smiled at him as she finished and began to head into the huge bath room and water closet that connected the bedrooms that he and the girls had chosen. He had remembered what Tonks had done in the Dursley home and had done his best to replicate it. The whirlpool was large enough for everyone currently in the house to sit in comfortably, and the shower could easily hold the four currently in the room. The floor, rather than being tiled, was a resilient material with a heating element running through it, so that a cold floor would never be a problem.

Ginny walked over to the sink and bent over it, sticking her pert arse into the air. "To hell with foreplay, Harry. Tonks supplied that. I want you in me, and I want it now. Fuck me and make me come. Make me yours, Harry."

It must be the spells, Harry thought as he walked over and seized the sexy little redhead's hips and lifted her off the floor as she gripped the edges of the sink. He carefully placed himself and began to slowly slide into the girl, making her squeal happily. He was inside her about halfway when he ran up against something.

"Push, Harry," Ginny moaned. "I'm a virgin, remember? I'm a pureblood witch, too. It's stronger in ... oh god ... don't know ... just break it, Harry. It'll hurt a little, but it'll get better." He pulled back a little and then thrust forward, hitting her maidenhead and tearing through it, making her scream. He closed his eyes tightly, trying to keep the tears that came to his eyes from flowing.

I hurt her, he thought numbly. *At a time like this, I caused her pain.*

"Oh no you don't, Harry!" Ginny said. "I wanted this, and I expected the pain. Keep pushing into me, Harry. It's like working out – you need to work through the pain – come out the other side better. Please, Harry? Please fuck me?"

It was the pleading tone that made him decide to continue, and he was soon glad that he did. Once he had reached the point where his abdomen was pressing against her rear, he began a gently thrusting rhythm – and she began to swing her dangling legs to the same rhythm, causing the most astonishing sensations to rip through them both. It was a surprisingly short time before he felt her body tense, and he was forced to grab her differently, because her arms stopped being able to grip the sink. He was surprised to find himself holding her up easily, by the hips. He grinned and began to bounce her on his shaft, which drew the most amazing extended squeal from her, and he very quickly orgasmed into the shuddering, bouncing young woman.

When he had finished, he found himself being held up by both Hermione and Tonks, although he did have a very solid grip upon the still quivering redhead who was still impaled on his slowly

softening erection. “Are you okay, Ginny? Are you ...”

“Shut up and let me finish coming, Harry,” she murmured. “You can not cause every nerve in my body to explode with pleasure and expect me not to revel in the feelings.” She purred after her comment – a very satisfied and happy sound.

Harry’s face lit in a happy grin. Tonks looked at him and smiled. “Should have warned you that might be the case with her. All ended well, I’d say, though,” she finished with a laugh.

“I’m finally losing it,” Harry said. “Doing my poor attempt to pleasure you three has taken a lot out of me, and I think I actually need to sleep. We’ll need to enlarge the bed, but I think I’d like it if we just sort of piled together on the bed tonight. Sleeping with the women who give my life meaning.” Disengaging from a mildly protesting Ginny, he set her to the floor, and then pulled them all into a deep hug before breaking down and crying. For the first time in his life, however, it was not tears of loss, or pain, or even healing. It was, oddly enough, the only way to express the deep emotions that these three women had brought out in him – they were tears of relief, happiness, and closure.

He vaguely remembered them all taking a moment to clean up, since they were all pretty sticky and sweaty by now. He wasn’t sure who did the bed enlarging, but soon he was in the center of the expanded mattress with three soft warm bodies curling in around him. Sweet peaceful slumber flowed into the room and claimed him.

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Harry Potter and the Paradigm Shift

Chapter 9

The four of them walked downstairs the next morning, smiling. Harry was wearing boxers at this point, but the girls simply wore smiles. “What about Sirius?” Harry asked.

“Let him look,” Tonks laughed. “We’re *yours* and that’s that.” She pulled him in for a quick kiss, and then they continued the walk to the kitchen, where they discovered Sirius, Moira and Ron sitting behind cups of coffee and with cinnamon rolls in front of them.

Ron’s eyebrows rose slightly at the way the girls were dressed, so to speak, and he said, “Just for my own knowledge guys, answer me a question – any of you have any idea what a silencing charm is?” His voice sounded stern, but his eyes were sparkling madly.

Tonks snorted. “Yeah, but a well placed *Finite* deals with it no problem.” Ron blinked and then laughed, followed quickly by Sirius’s bellowed laugh.

“You guys sounded like you enjoyed yourselves,” Sirius added when he could breathe again. “Which one of you is the howler? To an old dog like me, that’s a mating call!” He put a lecherous grin on his face.

“You couldn’t handle me,” Hermione replied saucily, even though she was blushing furiously.

Ron cleared his throat. “Uh, guys? I think we’ve officially hit TMI territory here. I do *not* need to know which one of the other two is the squealer and which one yells, since one of those two is my sister.”

“I’m the squealer,” Ginny replied sweetly, sticking her tongue out at Ron, who began to chuckle.

“My God, I’ve missed being able to sit around a table and be relaxed,” he said. “Life just hasn’t been the same without you, Harry. This is the most ... well, I think ‘mellow’ is the best word for it ... the most mellow that any of us have been in four years.”

“Being shagged into insensibility helps too,” Ginny purred.

“That it does,” Ron said with a smile, looking quickly at Sirius.

Harry’s eyes passed between the two of them, and then shot to Moira quickly. “Why do you think I left last night?” she asked. “I knew what the girls had planned, and I also knew that either Ron or I would be a third wheel.”

Harry shook his head, suddenly putting two and two together. “Remus was your lover, wasn’t he?” Harry asked quietly, receiving a nod from Sirius. “I owe him a massive apology. I only lost a father figure I sort of knew – he’d lost a beloved.”

Sirius nodded again, soberly. “For the second time, yet. I have no idea whether he’s weathered

this one better than when I went to Azkaban. And I have no idea how he'll take the knowledge that I've been back all this time and couldn't get in contact with him. Not without exposing you."

Tonks looked up from her coffee cup. "I think he'll take it better than you think. Remus understands how these things work."

"I hope so. It's not like either of us had promised each other anything, anyway. Not with things being so uncertain."

Harry cleared his throat to get back into the conversation. "Anyway ..." He looked to Moira again. "Thank you. In my rush to get laid for the first time, I forgot about my other best friend."

"Oh no you don't, Harry," Ron barked. "After a night like that, you don't get to get all depressed. For Merlin's sake, you haven't seen us in years, and you've been in love with the three of them for all that time, if not more! I understand, and even though there's nothing to forgive, if you think you need it, then I forgive you." He directed a mock glare at Padfoot. "You, too. No moping!"

Harry nodded at Ron, and then stood and pulled his friend into a hug. "I love you, Ron," he murmured. "You're the first friend my age and the best friend I have ever had."

They embraced for a while before Tonks cleared her throat and said, "As touching as this is, I'm hungry, and I think you worked up something of an appetite, Harry – at least, if we did our job right, you did." She grinned at him. "And since the breakfast rolls have all mysteriously disappeared" – the plate was indeed empty now and Ron was wearing a look of total innocence – "I think we should eat a bit of real breakfast, and then you can start to show us some of what you've learned while you've been out here."

#####

"Harry, you're a bastard," Ron grumbled after he'd landed on the padded floor of Harry's basement workout area for the fifth time in twenty minutes. They'd all dressed in loose clothes and Harry was demonstrating the unarmed combat techniques he'd learned.

"I'll have you know that my parents were married before I was conceived, although Sirius has suggested a few times that it was probably a near thing," Harry laughed as he helped Ron to his feet.

"Where did you learn to fight like that, Harry?" Tonks asked. "Trust me when I say that you could teach the Aurors a few things." At his wiggled eyebrows, she added, "Oh no, they're going to get their *own* teachers for *that*. I'm not sharing you with anyone but those two girls."

"Remember how I mentioned Charlie Watson? He's a member of Department Question Mark. That's basically the American Auror division. Ever run across those comments about Men In Black in some of those conspiracy theories? That's Department Question Mark. Mind you, it's spelled, so to speak, with the symbol, but how in hell do you pronounce *that*?"

“That,” Ginny replied impudently before sticking out her tongue at him.

“Smart-arse,” he mumbled, grinning.

“Well, *some* part of her has to be,” Ron said, jumping backwards into a roll as she came at him, laughing.

“That’s was impressive,” Harry said. “Looks like you guys have gotten some training of your own out on the East Coast.”

“Of course, Harry,” Hermione said simply. “We wanted to be as ready as possible when we went back with you to kill Voldemort.”

He blinked, and then smiled. “The Harry Potter from four years ago would have thrown a hissy fit and been stupid about how he can’t put any of the ones he loves in danger, not remembering that they would do this anyway, because they love him in return and want him to survive. The Harry Potter of today says thank you, and is trying to teach you a few other things.”

“Yes!” Ron exclaimed, pumping his arm in the air. “He *can* be taught!” This made everyone laugh.

Harry grinned. “Anyone up for a little magical duelling? Got something I can teach you there as well – something that I think will surprise any Death Eaters I run across. Get your wands.” While they retrieved their wands from the corner where they had left them along with their shoes for safety’s sake, Harry opened a tall, narrow wall cabinet. When they returned to the mat, he was leaning on a beautifully detailed quarterstaff, copper-shod at the ends. They looked at him with interest, and he grinned at them. He pointed one end at Ginny and said “*Tarantallegra*.” She began to dance uncontrollably, but quickly cast the *Finite* upon herself.

“How did you do that?” Hermione asked with interest.

“Catch,” he said, tossing her the quarterstaff. “Seventy-two inches, holly, phoenix feather core. Stiffer than usual, for use as a hand-to-hand weapon.”

She caught it and hefted it carefully. “*Lumos*. Wow,” she said as the end of the staff lit up. “I’d love to meet the person you got this from. The craftsmanship is magnificent, and it’s a powerful wand ... uh, staff.”

“You’d know how powerful my wand can be,” he smirked.

“Oh, trust me, it’s a staff,” she purred at him.

“Oh, please,” Ron said, faking a serious case of gagging.

“As for the craftsman of that staff, remind me later and I’ll take you to his workshop.”

Sirius snorted over in the corner. “Why torture them, Harry? Take ‘em now. You know they

won't be able to concentrate until they know the new wand maker in town. Besides, you know you want them to meet the guy."

"You're right," Harry said, taking back his staff. "We can duel anytime." He led them out of the basement workout area and upstairs. When they left the house, they were surprised to see Harry head not for the sidewalk, but for the garage at the rear of the property. He threw the doors open to show off the wood-working shop that was housed therein.

"Harry Potter, wand maker. I was trained by one of the teachers at Norton, who decided that I had a real talent for working with my hands."

"I'll say," murmured Tonks with a secret smile.

He snorted at her and continued. "A small part of this is also my electronics workshop, where I work on some of my other things that I play with. But as for the wands and staves, well, I started playing around with wood as a stress-reliever, but I think I've gotten good enough to consider wand-making as a career. Give me another three to five years and I might be able to consider opening a shop to compete with Ollivander. I'm not in his league yet, though I have qualified as a journeyman. When I don't need the tools to shape the wood anymore, then I'll be a Master."

"I do have one advantage over Ollivander, though," Harry said, gesturing at shelves holding neatly labelled boxes. "He works with a limited selection of cores, and makes mostly general purpose wands. I make specialty wands, and I use a wide variety of core materials for these babies. Sasquatch hair, quetzal feathers; I actually befriended a dryad, so she gives me the occasional lock of hair; I use kelpie sinew, and I even use jackalope horn and hide. I have one, count it, one, hair from the tail of a White Buffalo. I'm saving that one for something special," Harry said, caressing the top of a carved stone box which obviously contained the precious hair. "Diricawl feathers are good too." He shrugged. "Same with thunderbird and passenger pigeon feathers."

"Um, isn't the passenger pigeon extinct?" Hermione asked.

"So's the dodo," Harry grinned. "Thing is, we know the dodo as the diricawl. Same with that breed of pigeon. Magical breed, and they had to hide them." He snorted, and then whistled. A pigeon flew into the yard and landed on his arm.

"Harry, that's just a pigeon," she said. Harry looked at it. It bobbed its head twice and then shimmered slightly.

"Most people don't realize that the passenger pigeon still exists, and that it's magical and intelligent. Ever notice in a city that they seem to be the only birds that allow you close; that don't take off the second that a car comes anywhere near? These things are some of the best mathematicians on the planet; they can measure exactly how close you are or how fast the car is moving and know whether it's a threat or not. Wands with these feathers are perfect for people like you, Hermione." He looked at the bird, which bobbed its head again and flew into the workshop. It swooped down, picked up a wand and flew over to Hermione. She caught the wand it dropped in her hands and they watched as a localized wind whipped her hair, and she gasped at

the wand. “These babies hide in plain sight. Everyone thinks that they’re just regular pigeons. *They* cast the spells to hide themselves. I befriended a colony. They check in on me occasionally.” He grinned. “By the way, Hermione – Chloe here provided the feather in that wand.”

Hermione bowed before the pigeon. “I appreciate this, Miss Chloe,” she said quite seriously. Chloe bobbed her head twice and then cooed before taking off.

“She likes you, Hermione,” Harry said. “If there’s one thing I’ve learned in this country, it’s not to limit my options. I’ve been looking at everything and thinking whether it would make a good wand core. For example, Tonks, would you consider letting me have some of you hair for a core?”

“Me? But I’m not ...”

“You’re a metamorphmagus. You count as a magical being, and your hair would probably make a wand that would do wonderful transformations. I’m thinking of experimenting with werewolf hair when I get back to England, assuming I can talk Remus into donating some. Bet his hair would make a great combat wand, good for curses and hexes and the like. What? What are you all looking at me like that for?”

“Just amazed to see you so enthusiastic about something besides Quidditch,” said Ron with a grin. “You’re beginning to sound like Hermione when she goes off on one of her crazes.”

Hermione sent Ron a look of outrage and Harry seemed slightly embarrassed. “Shall we head back inside, then?” They headed back in, and Harry led them to the kitchen for something to drink. “You know, I just got sort of a synopsis of the treatment of the précis on how you came to move to America. Anyone actually want to fill in a few of the blanks? You were detailed enough as far as what you did, Tonks, but then you sort of jumped through the grabbing of these three.”

#####

Hermione was surprised to see Tonks at her door, looking normal, as far as Muggles were concerned. “Tonks! What’s happening? Why are you here?”

“I’m here because Dumbledore did something really stupid, causing Harry to blow out the office wall and escape. I think that Fawkes agreed with Harry, because ... well, Harry’s been to Gringott’s and gone already, before Dumbledore ever got there. I literally can not tell you what I found out, until you come to Gringott’s with me and read the letter Harry left for you. Let’s put it this way – he’s given me *full* access to his vaults. I have reason to believe that my name isn’t the only one with that same access granted. Can you come to Gringott’s with me?”

“Might I ask what it was that Headmaster Dumbledore did that has you so worried, Miss Tonks?” Dorothy Granger asked.

Tonks looked to Hermione and said, “I know your feelings for him, and I know that they *are* reciprocated. But he’s also ... well, I didn’t like the way he looked, so I got Amelia Bones to put

me on permanent detail guarding him so that he'd have someone to cry on, if necessary, and to start giving him some of the training that he really needs. It ... uh ... well, it didn't go *that* far, but we certainly share an interest in each other." She sighed. "Which, of course, gives him problems, because he cares for you and Ginny as well, and he ... you know what he's like, Hermione."

Hermione sat back in her chair and thought. *I want to be angry at Tonks, but I ... I have to admit to myself that I might have been tempted in Harry's position. She's a beautiful woman. But why does he fancy me? She's right, though. He's kicking himself over the fact that he fancies three girls.* "So Harry was all conflicted about us?"

Tonks nodded. "Not so conflicted that he could turn off his interest in any one of us, though, and I was the one in proximity, so I benefited. And so did he. Honestly, the difference it made in him was amazing. And then Dumbledore found out. We'd gone to him to report another matter entirely, about something that happened the summer before, but when he found out about us, all of a sudden the meeting was all about that and the other thing was pushed aside."

"What did the headmaster do?" Hermione asked.

"Told us, in no uncertain terms, that the relationship would end, or he'd end it for us." Hermione's eyebrows rose at that.

"He'd never ... but he cares for ... why would he do that to Harry when he'd just found happiness?" she nearly wailed.

"Ostensibly for my protection, and for Harry's peace of mind, but I'm not buying that. There was something else going on. I must have been right, because they'll be repairing that wall for a little while now. The hole Harry blasted was *big*."

Dorothy narrowed her eyes. "Hermione, you go to Gringott's and find out what Harry left you. I need to think for a while." She looked up at Tonks. "Am I correct in assuming that there's a Weasley you need to collect as well?"

"Two, actually."

"Molly won't be happy," Dorothy said. "When you have the information you need, come back here and we'll talk."

She nodded, and Hermione rose to join her. They walked to the Apparition point and were outside the Burrow moments later. Molly came to the door in a major tizzy. "Harry's missing! Albus just contacted me to tell me! Have you seen him?"

"Not since we both went to Dumbledore's office. Something got said, and then a wall disappeared, and Harry left. May I speak to Ron and Ginny, please? It may involve Harry's vanishing act."

A minute later Tonks was under a tree with the three of them, explaining the situation to them, and watching Ron's expression as she told Ginny the same thing that she'd told Hermione.

"What the hell does he think he's doing?" Ron exploded. "Three? I'll not have him hurting Ginny like that!"

"Isn't that my choice, Ron?" Ginny asked softly. "As if it's important, with Dumbledore having chased him off to Merlin alone knows where."

"I need to take the three of you to Gringott's because he left messages for each of you. That will tell you as much as I know. I think you have an idea who we can and can't tell."

"Mum, for one, we can't," Ginny said. "She'd go to Dumbledore in a heartbeat, and have him dragged back to Here from whatever There he went to, for his own good, of course." She shook her head. "I love Mum, but she's too smothering, and doesn't want us to grow up, and Harry's included in that 'us'."

"Much as I hate to, I agree with you on that, Gin," Ron grumbled. "I always thought the old bugger was mental. This just proves it."

"Especially when you eventually discover something that Harry knows now that apparently only Albus, Harry, and I know. I will tell you when I feel a bit safer about doing so, but for now, I want to kidnap you three to Gringott's. Let's tell Molly." They headed into the Burrow, where Molly was bustling about, trying to disguise her nervousness.

"Molly?" Tonks said. "I need to grab these two and take them to Gringott's. I headed there after Harry disappeared, and was hinted at by the goblins that he left messages for some people. If I know Harry, then the messages are for Hermione and at least Ron, but I know that he's at least friendly with Ginny, if not actually sweet on the girl. I'll take these three to Gringott's while you wait for further messages. You might want to Floo Arthur and let him know he's not seeing things if someone sees Ron and Ginny in Diagon Alley."

"I'd prefer to come with you. The faster that we know where he is, the faster Albus can get him back."

"Honestly, Molly, I'd prefer you stay here. That way we have another line of communication. As soon as we know, we'll come back here, and pass on whatever we've learned. If you take off with us, you'll have to tell people where you're going." Tonks paused, and changed her verbal tack. Suddenly she wasn't Nymphadora Tonks, lovable but clumsy friend, but Auror Tonks, with all the authority of her position. "We're wasting time here. If it weren't for not wanting to scare you, I'd have gone already. We're going, and we'll be back. You stay here and wait for any new messages to be delivered." She grabbed the three teens and Apparated before Molly could complain.

As they appeared before the doors to Gringott's, Ginny murmured, "Thought she was going to come with us for a second."

“She was,” Tonks said. “That’s why I left her there holding the bag the way I did. She’ll be annoyed at me, but when I point out that she would have taken several minutes that we don’t have, as far as everyone thinks, she’ll relent.”

They walked into the bank, and as soon as Tonks showed the token, they were ushered in to see Rackspit. Hermione’s eyes widened when she was introduced, and she bowed deeply to him. “No need, Miss Granger, but I appreciate the sentiment. You are here for Harry’s letters for you, am I correct?” The three students nodded. “There is a magically binding contract that will actively prevent you from telling anyone the information contained within these letters, except for another who has signed one of these four contracts. You must sign before you will be given the letter. Do you agree?”

“Once we’ve read them, can a Legilimens read the information from us?” Hermione asked.

“Possibly, but there would be a great deal of power involved in the process, and it would likely harm both the Legilimens and the one being read. Given that Dumbledore is the only known Legilimens of such power, I do not believe he will place himself at such risk.”

Hermione nodded and reached for the contract with her name on it. As she signed, a key appeared in the middle of the sheet. The same happened when Ron and Ginny signed, after being told to do so with their full names. It did not escape Hermione’s notice that the keys were identical.

She took her letter and opened it with some trepidation.

Hermione,

By now, Tonks has figured out how to drag you here to get this letter, which means you also now have that key.

Gods, I have so many regrets, Hermione. I'll probably never see you again, which is something I'm going to lay at the feet of my EX-Headmaster. At least in a letter I can admit some of the things I was too cowardly to admit in person. Some Gryffindor, huh? Too scared to tell a girl that he fancies her until it's too damned late.

Problem is, Hermione, I also fancy Tonks, and Ginny. I guess it's best that I'm running away from my problems – at least now I won't run the risk of breaking Tonks's heart by pining for you and Ginny around her. I can pine for all three of you in the United States.

Yes – I'm going to the U.S. to get away from Dumbledore. All I'll tell you is that I'm stopping in A Hell Of A Town – and that if I gave that clue to Ron and Ginny they'd never get it. (Or you could talk to Tonks – I told her flat out where I'm heading. Note: I'm trying to laugh here, but it hurts to leave everyone you love behind you.)

Be careful around Dumbledore, Hermione. **Do Not Trust Him** . I can't stress that enough. Since I expect that Ron will finally get the courage to ask you out (he'd better – I pretty much told him he'd lose you if he didn't get off his arse and tell you how he feels – I'm pretty sure he fancies

you), be careful for Dumbledore deciding that your relationship **Must** be a distant second to preparing for your part in defeating Voldemort. Which will probably be as a hostage to get me back, knowing that bastard.

Damn that man's soul to hell.

I'll sign off now, telling you that you, Ginny, Ron, and Tonks have full and complete access to all my moneys.

I'll miss you, Hermione, and the lost chances.

Harry

She noticed, as she finished reading it, that there appeared to be some tear stains on the parchment, and she was dangerously close to adding her own. She looked over at the others, each of whom also seemed to be having their own problems with their letters. She nodded and handed her letter to Ginny, who handed hers back to Hermione, and each read the others' letter.

Ginny,

I said some stuff to Hermione, and I'm repeating it to you. It's a real bitch, doing what I am, but I have to, in order to save the lives of the ones that I love.

Yeah. I didn't use that term wrongly, Ginny. Problem for me is that I'm a greedy little idiot, and fell in love with all three of you ladies – you, Hermione, and Tonks. Since I can only have one of you, in some small way this is better that I'm gone. This way, you three can develop a proper hatred for me, as you should.

I know your family trusts Dumbledore with their lives, and after what happened today, I'm worried that it may cost them exactly that, in order to get what Dumbledore wants. The old bastard tried to perform some rather vile manipulation, which led to my remodelling his office today.

I was with Tonks until he did what he did, and for that alone, I'll never forgive him. I'm not returning to the British Isles until the current headmaster of Hogwarts is dead.

I know I said that I love you, and I'm sorry for saying that, in a way, because I know you moved on, and there's this part of you that may be screaming at the paper 'Why now?' Use that anger to hate me, Ginny – you don't want Dumbledore using you as a means to get me back. Hate with all your being. Hate me for waiting until it was too late to learn that I love you. Hate me for loving Hermione and Tonks as well.

And spend away with that key. You, Ron, Hermione and Tonks have **unlimited** access to the vault. And it's **not** charity. If I can't have you as my love, I can at least give my sister something. (And I'll work hard on not considering the dreams I've had of you incest. (With luck I've at least got a smile from you.))

You can now talk with everyone else of the four of you about the letters. Ask Hermione and Tonks where I've gone – at least for my first stop.

Until some far future time (probably never), this must be, by necessity –

Goodbye.

Harry

Again, more tear stains, some fresh from Ginny, even more from herself, and dried ones from Harry. They handed them to Tonks to read, and then read Ron's as he handed it to Ginny.

Ron,

I need you to understand this from the start. That key I've given you is not charity. You're the brother I never had the chance to have. You Are Family – the only family I have. I would give every last Knut of the money I've just given you, Tonks, Ginny and Hermione **full** access to – I'd give it all to have James and Lily Potter back, with you guys as those friends from childhood. But that's not the way it works. This is the only way I have, now that I have to flee the country, to show you that I care, Ron – how to show you that you mean everything in the world to me as the very first friend my age that I ever had. If makes you happy, feel free to put a sizeable dent in that money you have access to. I will not complain one whit.

On to a couple other things. Now that I'm gone, do the smart thing and **ask Hermione**, before it gets too late. I don't think I've misread things, seeing all that URST (UnResolved Sexual Tension – we talk sometimes in the Tower when you guys were on patrol) between you two. Resolve it. I may fancy Hermione a lot, but I also fancy Tonks. Now I show the wisdom behind telling you this in a letter when I'm long gone – I also happen to fancy Ginny, and have had some thoughts you'd make me do a proctologic self examination over, head-first. I really do love all three of them, but now, because of Dumbledore and his need to rule my life, I can't have any of them. Talk to Tonks about the reasons why I left. Even she doesn't have the whole story, but it's enough. She also knows the place I've run to, which is actually likely to merely be my first stop.

I'm sorry, Ron, for doing this. Because Dumbledore can't stop meddling in my happiness, I've been forced to take things into my own hands and leave everyone I care for behind.

I set this letter up so that you **can't** tell because, no matter how much I love your Mum, she'd run straight to Dumbledore with the information about where I am. Again, I'm sorry.

I'll miss you just as I'll miss the others. (Although I won't be watching the way **you** fill out **your** clothes in my memories.)

Harry

"So, what do we do now?" Ron asked, after he'd finished reading the girls' letters.

"Floean Fortescue's, I think," Tonks said. "We need to think a little bit, and chocolate really does

help in situations like this."

Rackspit spoke before they could leave. "Since Harry is now considered a goblin-friend, I took the liberty of doing something that he might not approve of, but that will eventually be appreciated." He slid four bags toward the four people. Hermione picked hers up and gasped. Inside was wizard space, and a large sum of money. A *very* large sum of money – some in wizarding money, some in British Muggle cash, and a surprising amount in American money.

She looked up at him, and could swear she could hear him singing under his breath (in a rather impressive baritone, from what she could hear) "...the Bronx is up and the Battery's down ...". Despite her mood about Harry being gone, a momentary giggle escaped her lips, and she actually received a twinkle from the goblin. "Harry chose his beloved ones well, I see."

#####

"So the letters were melodramatic," Harry shrugged. "I really thought I'd probably never see you again. I love you all."

"I'll say," Moira laughed. "When I met this young man, he was the first one of my students I'd come across that noticed my appearance, but didn't start acting like all the others. Like this maniac, for example," she said, wrapping an arm tenderly around Sirius's shoulders. "Obviously didn't fancy boys, but he seemed to be comparing all the girls to someone, and they all came up far short."

Tonks looked at him in wonder. "*She* fell short? Compared to me – to us?"

He leaned over and took her hands into his. "Yes, Tonks. She may have a body to make a bishop kick a hole in a stained glass window and chew through the altar, but I didn't know her real beauty yet. I don't deny, now that I know her, that I think she's dead sexy and that Sirius should thank whatever deities may exist that she's chosen to grace his life ..."

"I do, Harry. I do," Sirius said quietly, more serious than anyone could ever remember hearing him be.

"I knew you were an intelligent man," Harry grinned. "But – sorry Moira – she doesn't hold a candle to any *one* of you three ladies, in my opinion. And I'll take that opinion to my grave a score of decades from now."

Everyone's eyes widened at the comment he had passed off so easily. Wide grins split everyone's faces, and Tonks threw herself at him, almost managing to knock him to the floor. "You expect to live past Voldemort now!"

"Yes." The simple sentiment made Hermione sniff.

"How long have you felt this way?" Ginny asked, voice throbbing with unshed tears of happiness.

He looked at the clock and saw that it was just past noon. "About ten to twelve hours," he replied.

“If you three worked so hard to find me, and gave me something ... well, it’s TMI territory for Ron, but you know what I mean – you make me *want* to live to a ripe old age with as many of you three as you’ll allow. And Ron, even if it can’t be that way between us, I hope you’ll be with me, too. I miss hearing you snore.” He grinned. “Maybe we’ll even share a house – still – with these two. Gives me more chances to catch a glimpse of her naked on her way to and from the shower.”

“That’s my fi – my girlfriend you’re putting the moves on, Harry,” Sirius growled good-naturedly.

“I like watching sexy girls, Sirius – not unlike my godfather. Doesn’t mean I’d ever touch as anything more than a friend.” He grinned. “You need to talk to her later. We could even add Remus into the mix if things work out. Enough. I want to know how they managed to convince the Weasleys and the Grangers to let their kids to move across the ocean without them.”

#####

Ginny smiled as they appeared at the Apparation point near the Granger home. Hermione was in quite a state. She was happy that Harry loved her, sad that he was gone, excited that they were going to try to get to the United States, and terrified that her parents were going to cause a major problem.

They approached the front door, which was opened by Hermione’s father. “Dorothy’s told me what you could say. Any new information?”

“No, Mister Granger,” Tonks said. “We’re still unable to pass along the information as to where he went. I, on the other hand, can make plans to follow him.” She wiped her eyes quickly, as if wiping away dust. “I just found what I think could be a real love, and I’m not going to let that bastard steal him from me. Pardon my language.”

“It’s Keith, Miss Tonks, and no excuses are necessary. Part of me wants to strangle the man for what he’s done to Harry, and by extension, Hermione. Instead, I’ll follow my wife’s advice and begin the process of selling the practice in preparation to move my family away from the threat of Voldemort.” His eyes twinkled. “Of course, it might make it easier if a trusted family friend who we knew was going in that direction anyway took our daughter ahead of us, so that she wouldn’t miss any schooling.”

Hermione gulped. “Daddy? Mummy? You’d ... you’d do that? Just move, dismantling the practice you spent so long building?”

“For you, dear,” Dorothy said with a smile, “anything. It’s obvious that you love this young man who left in such a tearing hurry. Miss Tonks tells us that it was with good reason. You are in danger, and so are you two, apparently. I don’t know how you’re going to work this one out. I’d let you live with us if I thought we could kidnap you to the States.” She shrugged and returned her attention to her daughter. “Besides, we’re in danger as well, given that you are known to be one of Harry’s friends. Kidnap and kill us, and it will affect you, which will affect Harry. I value our lives, and yours, over a dental practice, darling.” She looked back at Tonks. “How long before you need to disappear to wherever he’s gone to?”

“I’d like to do it within the week. I’ve already resigned from the Aurors, so I won’t be able to use those connections. I wouldn’t dare to use them anyway, because I don’t know who is in Albus’s back pocket. I’ll have something before the week is done, though.”

“Just remember to come by and get Hermione before you leave,” Dorothy said with a smile.

“Of course,” Tonks said with a laugh. “Now we just need to figure out what to do about the Weasleys here.”

Ginny noticed Hermione biting her lower lip and looking at her. As Tonks and the adult Grangers talked, Hermione walked over to her. Ginny was intrigued by the fact that Hermione seemed scared of something, but excited at the same time. *Well, yeah, she chided herself. She is planning a big move right now, to find Harry.*

“Ginny?” she asked in a quavering voice. “I hope you won’t hate me too much, but I really need to say this. Harry disappearing like this drove home to me how you might never be able to say the things you want to.” She leaned in suddenly and pressed her lips against Ginny’s kissing her with no little passion, making Ginny’s heart rate skyrocket. As she felt Hermione start to disengage, she put her hand behind the bushy-haired girl’s neck and returned the kiss.

When they finally broke, both girls were breathing fast, and conversation had completely stopped. Dorothy and Keith were looking at the girls with some amusement, and Tonks was applauding. “Damn! That was some kiss!” Tonks murmured.

“Mum? Dad?” Hermione asked, the rest of the question unasked.

“Do you love her?”

She nodded. “I wouldn’t have kissed her otherwise. I just ... well, I don’t know if they’ll be able to work something out, so I wanted ... I just couldn’t stand her being in the same boat as Harry is. Harry doesn’t know how I feel about him, and I wanted Ginny to know.”

“Damn, all those nights at the Burrow we wasted sleeping when we could have been snogging,” Ginny laughed, which brought the conversation back to a normal level.

#####

“That must have been a bit of a surprise,” Harry said.

“What was difficult was trying not to push her to the floor and tear all her clothes off,” Ginny said.

Harry looked at Hermione for a moment. “Yeah, I had that desire a few times in the Gryffindor common room. I was often thankful for loose robes.” Hermione blushed clear to her breasts. Grinning, Harry intentionally changed the subject. “So, how did you get Molly to allow Ron and Ginny to move to America with you?”

#####

Tonks Apparated to the Burrow with Ginny and Ron, where they were met by Molly and Albus. “Well,” she said, “Harry’s a smart one. Three letters – one each for Ron, Ginny, and Hermione, and apparently they were magical contracts such that Occlumency can’t be used without burning out the brain of the person with the memory, since it would take a hideous amount of power.”

“How do you know this?” Albus asked, burning with curiosity.

“First off, you were the reason that Harry ran, Albus, and you know it. Whatever you said set him off.”

“He insists on being treated as an adult, and then he does something like this,” Molly huffed.

“He has been under quite a lot of strain recently, Molly,” Albus replied. “After all, his godfather died less than two months ago.”

“That, living with a family that actively hates him and has a son that, well, that’s not my story, but Harry’s been his whipping boy. And let’s not forget threatening Harry’s girlfriend while we’re at it, Albus.” Tonks’s mouth set in a thin line.

“Nymphadora Tonks!” Molly exclaimed. “Mind your manners! You may be an Auror, but I think Albus has just a sight more integrity than to do what you just accused him of doing.”

“It could be taken that way, I suppose,” Albus said. “I had stated that I thought the relationship was dangerous, and that if necessary, steps might be taken to protect Harry. It is quite possible that my phrasing was such that it could be taken as a threat to his girlfriend.” He locked eyes with Tonks for a moment, and she could read his thought without benefit of Legilimency – *Give it up; you’re going to lose this one.*

Maybe, old man, but I’m going down fighting, she thought back at him. “Given that the girlfriend had her job threatened if she didn’t break off the relationship? And those were your words, Albus, that you were going to craft a missive to Amelia Bones, to see to it that punishment was meted out for intimacy with an underage wizard. Mind you, at the time, there hadn’t been any proof that such intimacy had taken place – you were working under suspicions, and threatened someone’s employment based upon suppositions, not facts.”

“You avoided my questions twice, Nymphadora,” he responded quietly. “Your very reactions led me to believe that you had been intimate with him.”

“Note, Albus, that I was informing you of the truth. The information you were asking had no bearing on the situation as it had developed. In answer to that question, however – the most intimate we got was that he knows what I look like without clothing. One bathroom in that place, Albus. It was going to be seen, even if by accident. We had stated that the attraction was mutual, and he informed me – note that carefully, Albus – *he* informed me that nothing was going to happen until after he turned sixteen. And this was while he was reacting somewhat obviously to

the nude woman in front of him, who had stated an attraction to him.” *He can twist the facts, so can I.* “Boy’s got a hell of a stronger will than you give him credit for.”

“Why did you simply not tell me this information two hours ago?” Dumbledore asked, aghast.

“*It was really none of your bloody business!*” she bellowed at him. “It had no bearing on the fact that his cousin had been ... you had best deal with that whale, or I will, Albus. And the little scum on guard duty that let it happen.”

“Punishment will be meted out as necessary, Nymphadora, and the severity will be proper for the crime. Have no fear of that.”

“Your record is somewhat spottier than Trelawney’s prediction record thus far,” Tonks said dryly. Ginny snorted at this.

Molly turned to her children. “There are chores to be done. Go do them. Leave the adults to finding Harry.” Ron’s face turned red at his mother’s condescending tone, and she added, “Don’t even think it, Ronald Bilius Weasley. I am still your mother, and there are still some uses for strong soaps. I will not have you even *thinking* that sort of language at me.” Ron’s face purpled for a moment, and then shut down.

“Now *that* was a mistake,” Tonks murmured as a silent Ron and fuming Ginny stalked away.

“Oh? And how many children have you raised?” Molly asked Tonks snidely.

“None. You, on the other hand, have raised children who do what they damned well please when they get out from under your thumb. The one who was closest to what you wanted a son to be like turned traitor on the entire family. The only two left are them, and you just informed your youngest son that he is not permitted to *think* without your permission. You smothered Harry all last summer, informing him that he was too young to know certain things. You argued with his godfather, *in front of Harry*, informing Sirius what a lousy role model he was.” She shook her head. “Keep this up, Molly, and those two are just going to up and leave one of these days without looking back.”

“This coming from the girl seducing a fifteen year old boy,” Molly said, almost in a snarl.

“Because I am friends with your two youngest children, Mrs. Weasley,” Tonks barked in her Auror voice, “I will refrain from delivering the thrashing you so richly deserve.”

“As if you could, child. I am twice your age, and I think I know a thing or two,” Molly replied in equally as cold a voice.

“You need to learn how to detect the truth, Mrs. Weasley. If you don’t, someday you will wake up cursing your bad choices.”

“I see one of them right now. I am revoking your permissions to step upon the Weasley lands unless it is on Order business. You are no longer welcome at this household, Nymphadora Tonks,

and I will be quite glad to keep you from attempting to lead my Ronald astray, as you tried with Harry, undoubtedly.”

“Certainly, Mrs. Weasley. You and I will speak again only on Order business. The only times I will set foot on this Weasley property again is either under Order business or under emergency circumstances. This will not change until you give me the heartfelt apology you will someday know that I deserve.” A flare of magic burst from her and impacted with Molly Weasley, staggering her. “Now, I need to say something to your children before I leave, and then I will take my leave of this property.”

She stalked around the house and located the two youngest Weasleys by the screaming coming from the garden. They were degnoming, and putting quite a bit of force behind their throws. Ron let loose an inarticulate howl before letting one loose that flew a good fifty metres. “Nice throw, Ron,” Tonks said conversationally. Getting closer, she said, “I will owl you the day we’re going to leave. It’s going to be tricky, since I’ve just had my permission to be on your property rescinded by your mother. Remember to remind them that it was a magical contract, and that you *can’t* tell anyone. Dumbledore is going to try to weasel it out of you, and don’t be surprised if he comes up with something from talking to you. I have a sneaking suspicion it’ll be harder to find Harry than he thinks. I just hope *we* can.” She turned to face Molly Weasley, who was standing at the corner of the house, fingering her wand. Waving her fingers at the woman, she Apparated to her flat.

#####

“So what happened?” Sirius asked. “What kind of escape did you make?”

Tonks snorted. “Actually, I went to the goblins to work out a method of getting to New York City, since they knew that I was one of the ones that their goblin-friend loves. They didn’t let us use the same transportation that you took, but they certainly bent over backwards to help us get Muggle transportation. Four visas, four one way first class tickets to New York City, and we were ready. I sent an owl the night before, to Ginny, telling her when to be ready. Ten a.m. the next day I Apparated into the living room, Grabbed the two of them, and Apparated to Heathrow before Molly had even registered what had happened.”

“But ... you’d had your permission rescinded.” Harry was momentarily puzzled.

“Except in Order business or an emergency. Whether Dumbledore likes it or not, making sure you – and the ones you loved – were safe falls under both headings, and so I was able to get in and out.”

“Mum and Dumbledore questioned us,” Ginny said, “but we didn’t really give anything up. All he really got was that we knew you weren’t in Britain anymore. He didn’t find out anything about where you were until we got sighted in New York City, and decided to settle there.”

“They’d gotten word to us about when the ‘escape’ was,” Hermione picked up the story, “and Mum and Dad got me to the airport, where I waited for them. We landed here in the U.S., realized

that Dumbledore would probably send Aurors to bring Harry back, and decided not to come after you immediately, but to set up false trails for Dumbledore to follow. Reggie and company were a great help in working out the problems that threatened to arise from my 'kidnapping' Ron and Ginny."

"And that, as they say, is that," Ron said with a laugh. "We finished up our last couple of years of school in New York. Our schooling wasn't quite as ... um, filled with interesting things as yours was. That really does bring us pretty well to today."

The others nodded. "Wow," was all Harry could say for a while. "I need to digest this for a little. I'm going to disappear into the study to think and tinker for a while."

As he left the room, Sirius said, "Don't worry about him. He doesn't get those deeply moody depressions anymore. I think this is literally what he said – he needs to assimilate and work on his electronics for a bit. I expect that we'll see him ready to enjoy his birthday sometime in the middle of the afternoon. In the meantime, let's get out of these sweats, into decent clothes, and brainstorm. He needs a party."

The girls headed upstairs, and Moira chuckled as Sirius' gaze followed them. "They're with him, studly."

"A guy can look at the menu, can't he?" Sirius asked. "I'm just shocked that I think my cousin has a nice arse." Tonks turned around and winked at him, and then added a little wiggle as she stepped out of sight. "Minx!" he called after her, laughing.

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Harry Potter and the Paradigm Shift

Chapter 10

Harry looked at the small device he had been working on. He had a slew of the prototypes of his mage PDAs and he was checking out some of the more esoteric functions. There was another across the room, and he aimed the one he was holding at it. Activating the send function, he held a pencil over the screen. The pencil disappeared and immediately reappeared on top of the other machine. He grinned. "What do you think, Tonks?" he asked without turning around.

"Impressive. Portkey function?" she asked, walking further into the room and pretending that she hadn't just been caught peeking into Harry's study.

"No. Quantum tunnelling in a particularly interesting way."

"Since when did you become Hermione? And how do you make the electronics work with magic? I thought magic fried the circuits."

"That was the hardest part of the whole thing. The magic parts kept letting the smoke escape from the electronic bits. And I couldn't shield it without having the shield itself do damage. I finally figured out a way to ground the circuits to drain excess magic off harmlessly. It's hell on the battery, though. And don't worry, I didn't do the theory on this – that's a think tank in Princeton. I just found a practical application." He finally turned to face her and took a breath. She was in her base form, wearing a simple T-shirt that read 'Harry's girl' and a denim skirt that looked delightfully short to him. "My God, Tonks – you're beautiful."

She flowed into his arms and they kissed tenderly. "I hope you don't mind if I hang off your arm all day."

"Hmm, beautiful, sexy, vivacious woman hanging off my arm, making people wonder what I did right in my life? Me, complain?" he chuckled. "Do I look stupid or something? Don't answer that," he finished quickly.

She chuckled. "I'll answer anyway. You don't look stupid at all. You're quite adorable, actually. I've seen that look on Hermione's face when she's trying to work out a vexing research problem, and on Arthur's when he was tinkering with Muggle things. He's going to worship you, you know. This goes way beyond flying Ford Anglias. What else does this, um, thing do? What is it, anyway?"

"It's one of several prototypes of a mage Personal Digital Assistant. I was just testing out the send function of the little baby. Basically, I've set it up so that even Crabbe or Goyle could use it fresh out of the packaging. Not that I plan to let them get their hands on them just yet. You can talk, sort of like the Floo, send small items, and keep verbal notes that will write them to parchment when you set it in its cradle. Requires that you have parchment in your bin, of course. Here, let me show you." He took his wand, tapped the screen and then said, "Nymphadora Tonks is one of the sexiest women it has ever been my pleasure to know." He tapped the screen again

and then set it in a box that had a depression carved in it just large enough for the device, plus room to get fingers around it. There was furious scratching inside the box, and then it spit out a sheet of parchment with writing on it. He handed it to her. In his own handwriting, it read: 'Nymphadora Tonks is one of the sexiest women it has ever been my pleasure to know.' "You even have proof of my views now," he finished with an impudent grin, tapping the paper.

"This is impressive," she breathed.

"Yes, you are," he replied, never taking his eyes from her. "In case I haven't told you recently, Tonks – I love you." He pulled her close and inhaled deeply of her hair. "I adore you, and I thought I had killed a part of myself when I had to leave. I don't know if I will ever be able to tell you what it means to me that you're here. Right now, Dumbledore himself could knock on the door and I'd invite him in for tea before kicking his arse back to England."

The gods were obviously listening at that moment, because a loud knocking was heard at the door, and both Harry and Tonks jumped in surprise. He walked into the hallway, muttering to whatever powers were paying attention, "Please don't let that have been a prophecy. Please." He looked next to the door, where a small monitor showed who it was. "Oh, joy," he grumbled. "Not Dumbledore, but maybe the next best thing. Carly, dolled up and dressed to kill. In other words, there's nothing under that sun dress." He rolled his eyes and headed for the door.

"Let me," Hermione said, coming downstairs, peeling her own sun dress over her head and kicking her shoes off, leaving her in a powder blue thong.

"Is she going to do what I think she is?" he asked, his eyes bulging slightly (as well as his trousers – he was rather fond of that girl's figure). In answer to his question, Hermione grasped the doorknob and opened the door as Tonks pulled him back into the study.

"Can I help you?" she asked brightly. "Carly, isn't it? Let me get Dan for you." She let Carly into the hallway, turned around enough to give the girl a view of exactly what Harry had been enjoying looking at and called for him.

He walked out beside Tonks, who had rapidly stripped out of her shirt and skirt, proving to him that she had been planning to tease him during the day – she'd been the only thing under either piece of clothing. He nuzzled her ear and said, "At least when I die, I know it'll be with a smile on my face."

"You say the sweetest things," she replied and nibbled his ear.

"Carly, what's up?" he asked the visitor, trying to keep the annoyance from his voice.

"Other than you?" Hermione murmured.

"I just ... um ... I didn't realize that ... um ... well, I was wondering if you wanted to ... uh ..." Carly stammered to a stop, unable to keep from looking first to Hermione, then to Tonks, then to Harry, and then repeating the cycle. "But I guess not."

"Sorry, but we have plans for him today," Tonks said, actually fighting to keep an erotic purr *out* of her voice. "It's his twentieth birthday, after all."

This actually brought Carly out of her stupor. "Really? Happy birthday, Dan!" she said. She looked at Hermione and Tonks and asked, "Would you be bothered if I gave him a birthday kiss on the cheek?" When they shook their heads, she came in and rose onto her toes to kiss his cheek. When she settled back down, he heard her whisper to him, "Do they make you happy, Dan?"

"Carly, they're the reason why I was the way I was in school. They were the ones I left behind when I left England. When they showed up yesterday, my world became complete again." He took her shoulders. "I've been ugly to you over the years, and you shouldn't *ever* forgive me for that. I couldn't understand why you wouldn't take 'No' for an answer. I honestly will never love you. Can you live with that? You're a pretty girl – hell, you're beautiful. But you're simply not my type. Can we be nothing more than friends?"

She developed an amused look on her face and said, quite obviously paraphrasing something, "Can we be the kind of friends who have a lot of sex?" She refocused and said, "Just kidding. I don't hold a candle to these ladies."

"You'll find someone, Carly," Tonks said, summoning her clothing and slipping it on in front of the girl while Hermione did the same with her sun dress. "You'll find someone as wonderful for you as Dan is for me, Emma and Bonnie." Ginny started to bounce down the stairs.

"Bonnie, is it?" Carly asked, looking up at the girl coming downstairs. "Sorry for intruding today. I was going to ... well, ask Dan – I certainly annoyed him a lot these past four years. I'll be going." She turned around to head home.

Harry stopped her. "Where's my birthday hug?" he asked with a laugh, and was rewarded with a big one around the waist from the girl. He could tell she was holding back tears. "I know it doesn't seem like it now, Carly, but it *will* get better," he whispered in her ear. "And I *will* be your friend if that's enough. I just can't be everything you want me to be." She hugged him tightly and then ran out the door.

He exhaled loudly, blowing air through puffed cheeks. "Well, that was interesting. Maybe, just maybe I've finally gotten her past the 'Dan Radcliffe *will* be my boyfriend' phase. She could probably be a good friend, but I could never get her to that point. You saw how she was dressed yesterday and today."

"You've thought that before," said Sirius, emerging from the kitchen where he and Moira had been eavesdropping. "Maybe the shock treatment Hermione and Tonks just gave her will do the trick."

"I hope so, but I'm not going to worry about it. I have a life to live. I have the group of you to reintegrate into my thought processes. I have to figure out how to speed up Dumbledore's demise – either that or decide to go back anyway. I can't leave Voldemort running around out there to kill and maim as he chooses. But I need to go back with a plan."

“We’ll talk about it later,” Tonks said. “Today is your birthday, and we’re going to enjoy it with you.” The rest of the group nodded, grinning. “So, Moira, where should we drag our victim ... I mean, the birthday boy?”

#####

A very tired but very happy man was effectively dragged back into the house by his group of friends. Tonks was tipsy, which had apparently made her horny. Ginny dragged Hermione upstairs to the room they’d chosen, while Ron had to be *Mobilicorpus* ’ed up to his room, he was so tired. In fact, he fell asleep while being carried. Sirius and Moira headed on up to Sirius’ suite, leaving Harry and Tonks downstairs.

She wrapped herself around him, kissing him hard in more ways than one. Her left leg rose and tried to wrap around his right leg, but she was having some trouble. He made it easy for her – he slid his hands up her legs, under her skirt and grasped her buttocks, lifting her slightly off the ground. She moaned into his mouth and wrapped both legs around him. As he fondled the firm, muscular derriere that he so happily had in his grasp, she disengaged from the kiss and said, “Fuck me, Harry. No gentleness tonight. I need to be hammered into that wall behind me. Pound me ‘til I’m bruised.” He looked her in the eyes, unsure of whether she really wanted this, but the last shreds of the tiny amount of resistance that he had went away when she growled and whimpered at him, “Please, please – possess me.”

One murmured spell later and his trousers and boxers were off. He lifted her higher, and she reached down to aim him properly. Once she had the tip of his cock pressing against her, she looked knowingly at him, and he understood immediately. He let go of her completely, and let her lower herself onto him at her own speed, which was nearly at the speed of gravity. When he felt their pelvises slam together, even as he winced slightly, his hands came back up and grasped her tightly, and then walked until her back was against the thick wooden archway that separated rooms. That was when he gave her what she had pleaded for. He pulled back, and then began to power thrust into her, but still not wanting to hurt her. “Harder, Harry,” she panted in his ear. “I can take it.”

He did as she asked – his thrusts became a bit harder, and their pelvises ground together forcefully with each thrust. He could tell this was definitely going to be a quick one for the both of them, because he could already feel the orgasm starting to build inside him, and she was showing all the signs of an impending orgasm herself.

#####

He awoke on the couch, sitting up, with Tonks sitting on his lap in the same position she’d had in the last memory he could dredge up – in fact, he was *still* inside her, given their positions, which surprised him to no end. *Small spell, in case of scenarios like this one, to keep me inside her?* It was daylight. *Early morning, given the way the light is coming in the window,* he thought. Someone had apparently come down during the night and covered them with a light blanket.

She moaned slightly in her sleep, and he let his hands begin to caress her legs. She moved

slightly, and he felt himself stiffening inside her, which made the moaning take on an erotic tone. His hands came up and gently slid under her shirt, finding her breasts and cupping them gently, capturing the nipples between thumb and forefinger. She gasped and opened her eyes.

“Morning, love,” he whispered as he continued to tease her erect nipples.

“Oh, I love waking up like this,” she whimpered. “Horny as hell, with the man who’s making me feel that way already throbbing inside me.”

“I’ve got a witch who’s sexier than should legally be allowed sitting on my lap. Do you expect I’d stay soft, especially after remembering last night, with you always carefully choosing places to flash me? ‘Oops, I dropped something’ and there you’d go, bending over and showing off that magnificent arse of yours, and the fact that you were extremely wet. I think Ginny and Hermione probably enjoyed themselves last night because of you. Now be quiet.” He flipped the blanket up over their heads and captured one of her nipples in his teeth.

“Oh Morgana, if you’re going to do that to me, I don’t think I *can* be quiet,” she whimpered, grinding against him unconsciously. He could feel her heart rate climbing as that piece of heaven he was so deliciously ensconced in began to throb harder and faster. *I probably wouldn’t feel that if I weren’t so damned large, which makes her so wonderfully tight.*

He disengaged from her nipple. “Then don’t be quiet. Be an alarm clock, beloved. I love you, and I love your body.” He captured the other nipple and teased it just as mercilessly as he had the first. He let his hands slide down her body, grabbed her behind again and began to thrust in the small way he was able. She helped him, and they developed a rhythm. She surprised him delightfully when she added a slight side to side motion as she slid back and forth on him, turning it into a somewhat circular motion as she ground him into and out of her wonderfully tight pussy. He was enjoying the feel of her actions so much that he was surprised when he felt his orgasm start to boil up out of him and explode inside her.

As he recovered, he disengaged from her nipple and pulled her close. “I’m sorry love. That was only me, wasn’t it?” He reached down to where they met to find her clitoris, but she stopped him.

“Don’t know how ...” she panted, “but I kept ... kept quiet while co ... coming. Don’t you dare apologize for making me come.”

He hugged her tightly. “I didn’t know you had. I was doing this for you, not just for me.”

She sniffed in his ear. “I love you, Harry. I can never say that enough to you. But you are allowed to enjoy yourself and not worry about me.” His only response was a look that fairly screamed ‘Like that’s going to happen.’

When he felt himself softening, he finally said, “Well, I need to get my trousers, and we need to get upstairs to at least shower.” He heard a slight chuckle and felt something fall onto the couch next to himself. Tonks grinned at him, and flipped the blanket completely off to show the entire contingent of the household standing there looking at them. Sirius laughed. “Damn, girl! Nice

arse, nice chest, and you have to be related to me!”

“She’s mine, Sirius,” Harry said possessively, but with a large smile. He grabbed his clothes and Apparated the both of them upstairs onto the bed. She gasped slightly as they landed, since he was still inside her, and she was still experiencing what she was thinking of as micro-orgasms. He could hear laughter and a round of applause rising up the stairs from where they’d been caught. As they disengaged, Harry found himself musing.

I’d think that I should have been more embarrassed to have been caught like that – I haven’t changed that much. But to be looking at everyone, with them knowing that I’d just been making love to a beautiful woman on the couch – and not try to hide because of it? He leaned over and kissed Tonks on the cheek.

“You’re welcome, whatever that was for,” she smiled at him.

“For being you, Tonks. That was just for being you. Shall we shower and get dressed?” She nodded and stripped off her clothes and padded into the bath room, Harry in hot pursuit. The shower took longer than perhaps it should, but neither one of them complained about it, considering the glow they both had as they dried off. “I still prefer towels,” he had told her, wrapping her in a big fluffy one, “for this very reason.” He hugged her tightly, and she nestled in against him. *I want to do this for the rest of my life*, he mused. *To just be here, with her, with them, and to just ... just be.*

“We’ll see what we can do for you then, Harry,” Tonks said quietly, startling him slightly. “After the life you’ve had so far, you deserve to have a chance to ‘just be’.” She kissed his sweetly and walked to the closet to get clothes for the day. He shook his head. *Didn't realize I'd vocalized that thought.*

#####

When they got downstairs, Ginny pulled Tonks close and kissed her. “Looks like one of you woke up the right way,” she giggled.

“We both did,” Harry replied. “I woke up still inside this beauty, and she woke up ...”

“I passed out from Harry being inside me, screwing my brains out, and I wake up with him still hard inside me.” She grinned. “Damn, that’s some stamina!”

“Inspiration, my darling,” he answered her before kissing the ladies good morning. “So, any plans on breakfast yet?”

“Well, you’ve already eaten,” Sirius quipped.

“I have not. I’m not that limber. What do you people say to an omelot and a massive amount of bacon? Easy enough to make.”

“Omelot?” Ron asked, amused.

“There’s seven of us here at the moment, and you can eat enough for three people rather easily. That’s one very large omelette. Therefore, an omelot.” This brought chuckles from the group, which followed him in. Moira joined him in getting the ingredients out of the refrigerator, and as they carried everything to the countertop, he frowned slightly.

"What's wrong?" she asked as she began to crack eggs into a large bowl. Harry started the bacon on the griddle.

"Is there something wrong with me?" he asked. "I discover that the rest of the household knew exactly what we were doing – they were just a couple feet from us, in fact – and I'm not even close to ashamed. I'm not the type to shag anyone in public, but yet finding out you all were there did nothing but excite me slightly."

"Okay, let me answer you by asking a few questions. What do you think of the people who saw you? Include me. Be as blunt as you need to be – you're an adult and I won't be offended by words like 'fuck'."

"Well, the girls are easy – let me rephrase that," he chuckled. "Telling you the answer as far as the girls are concerned is easy. I love them. I will give my life before I will knowingly allow them to come to harm. They literally mean more to me than my own life does. That's all three of the girls. Ron? He's my best friend, and if I happened to play for that team, he would be at the very top of the list of people I'd make love to. Same with Sirius. I love them just as deeply as I do the girls, just differently. As far as you're concerned, I've gotten to know you, and you make Sirius happy. You've seen me at the worst I've been over here, and that's pretty bad. I'd trust you at my back with a knife and a wand."

"Interesting. Did you notice that sex came into the description only peripherally? And only while you were talking about the boys? So, you're happy with these ladies for being themselves, and sex is an added bonus in the relationships, right?"

“Basically,” he answered, not noticing that their conversation had reached normal volumes and that the group at the table were trying to look as if they weren’t listening.

“I won’t even comment on the fact that you’ve finally started reacting to me as a woman as well as a friend, and if you apologize for that compliment you accidentally paid me on line yesterday, I swear I’ll slap you,” she laughed.

He grinned impudently. “I’m sorry I can’t tell you that I’m sorry. Especially since you are ... well, pure physically speaking, Sirius is one hell of a lucky man to get the chance to look at you. And then there’s that mind that scared the boys at school and drew Sirius to you like a magnet.” He turned to Sirius. “You’ve got a thing for brilliant people, don’t you?”

He grinned. “Pity Hermione’s taken.” He leered at Hermione, who blushed at him.

Harry shocked them all by saying, “That’s her decision, and between you, her and Moira. Well, and these two ladies as well. I don’t have a say, nor should I.” He casually scooped the crispy

bacon onto a plate and Vanished the excess grease.

The room was silent while he stirred the two dozen eggs together with some extra sharp Vermont cheddar cheese and a few other spices that he liked to play with. “Scrambled or omelot?” he asked, noticing only then that everyone was staring at him. “What?”

“Why shouldn’t you have a say, Harry?” Moira in Hermione’s stead, since the girl was remarkably flabbergasted, and apparently trying to decide if she was going to cry or not.

“Not my body. Pure and simple. It’s her body to decide what to do with, and I have no say in the matter. The other two because they’ve been together for four years, and I think that you are smart enough to understand why you and Sirius are included. Me? I haven’t been in a relationship of *any* sort with her for four years, save the night they arrived in San Francisco.” He looked to Hermione. “I treasure that, and pray that it can happen again. I *do* love you, Hermione. ‘If you love something, set it free,’” he quoted. “You are free to do whatever you want with your incredibly nubile, sexy, and delectable body. Even if we were in a relationship by ourselves, I wouldn’t force you to stay with me, or to stay monogamous.” He saw the unshed tears. “And I’ve almost made you cry.” His shoulders slumped and he turned back to the stove with the bowl of eggs. “Scrambled is much easier with this large a batch. Should be ready in a couple minutes,” he said and began pouring. *Good going, Casanova. Jerk.*

#####

Hermione started to stand, but Moira and Sirius shook their heads. “Not while he’s cooking,” Sirius mouthed. “Worst possible time.” Harry continued to cook for a few minutes, and soon the eggs and bacon were on the table.

“You know something?” he said as if the previous conversation hadn’t happened. “I understand about Hermione’s parents allowing her to come over, but Molly and Arthur Weasley? I’d imagine that there were kidnapping charges levelled. How did you guys ... well, you specifically, Tonks ... how did you avoid them?”

“I’ll explain later,” Tonks said. “Before that, however, we’re finishing the previous conversation. What made you so depressed so suddenly?”

“I’d forgotten your terrier tendencies,” he murmured. “In honesty, it was the fact that I can make a woman that I love cry without even trying to, when I’m trying to do what feels like the right thing. I mean if they were tears of happiness or joy, I could see it, but Hermione’s weren’t. I hurt her feelings, and I did it pretty badly – and I don’t even know how.”

He looked out at the assembled group. “I’m reminded of the reason I was born, and I have to ask myself – if I’m so good at doing the wrong thing when I’m trying to do the right thing, how do I have any hope in hell of defeating Voldemort?”

He grumbled and pushed away from the table. “And now I’ve probably hurt Hermione even more by even talking about this. I’m going to go work out in the gym.” He was gone before even Tonks

could stop him.

Hermione sat at the table with her head in her hands. “How do I explain it to him? I was bothered by the fact that he feels that he shouldn’t have a say in it. Sorry, Sirius, but you really aren’t my type, even with all the joking I may do. But to find that he feels that he has no voice in something that may tear his heart out? That he has no *right* to have a voice?”

“Loving him is loving him for the long haul, girl,” Tonks said. “Are you ready for that? You need to know that he’ll probably wake up screaming some nights because of the things that have happened to him in his life. Can you handle that?”

Hermione looked at Tonks. “I’m intending as much of a lifetime as Harry will let me. He hides, but – and I don’t mean this to sound snarky – I know how he can be at times even better than you do.”

“You lived with him for five years,” Tonks chuckled quietly. “I’d think you might know him better. You know what your lifetime comment sounds like, don’t you?”

Hermione’s eyes twinkled as she replied, “I do.”

Ginny sat through this entire exchange looking somewhat stunned, by the change in attitude in Harry, but remembering it all too well from Hogwarts. “Maybe we shouldn’t have come looking for him after all, if this is what we’re doing to him.”

Sirius shook his head. “Not your fault. He does this every so often. He’ll work out for a bit, then come up and try to pretend it didn’t happen.”

“Well, I need to find him and talk to him – the sooner the better,” Hermione said. “At least now I’m better prepared to deal with him.”

“That might be a bad idea, Hermione,” Sirius said, and as if to punctuate his statement, the house shook slightly. “Ah, a magical workout. You could conceivably not survive the experience, kid. He tosses some ugly ones, including the Unforgivable ones – which aren’t, over here, but then again, you knew that.”

“I’m going down anyway,” Hermione said. “I caused part of this, but so did he, and I need to get to him before he can get it completely installed into his psyche.” She got up and headed for the stairs to the basement.

“You go, girl,” Tonks chuckled. Since everyone else seemed to be ready to follow Hermione down to the basement, she cast two quick charms to keep the bacon and eggs warm and fresh until they returned. Sirius shook his head in resignation, and brought up the rear of the troupe.

Downstairs, they headed for the workout room. Tonks cast a spell to make the door become the equivalent of a one-way mirror. Harry was inside, beating on dummies with some considerable force. He fired off a spell, creating a small vial, and then fired off another spell, striking the vial,

which promptly exploded rather forcefully. When they opened their eyes, Harry was bleeding slightly, but ignoring it.

Hermione cast a powerful shielding spell and opened the door. Harry spun and immediately fired off a spell. She chuckled and with a flick of her new wand, sent the spell caroming away into a wall.

“How did you do that?” Harry finally asked her after finding his voice. It seemed he’d been shocked out of his funk, and both Sirius and Tonks looked gobsmacked.

“*Wingardium Leviosa*,” she replied, intentionally calling on the memory of the eleven year old know-it-all girl she’d once been. “Stress the GAR.” She grinned at him. “If the spell in question is physical, meaning that it can damage physical objects, then you can use *Wingardium Leviosa* to redirect it.”

“Do you realize what you just did?!?” squeaked Harry. “We’ve been taught for years that there’s no way to block an AK with magic – you have to get something physically in the way of it ... but you can deflect it with a *first year spell*? That’s going to revolutionize magical combat!”

“Is it really? I was just looking at it from a theoretical point of view and decided to see if it worked. But that’s quite beside the point.” Her demeanour changed, however, and she was suddenly looking at Harry in a manner that made him somewhat nervous, from what she could see, which made her smile internally. “I came down here to get that silly notion out of your head before you could give it permanent residence there. I was not crying because you hurt me, I was crying because those damned Dursleys made you believe that you had to take what came your way. If ever I decided that any other man than you was to be even considered as being a lover, you would have the final say in the matter, Harry.”

“But why? It’s your body,” he asked, puzzled.

“It’s your soul,” she replied. “Right now, it would tear you apart to find me with another man, wouldn’t it?” She stared at him for a long moment before saying, “Answer me, Harry. It would, wouldn’t it?”

“But isn’t that hypocritical of me? ‘Oh, you have to be faithful to me as far as men are concerned, but I’m allowed to have multiple female lovers.’ Who do you think I am, Draco Malfoy?”

She laughed. “As I recall, we didn’t ask your opinion on the matter, did we? We simply informed you that the decision had been made. And then jumped you. Besides, are you planning on adding anyone else?”

“If I did, you girls would have final say. I’ve loved you longer than anyone else I could add.”

“Then that answers your question, doesn’t it? You’re not being hypocritical, because you didn’t tell us we had to deal with each other as your lovers, we informed you that we had no problems with it.” She pulled him close to her and kissed him gently. “I love you, Harry, and I hate that

you're in pain like this. We'll get you through this somehow, and then we'll get to loving you and playing through every happy fantasy any of us have ever had."

"Hey, Hermione!" Ron said with a laugh. "Maybe you could do that Sexy Librarian fantasy that one guy at your school wanted you to do with him!"

At Harry's raised eyebrow, she blushed and said, "Guy wouldn't take no for an answer until I – Harry, try to curb your anger, because he's already been dealt with multiple times – well, after he cornered me once in a quiet classroom and ripped my panties off, I ended up defenestrating the guy." Harry gulped.

"I thought you threw him out a second story window," Ron said, puzzled.

"I did," she answered. "What did you think defenestration means?"

Harry replied with a weak grin, "Something you can only do to guys."

"No, *I* emasculated him," Ginny said. "Kicked him rather hard in the 'nards." Harry winced at the concept. "Oh, don't worry," she purred at him. "I promise that there will be no *kicking* your 'nards. Fondling, probably. Same with kissing. No kicking."

"Lucky bitch," Ron murmured with a grin, which she answered cheekily. As he looked at Harry, he said, "Don't you dare, Harry. I understand, but *I'll* kick you there if you apologize for not being attracted to me. You have no say in the matter of who you find sexy. You've already said that if you did find guys attractive, I'd be the first one you'd look at. So I'm happy enough."

Harry smiled at Ron before looking back at the others. "'Sexy Librarian'? Please explain."

Ginny chuckled. "Imagine Hermione in the blouse and skirt she wore when she was in fifth year."

"No insult meant, but they wouldn't fit anymore. They'd be too tight." A fleeting image of her in the school skirt and shirt, both fitting tightly across the bushy-haired girl's frame. "Oh," he said. "Oh my."

"Yeah," Ginny giggled. "Add a pair of Dumbledore glasses to that for her to look over with a seductive look in her eyes."

Harry shook his head. "Sorry Ginny, but you ruined the image by introducing Dumbledore into the mixture. I do not want to think of sex and Dumbledore at the same time – ever." He looked around at the room, which had self-repaired, and said, "Well, since I'm done creating nitroglycerin and detonating it, shall we head upstairs so that I can get cleaned up and get rid of the cold food?"

"We cast heating spells over them, so they won't be cold," Tonks said.

Harry chuckled. "Bet you forgot to cast a protective spell over them, didn't you?" When she nodded, he said, "Well, the bacon is mostly gone at this point, and I'm betting that quite a bit of

the eggs are, too.” At their puzzled looks he said, “Hedwig and Fawkes?”

Ginny snorted. “Pig as well. He’s flitting around here too, you know, and he eats as much as an owl twice his size. Takes after his owner. Well, let’s get back upstairs and see what’s left.”

They headed back up, Harry hanging back to put his quarterstaff away. He turned to be faced with Hermione, holding her wand out at him. Before he could do anything, she said, “*Accio* glass,” and he felt the small shards pulling from his face and flying into her hand. “*Evanesco*,” she murmured, following that with a healing spell, after which she put the wand away and hugged him. “I love you, Harry Potter, and you will always have a say in my love life if I’m crazy enough to want to take another lover into my bed. And that includes if I want to add a woman.”

“I love you, Hermione, and if you want to add someone, then they’re giving you something I can’t, and that makes it your choice. I still don’t see that I have the right, but I’ll try to get to the point where I can see your side of things.” He grinned suddenly. “You know that your clothes may not survive if you try dressing like that librarian you guys were describing.”

“That, my beloved mage, is my most fervent hope.” She kissed him quickly but passionately, and flounced away up the stairs.

“My god,” he murmured. “That is by far one of the most perfect arses I have ever seen.” She turned at the top of the stairs and flipped her skirt up saucily.

#####

At the table, they were dealing with the remainder of what Fawkes and Hedwig had left, and Harry chuckled. “Not much left, is there?” he asked. “Not surprised, really. She and Fawkes probably took turns at it.”

“What do you mean?” Tonks asked.

“Follow me,” he said with a grin, and led them to the back of the house. He dropped the wards on that section of the house, and was amazed to hear high pitched chirping. He spun to face Sirius, his face bright with joy. “They’ve hatched, Sirius! The chicks have hatched!” Turning back to the room in question, he knocked on the wall and asked, “May we come in and see them?” He was answered by a welcoming trill from Fawkes.

They entered the sun room to see a very proud phoenix standing guard as Hedwig fed the cheeping forms in the nest. There were six there, and only two of them bore any resemblance to normal fuzzy owlets. The other four were featherless chicks that reminded Harry of Fawkes after burning day. “Fawkes ... and Hedwig? Fawkes is a *father*?” Ginny squeed. In answer, Fawkes preened by the nest. They stood a distance away, admiring and watching as Hedwig took care of her chicks, before heading back into the kitchen to leave them to their duties.

As they sat, Harry noticed his daily delivery of the *Quibbler* and *Daily Prophet*. “Well, let’s see what mayhem has been stirred up recently. I’m assuming you guys have been following the news,

too. It's been an interesting year so far. Lucius Malfoy dies of an apparent heart attack three months ago – surprised me that the bastard even had a heart - and then Fudge craps out a few days ago.” He opened the package to see a huge headline – ‘Dumbledore New Minister for Magic!’ He read through it quickly. “Damn, I was hoping to go back someday, but not while he's the Minister. How in hell did he get tapped for it? He's always fought it!”

“It was the Order that convinced him to do it,” Tonks said. When Harry looked at her questioningly, she continued. “We stayed in contact with Remus. He passes information to us and keeps us updated on what the Order is doing and information that doesn't hit the papers. When I explained what Albus had tried to do, he was ready to come over with us, but we convinced him that we needed someone we trust to pass along information.”

“Why didn't you tell me this when you were describing things to me earlier on?” he asked incredulously.

She blushed. “Um, I didn't know how you'd take it.” She hung her head slightly in embarrassment.

“You trust him not to have told Dumbledore where we are, right?” Harry asked, receiving a nod from Tonks. “Then there's no problem. What sort of background do we have about these stories? Are they just Voldemort having bad luck and then good luck, or is it something more sinister?”

“Well, as far as Lucius Malfoy's death is concerned, Fudge hid the fact that Voldemort had Malfoy killed. There was a Dark Mark floating over the house. Narcissa and Draco had apparently been out of the house for a show, and Lucius had been at home going over the books. The Aurors spotted the Mark, but were still trying to get through the wards on the Manor when Draco and Narcissa came home. They let the Aurors in, and they found Lucius dead at his desk. Fudge covered up the exact circumstances because the Malfoys have been funnelling money to the Ministry for years, and I guess he hoped that would continue now that Draco's head of the family. Even Snape didn't know in advance about a planned attack on Malfoy, so we don't know if Voldemort ordered it, or if it was a hit planned by a rival Death Eater. As for Fudge himself, well, he was murdered by someone. The Prophet may have called it natural causes, but I don't really know how you can consider a knife between the ribs a natural cause. That left things in turmoil, and one of the candidates for Minister was one of the people we know to be a Death Eater, but can't prove it. Tristan MacThomas. He's never even been arrested for it, but Snape knows him. So, when it looked as if he might get the nod for Minister, the Order convinced Dumbledore to throw his hat into the ring, knowing that it would bring people around. So, McGonagall is headmistress of Hogwarts, and Dumbledore is Minister. Remus told us a day or two before it was formalized, and that's why we came out here. We figured we'd need to explain to you how it happened.”

“So Remus has been feeding you information as he can?”

“Yeah. He kept warning us of upcoming visits by Aurors, although these Department Question Mark people made a good point to them the first time they showed up, trying to grab Ginny and Ron. Ron was already sixteen, which made him an emancipated minor, and he claimed Ginny,

basically. The Question Mark folks informed the Aurors that they would certainly be permitted to start things through legal channels, but that an attempted kidnapping would be frowned upon at the very best. Words like ‘international incident’ got bandied about. A legal attempt was started, and they went after every single thing they could to keep Ginny here, including being utterly precise about paperwork. They allowed the process to finish on August tenth of ninety-seven, and informed the Aurors that they could pick her up on the eleventh.” Harry snorted. “I see you recognize the importance of the date.”

Ron picked it up, chuckling madly. “So they showed up on Ginny’s sixteenth birthday to take her home to Mum, and were informed, by this tiny terror, in front of her court appointed guardian and several Department Question Mark agents no less, that as a sixteen year old girl with access to adequate funds to support herself, she was declaring herself an emancipated minor, and that she was staying in the United States, thank you very much.”

“What made it worse,” Hermione said, giggling, “was that she turned on the little girl charm and apologized for making them take all that time to come over for nothing, and that she was really sorry for the trouble.”

Harry was laughing, tears streaming from his eyes. “I’ll bet Dumbledore hated that when he got word! You know he’s the one who convinced them to send a team.” He laughed a bit more before finally getting under control. “So, is there anything else I need to know, really? What kind of crap has Voldemort been pulling?”

“Not a lot, apparently. At least, not until the last six to eight months. He’s been lying pretty low. The occasional attack here or there, but no major incursions. But the murders of Malfoy and Fudge are worrying people – it means that he’s feeling pretty sure of what he’s doing, and that he’s got one hell of a plan.”

“And Snape has no ideas what that might be?”

“None whatsoever. He knows that about a year ago, Voldemort got a new advisor, one that no one, and I mean *no one* other than the advisor and Voldemort know the identity of.” Tonks frowned. “We’re pretty sure that it’s a member of the Order, since the meeting with Fudge was something known only to Fudge and Order members. So we have a traitor in the Order somewhere.”

“Why am I not surprised?” Harry muttered. “Dumbledore has such a wonderful track record.”

“There’s only a tiny portion of the Order in England that I’m sure is safe,” Tonks said. “Moody, Remus, the twins, Molly and Arthur, Arabella ... beyond that, I’m just not sure. Pretty sure Amelia Bones is clean, too. Oh, your aunt, as well.”

“Aunt? I have an aunt in the Order?” Harry asked, surprised.

“Yeah, one Petunia Evans - formerly Dursley,” Tonks said. “You apparently struck home with that little revelation to her that summer. She turned over a new leaf, moved out of Privet Drive and divorced Vernon, and now works for the Order, hoping someday to see you again to apologize.”

She's our primary contact for information and supplies from the Muggle world, since she and Remus are the only ones that can move comfortably in it. They checked her out. She really would rather die than do anything that might hurt you."

"I assume this was after she recovered from whatever attack brought her to her senses?" Harry asked.

"As I said, Harry, it's been quiet," Tonks replied, puzzled. "There were no attempts made on the Dursleys."

Harry looked up from the papers. "No attempts? Nobody tried to kidnap Dudley or blow up Privet Drive?"

"No. Have I missed something?"

Moira suddenly stiffened in her chair, and her eyes focused on Harry. She opened her mouth and out came an unearthly voice.

"THE DARK LORD RISES AT THE DARK LORD'S DEATH AND FALLS BY HIS RIGHT HAND ... BETRAYER SHALL BECOME SAVIOUR BY BETRAYING THE SAVIOUR ... DECEIT IS THE DARK LORD'S COIN, AND IN SILVER SHALL HE BE PAID ... THE DARK LORD RISES AT THE DARK LORD'S DEATH AND FALLS BY HIS RIGHT HAND ..."

The spell passed as suddenly as it came upon her, and she slumped into her chair. "Damn," she murmured. "I haven't channeled a prophecy in years. Does that one make any sense to you?"

Harry shot out of his chair. "Okay. Sirius, you contact the papers and the utilities and get them shut off. I'll talk to Fawkes and Hedwig about travelling. I need to finish a few things around here and do a fast pack, and then we're returning to England to finish this once and for all."

"What the hell are you talking about, Harry?" Sirius asked, more than a little puzzled by the change in demeanour in his godson.

"I know the identity of the traitor in the midst of the Order," he replied simply.

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Harry Potter and the Paradigm Shift

Chapter 11

The group of seven travellers stepped off the plane in Edinburgh after a particularly long flight from New York. It had been a chartered jet, so they were met almost immediately by a limousine, which quickly took them to a nearby hotel, where they promptly collapsed into sleep in their rooms.

Upon awakening a few hours later, Harry looked at the clock and realized that he had no idea of the time of day. It read 8:03, but had no indicator for morning or evening. There was sunlight showing in the gap at the bottom of the drawn curtains, but at this time of year the sun rose early and set late in Scotland, so that didn't tell him anything, either. He shook his head and climbed carefully from the bed, not wanting to awaken Tonks. He felt his heart swell in his chest as he looked at the sleeping woman, and he fought with himself to keep from climbing back into bed and kissing her thoroughly. He grabbed his watch from the nightstand and smiled. "Damn," he whispered. "Eight p.m. We've been asleep for a while. At least it wasn't eight a.m. I'd hate to find out we'd been asleep for almost a day." He shook his head to clear it and staggered off to the loo. After indulging in a long hot Silence Charmed shower, he was feeling much more human. Tonks was beginning to wake up, so he kissed her thoroughly, dressed, and took a certain sadistic pleasure in going down the hall and rousting the others out of their respective beds. "Time to give Remus a call, and hope that he's still carrying that mirror around." Fortified with cups of appropriate hot caffeinated beverages, they gathered in the sitting room of Harry and Tonks' suite, where he produced the mirror that Sirius had given him for Christmas four and a half years ago. He and Sirius had fixed it in case they needed a secure method of getting in touch with Remus. That time was now.

"Remus Lupin," he said firmly into the mirror. He chuckled as he imagined the other mirror sitting in a drawer at whatever flat Remus was staying. Since the thing vibrated to let the recipient of the message know that a message was coming in, Harry could just see Remus's reaction to his nightstand beginning to vibrate.

Much more quickly than Harry expected, Remus' face appeared in the mirror, concerned and suspicious at first, but moments later breaking into a wide grin. "Harry! How are ... wait, prove to me that you're Harry." The face went from a grin to a scowl.

Harry thought for a moment before grinning impudently into the mirror. "The offspring of Mr. Prongs requests that Mr. Moony keep his abnormally furry snout out of other people's business."

Remus's grin returned. "Harry, where are you?"

"Are you alone?" At Remus's nod, he said, "Apparate to the Aberdeen Apparation point. I'll be there before you will. If I even think I smell an Auror in the vicinity, I'll be gone for good. Understood?"

"I'll be there in a few minutes, Harry." The mirror went blank again.

“We’re in Edinburgh,” Ron said.

“He’s trying to think a step ahead of whoever might still be around looking for him,” Sirius replied. “Four years should have stopped the majority of the chase, but I can still imagine that Dumbledore would like to get his hands on the boy. So he tells Remus to go to a different city, and then does the Apparation from there.” Harry nodded with a grin, and Disapparated.

He hadn’t been waiting near the Aberdeen point very long when Remus arrived and swept him into a hug. “It’s been a long time, Harry. How are you doing?”

“Pretty good, Remus,” Harry replied as he ran his wand over the werewolf. “Good, no tracking spells that I can detect. Shall we head to the hotel? I have something of a surprise for you there.” When Remus nodded, Harry took his hand and Apparated them back to the hotel.

At least, he thought it was the hotel ... When he appeared, the room looked to be a Sultan’s bedroom, and all the women ensconced within were in diaphanous harem costumes. *Even Moira?!?* Harry thought numbly. *Damn!* He looked around. “As enjoyable as this view is, ladies, is it safe to assume who set it up?”

“That it certainly would be,” came an all too familiar voice to Harry.

Remus spun, eyes wide. “Si ... Sirius?” he almost whispered before he fainted.

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Remus Lupin awoke on a bed to find three familiar young ladies, and a fourth he did not know, all still in highly revealing clothing, looking down at him in a mixture of amusement and concern. Their faces lost the concern once they were sure that he was awake. “He’s back,” Hermione said.

“I have to admit, Miss Granger, that I could not have imagined the young student I taught being secure enough to wear such an outfit,” he said.

“Nice to look at, though, isn’t it?” she asked impudently, causing his eyebrows to rise.

“I think I like the change in you. Much more self assured.” He started to sit up.

“Comes from knowing that you’re loved,” she replied.

“As you are,” came a voice that Remus thought he’d never hear again. “It’s good to see you again, Moony.”

Remus looked over at the speaker, and couldn’t believe his eyes. It was the Sirius of years ago – a lean, trim man, but not the gaunt spectre of five years ago. “How ... how do I know that it’s really you?” Remus asked.

“If Harry had been born a girl, he would have been named Melody,” Sirius said quietly.

Remus was off the bed in an instant, his arms around Sirius. "Oh my God, how did ... what ..."

"Blame me," Moira said. "I did the séance, Harry did the summoning, and some others did the actual pulling through."

"Let's not forget the little Chinese man who said 'Dorf'," Harry added with a laugh.

"We obviously have a lot to catch up on," Remus said, still a little light-headed.

Harry grinned. "And now you know the reason for the third suite, Sirius. No sense worrying about kicking anyone out of anywhere – just take it to that suite."

Remus looked to Harry. "Just what are you saying, Harry?"

"That it's been four years since you last saw your lover, and you'd probably like to welcome him back in the best way possible."

"How long have you known?" he asked, just a little white.

"Long enough. You'll note, Remus, that I invited you here, and even set up a separate suite for you? I have no problems with it. Now go. You two have a lot of time to catch up on. We'll all talk tomorrow." He turned to Moira. "You're welcome to stay in here if you want, if you've gotten used to the company."

"You putting the moves on my girlfriend again?" Sirius laughed.

"Considering she could hospitalise me if I tried anything? You figure out the answer for yourself," Harry laughed. "I'll look if she lets me, though," he finished, wiggling his eyebrows lasciviously. "Besides, if I tried to touch, assuming she let me live, the other ladies would be forced to remove something they still seem to have some use for."

"We would not," Ginny said in an offended voice. "We would get together with all involved parties, have an in depth conversation about what had happened – and then use the offender's testicles as a punching bag. Simple as that."

"Simple. But not very pleasant for the proprietor of the punching bag."

"Wait, wait, this is all going so fast," said Remus. "Sirius ... you said 'girlfriend?'"

"Right. Gah. I'm an ass," said Sirius. "Introductions first. Then screwing."

"Sirius, you have a one-track mind."

"You never complained before. Moira Cybelle, may I present Remus Lupin, the best childhood friend a man could ever have. Remus, the Americans hire the real article for Divinations teachers, and it's entirely due to Moira that I'm back. I hope you'll get on well together; you should, since you're both insane enough to put up with me. All clear now?"

“But, if you’ve a girlfriend, then we shouldn’t ...”

“Shouldn’t what?” put in Moira. “Welcome your beloved after four years? Remus ... may I call you Remus? Thanks. Remus, this reprobate has been talking about you as long as I’ve known him. It practically feels like I was at school with the both of you sometimes. I know what you are to each other, and I wouldn’t dream of trying to interfere with that. So go on, off with you. I don’t expect to see either of you till tomorrow, lest I lose my faith in Twue Wuv.”

Remus snorted at hearing that, and smiled over at Sirius, who gently grabbed his arm and led him to the other suite.

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The next morning came giving Harry a shock. He awoke to discover himself pinned between two warm, pleasantly rounded bodies. Hermione was sleeping on his left shoulder, and when he turned to see who the other woman was, he discovered that it was Moira. The covers were down to his waist and quite ruffled, and he could see that she was dressed as Hermione was – at least from the waist up, nothing.

"Please, whoever is listening out there, let this be Tonks playing a joke on me," he murmured into the air. "Sirius will kill me if not."

"Kill you for what?" Moira said from his shoulder. "We’re all adults here, and it's not like you did anything to me last night, even if we all do happen to be nude right now."

As he reacted, somewhat obviously, he said, "I really did not need to think about being naked in the same bed with my godfather's rather sexy girlfriend."

"Why not?" she asked.

"Because I hate myself for being tempted. It feels like I'm being unfaithful to Tonks, and this beauty on my arm, and to Ginny. It's not logical, but it's the way I'm thinking right now."

The door to the suite opened, and Sirius and Remus came into the room. Moira looked up and said, "Hey Sirius, I slept with your godson last night."

"How was he?" Sirius asked.

"Gentle as a lamb, and he snores cutely too. As for what he's thinking and I led you to believe, we'll have to find out at another time. You were right, though. Even climbing into bed with him, he knew that I wasn't one of his ladies, so he never once, even in his sleep, placed his hands anywhere untoward. He defines what a gentleman is."

Tonks stepped out of the bathroom wearing a towel in her hair and nothing else. "And he's also a gentle man. If you're ever interested in finding out, Moira, you have my vote. You were there for him when he needed you, and I like the man he's become."

"You've got mine too," Hermione said quietly, ostensibly in Harry's ear, but loud enough for everyone else to hear.

"I've trusted you with my life, Harry," Sirius said. "Not to mention the fact that I've talked to these ladies. If Moira ever decides that she wants to see exactly why these girls rave about your skills as a lover, then I'm not going to complain about it."

"I'm not going to worry about that just yet," Harry said slowly, more than slightly flustered. "We have more important things to deal with." He looked at the two ladies still resting on his shoulders and said, "Could you possibly get up and perhaps get dressed? I'm ... uh ... I need to think, and that's very difficult at the moment."

The two ladies chuckled and slid from the bed, Transfiguring their discarded harem costumes into bathrobes. Harry marvelled for just a moment that such beautiful women graced his life in such roles, and then shook his head. Once they were out of the room and Harry had dealt with morning necessities, he looked at the somewhat bemused werewolf and said, "Now that the blood flow is restored to parts north, I can contemplate what I need to say." He continued talking while dressing. "I need to set up a meeting with people who can be trusted, Remus. I don't want word of this meeting getting back to Dumbledore yet. I have some things to say to the Order members that we can trust." He paused. "Do you think that Petunia Evans would be trustworthy for this sort of thing, or does she answer to Dumbledore?"

"Honestly, Harry, I truly believe that if you asked her to choose between you two, you'd win hands down. I've caught her crying at times over the last four years, and always because of the treatment that she gave you growing up."

"If you trust her, Remus, then invite her to the meeting. But they must be people who will not go running to Dumbledore without ... well, this will be the thing that bugs them ... without asking me first. I have my reasons, which will be enumerated at the meeting. How soon do you think you could get them together?"

"It would take a couple days," Remus mused. "When and where should we meet?"

"The old headquarters for the Order. Try somewhere around the seventh, I guess."

"Harry, no one can get into ..." Remus started to say, and then laughed. "I suppose the owner of said property, being the one who locked us out, can let us back in, can't he?" Harry merely grinned back at his old teacher.

"I will admit that you have managed to surprise me, Harry," Remus said a moment later. "You're surprisingly accepting about the relationship between Sirius and myself."

"My entire life has been defined by hate. Voldemort hated my existence enough to try to murder a baby, and he hates me even more now because I keep getting in his way and surviving. Vernon Dursley hated me enough that I truly think that he would have killed me if he could have figured out how, and he taught that hate to Dudley. Draco Malfoy hated me because I spurned his

attempts at friendship, if you can call it that. Snape hates me because ... well, to paraphrase someone else ... it's more the fact that I exist, if you know what I mean." Both Sirius and Remus recognized the source of the comment and winced at the pain in Harry's voice. "A lot of my fellow students hated me because they thought they should, or because the *Prophet* told them to, or some such drivel." As he spoke, Ginny and Tonks tapped on the door and let themselves in, sitting on either side of Harry. Harry leaned over and hugged them, first one and then the other. "Then, against all luck, my godfather came back, and we've lived together for four years, giving me the home I always wanted – loving and where I'm treated like a valuable member of the household."

"Of course you are! It's your money!" Sirius quipped, to be followed with a hurt expression and an exclamation of "Ow!" as Remus smacked him lightly on the shoulders.

"Be that as it may," snorted Harry, "I found some friends in San Francisco who didn't know that I was The Boy Who Lived, and liked me for me. And then, after all that, four people who mean more to me than words will ever be able to convey properly, who I thought I might never see again, show up on my doorstep and tell me that they love me, which was more than I ever could have hoped for. Besides, three of the ladies in question have a relationship with each other, and I have no problems with that – how hypocritical would it be of me to begrudge my godfather and his best friend-slash-lover their relationship? We've all had too much loss in our lives – my parents were your best friends in the entire world. Any happiness we can grab is worth it." Realizing that the tone had turned fairly serious, he turned and pounced Ginny, hugging her tightly. "Got her!" This had the desired effect, causing the room to break out in laughter. "Excuse for a second folks, I have a need to nuzzle this incredibly alluring neck."

He proceeded to nibble gently on the girl in his arms, who soon breathed into the room at large, "Don't think I'm not going to get a proper revenge on you, Harry. You *know* what you're doing to me."

"Well, we have to clean up the old HQ, which means that we'll get nice and dusty and dirty. That requires a shower afterwards, wouldn't you say?" He nipped gently at her neck one last time, and looked up to see a widely smiling Remus, who looked suspiciously as if his eyes were particularly damp.

"I don't think I can tell you how good it is to see you so at peace with yourself, Harry," he said finally. "I need to get myself ready, and then head out to connect with those people you asked for. Only those you do not expect to talk to Dumbledore should even be made aware of the meeting in the first place, correct?" At Harry's nod, he asked, "Just to verify what you said earlier – I should bring Petunia? She will wish to speak with you, and she's not a Dumbledore fan, to be honest. She blames him for chasing you off before she could apologize to you."

"If you trust her, Remus, then she can come to the meeting," Harry said. "If she really feels that way, then I can get to know her. If not, well, there's a reason memory charms exist."

The others in the room blinked at how forthright he was in making the statement, but Tonks nodded at the logic behind it. Remus said, "I'm going to invite Amelia Bones – she and

Dumbledore haven't gotten on as famously as they once did, ever since his antics lost her one of her best Aurors. I think Fred and George also. They still haven't quite forgiven Molly's burst of temper that led to you two leaving." He looked at Ron and Ginny. "Expect to get an earful when you do see her again."

Harry snorted. "She'll end up throwing *me* off the property when *I'm* done with her. I am not stepping foot on Weasley lands again until *all* the people I love are welcome there." He turned to Ron and Ginny. "Sorry."

"For what?" Ron asked. "You're within your rights. I've lived with her for four years now, and I agree with you. If she's not welcome, then neither am I. I left on purpose, with her." Ginny merely nodded vehemently, which set up some interesting vibrations that Harry took a moment to enjoy.

Harry shook his head. "Enough. Remus, I trust you to invite people who won't go running to the Minister immediately. We'll see everyone there on the seventh. It'll probably take us the entire time till then to clean the place up, since I think doing magic in there is likely to set off sensors at the Ministry. So we get dirty and dusty." He looked to Ginny and wiggled his eyebrows at her. Remus laughed, gave Sirius a heartfelt hug, and Apparated away.

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They appeared in an alley near Grimmauld place, and walked the rest of the way there. Harry chuckled as he pulled out his wand and murmured "I ain't here, man!" Ginny was surprised to feel a tingle as he did that, and watched in alarm as Harry nonchalantly walked up to the appearing door to Number 12 Grimmauld Place and opened it in broad daylight, with people on the street. No one seemed to notice. He turned around and motioned them all inside.

"How did you do that?" Ginny asked as the door closed behind them. "Magic in broad daylight, and no one noticed it!"

"You didn't have some of the teachers I did, obviously. The words are unimportant in a spell. The most important thing about a spell is the intent. Be honest – who in hell first learned that a certain series of wand waves, jabs, and squiggles casts a certain spell? We do wandless magic as children, and it tends to do what we want. All the rest are focusing mechanisms. You can forego the waving and the words, but you need the intent, and a wand is *really* good at focusing and improving the power of the spell – after all, there's a reason for those magical cores. I'd show you more of what I mean, but I don't want to have the Minister and the ones in his pocket swooping down on this place. He may have the secret right now, but eventually he'll either die, freeing up the secret, or just decide to end it."

He shrugged. "Unfortunately, this means that we clean this place the Mundane way. Let's get going."

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They realized that it was probably best to start in the rooms they'd be sleeping in, which led to a small fight between Sirius and Harry, each of whom felt that the master bedroom belonged to the other person. Ron ended up winning the argument for Sirius when he said quietly, "Harry? Which one of you has the willing harem? Which one of you *needs* the greater space? If and when you no longer actually own this place, then you can give the bedroom over to him, but for now, you probably ought to sleep there."

That small crisis averted, they set to cleaning the rooms with a vengeance. Dust flew until they all were a deep charcoal colour, and evening had started to come around. At roughly six p.m., Harry felt a vibration in his pocket, and pulled out the mirror to show Remus. "Yeah, what can I do for you, Remus?" he asked.

"Sorry I didn't get the chance to talk to her earlier, but you shouldn't worry about doing magic at the house. Amelia will keep an eye out for that sort of thing, since it needs to cross her desk first. Albus doesn't have enough of a solid foot in the office to have people willing to go around her. At least not yet."

"Excellent. We'll all take some showers, and then I think that we'll get serious with the clean up tomorrow. How many have you talked to so far?"

"Amelia and the twins are the only ones I could get without drawing any real suspicion. Wouldn't have thought it about the Head of MLE, but we got to be friends four years ago, so I show up occasionally just to talk when I can. They've gotten used to me, so no one thinks twice about it. I asked her to talk to Shack for us as well. We can trust him. I'll get to the others in the next few days. That really leaves talking to Arabella and Moody. I can get Arabella to get in touch with Petunia for me."

"Thanks again, Remus. I owe you one."

"No you don't. I'll see you in a few days at the very latest." The image disappeared from the mirror.

He looked to the crowd. "Okay, magic is now usable. Let's get ourselves cleaned up, though. At least now I can figure out how to remove the biddy from downstairs."

"That's my mother you're talking about, Harry," Sirius growled. "You can use *much* nastier terms than that for her."

"There are ladies present," Harry said loftily. "Delicate ears, or some such bullshit." He grinned widely at that. "Now, I'm feeling filthy at the moment, and I'd really like to look as if I hadn't spent the last few years in Newcastle." He began to walk toward the bath in the master bedroom. Almost nonchalantly, he turned around and asked, "Coming Ginny?"

"Not at the moment," she replied, eyes twinkling. "I'm sure you can fix that, however."

"Ah, so you're asking for my input on the subject?" he asked with a grin as he motioned her into

the bath.

"As long as that subject is me, yes," she replied, dropping her voice an octave and swinging her hips slightly. His answer was to pull her into a hug from behind and let his hands slide up to cup her breasts.

"I love you, Ginevra Weasley," he said in a voice thick with emotion. "I didn't think it was possible to love three women as powerfully as I love you three." His hands pulled her shirt free of the shorts she wore, and slid slowly up her body, once again cupping her bra-covered breasts in his hands.

"You sound like you're proposing to the three of us," she said in a shaky voice.

He thought for a moment before saying, "Can't say as it's a bad idea. I already know that I want to spend the rest of my life with you three. Why not make it formal? Not official until ..."

"I know," she grumbled. "Not until Voldemort is dead."

He nibbled her ear. "Actually, I was thinking more along the lines of not being official until I could buy the three of you engagement rings."

She gasped. "Are you serious?" she breathed. "You're not going to make us wait until Voldemort's dead?"

"What? You think I'm stupid or something? Hell, if I thought we could get away with it, I'd marry you the same day, but we'll probably have to wait for after he's dead for that to happen. If I have to blow all of the goodwill my fame gets me in order to arrange that, I will. And if they won't allow it, the hell with it, I'll do it anyway." He laughed. "I want to live a long time, Ginny. I want to spend that time living and loving to life's fullest. You three goddesses do that for me – you make me want to live."

She blushed. "Do you really think of me as a 'sexy freckled goddess'?"

He slid his hands down and then peeled her shirt over her head, followed by undoing her shorts and sliding them down her body, nibbling gently on the smooth tan and freckled cheek presented to him as her shorts hit the floor. He looked up to see her undoing her bra, and slid his own clothes off his body. "Let's get our shower, and I'll worship you as a goddess should be worshipped. With a great deal of devotion." He pulled his wand from his own clothes and motioned at the shower, which started to spray hot water into the stall. He opened the door and then swooped her into his arms, kissing her thoroughly as he stepped in, allowing the water to strike him first, on the chance that he had set the temperature too high. Finding it to be perfect, he turned around and let the water strike her as well. All the while he held her and kissed her.

When they finally broke for air, he gently set her down and grabbed a bar of soap and worked it into a lather before running his hands along her body, soaping her skin and giving her a quick and gentle massage at the same time. He grinned to himself as he took extra time to massage her

extreme upper thighs, and knew that when time came to sheathe himself, as he so wanted to do, he'd have no trouble slipping inside her.

He stood finally, and began to lather the soap in her hair. She turned to face him, and pressed tightly against him. "Harry," she murmured. "Finish quickly with the soap. I need you in me. Please?"

"You need but ask, beloved," he said, lowering himself for another kiss, and their tongues clashed for an endless moment. He quickly washed the dust and grime from himself while she worked the soap from her hair. She grinned and worked in some shampoo, and then conditioner after that was out of her hair.

"It needs to sit for a while, and rather than be bored while waiting, I figure a nice relaxing bout of sex should work as a good timer." He laughed and picked her up to kiss her, his hands seeming to naturally come to rest on her firm muscular buttocks. Their lips met, and she wrapped her legs around him to grind into him gently. The kiss broke and he lifted her while she carefully manoeuvred him, and then he let her slowly slide down his body until their pelvises met. He moved to press her against the wall of the shower and began to thrust.

She had apparently stayed in a state of arousal ever since that morning, because he managed to bring her to her first orgasm in record time. He continued in his tender ministrations, not only because he enjoyed the sensations so very much, but because he knew she'd quite likely do him an injury if he dared pull out before his own orgasm happened.

Finally sated inside her, he chuckled as he found her fighting him gently as he decided it was time to pull out of her. "Ginny, I can't wear you around town like this."

"Why not?" she giggled, tightening her legs slightly.

"It's a bit inconvenient, for one thing," he laughed.

"But you feel so good inside me, I never want to release you."

"You have to, honey. What about the other girls?"

"As long as you're talking Hermione and Nymph," she replied with a laugh, shivering as Harry slowly slid from her. "Morgana give me the strength to deal with not feeling complete all the time." He saw her start to laugh as he felt his jaw drop. "Harry, when you're in me like that, I feel whole – I feel like – damn it, the only way to describe it is that I feel complete."

She frowned momentarily. "Harry, I don't know if I'm a seer or not, but I knew the second I saw you that I was going to be with you someday. Not the cute little girl feeling, either. Even at ten, I was stunned by the utterly adult feeling of love I had for you." She blushed furiously. "I don't know if Mum ever knew just how early I started to sexually mature. I was touching myself all your first year, Harry. That's part of why my elbow ended up in the butter the summer before my first year – I was afraid that you'd somehow know that I was doing that, and would think me a

silly little girl.”

“I didn’t really understand anything about girls until about fourth year,” he answered honestly. “Even then, all I understood is that I suddenly enjoyed looking at them. It wasn’t until Tonks came along just before I ran to the U.S. that I really understood what my feelings were.” He laughed in a self-deprecating manner. “I’m a bit slow at times. That’s why I’m surrounding myself with women far more intelligent than I am.”

She hugged him. “Thank you. I don’t know why, Harry, but the few times you’ve been inside me, I simply felt ... I felt as if ... damn, it’s poetic, but it’s also the only way to describe it, even if it is a cliché. It feels as if the other part of my soul that I didn’t know was gone has returned. I feel that with all of you. Ask the girls how difficult it is to disengage from me.”

“It’s a fun struggle, though,” Harry said as he ran his fingers through her hair, helping her to remove all the conditioner. They stepped from the shower finally where Harry cast a drying charm on her and then himself. She combed her hair out before drying it, and then they left the bath, their dirty clothes in hand.

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Downstairs, Harry found Sirius looking at the painting of his mother, which had apparently come unstuck from the wall. “You weren’t able to get her off the wall the entire time you were here before. What did you do this time?”

Sirius looked up and shrugged. “Apparently she couldn’t handle my doing something her Dark Lord couldn’t do this well – come back from the dead looking better than I had been looking before I died. She fainted, and the painting came smashing down off the wall.”

He picked up the heavy thing and dragged it into the drawing room, where he started a fire, and tossed the painting in. He followed that with a Silencing Charm. “No need to listen to the old biddy scream,” he said. “So, let’s see about some food then, shall we?”

They walked into the kitchen, where Moira found herself scowling. “Forgive me for this, Sirius, but that painting was of your mother. How could you just burn it so easily?”

Sirius just looked to the others and said, “Would any of you like to take a go at this? Maybe with all of us explaining what my mother was like, she’ll understand why it was so easy to do that.”

Harry looked at her. “Moira, for one thing, it’s not really his mother, as you know. It’s just an echo. But she was insane. She screamed at everyone. The only reason we didn’t set her off today was because we were working upstairs. If we’d been down here, you’d have gotten a taste, I’m sure. The only one that she didn’t scream at in my presence was that obnoxious house elf Kreacher. Everyone else was a blood traitor or a Mudblood or half-breed scum. She worshipped the ground that the feet of the Dark Lord touched, and she made sure you knew it.”

“Mudblood?” Moira asked with curiosity.

“A Muggleborn wizard or witch. Sorry – forgetting that America does not use those terms – I slipped back into the English patterns so easily. A mage who does not have a mage for a parent, or, as far as anyone can tell, any mages at all in their family tree. It’s the British mage equivalent of calling ... oh, let’s choose Jesse Jackson ... calling that man a ‘nigger’. Mudblood is just as disgusting a term, and thrown about by people who think of themselves as pure-blooded.”

Moira looked at herself, and looked up at Harry. “Ever wonder about the permanent tan I seem to have? That perfect bronze shading that so many of the boys drooled over? My mother came from Ireland – born and raised there – but my dad’s family? His African-American skin blended with her pale Irish skin to give me this shade. You couldn’t have chosen a better example if you tried – especially since I can remember a cross burning on our lawn when I was nine. We didn’t live in Kansas for very long after that. Especially since I’d recognized some of them – I’ve always been able to see, after all. They all had particularly ugly accidents in the next month. We moved later on.” She sighed. “I understand ‘Mudblood’.” She looked to Sirius. “Was there nothing good about her?”

“She could be a wonderful mother – unless you disagreed with her. I don’t know if the family tree still hangs out there in the hallway, but look at the blasted areas. My name is blasted off, as is my cousin Andromeda Tonks.”

“My mum,” Tonks replied before Moira could actually ask the question. “He calls me his cousin, but it’s really one of those ‘once-removed’ sort of things.”

“I ran away when I was young, and went to live with the Potter family. It was there that I learned how a family is supposed to act toward each other. She wanted nothing to do with me, and told me personally that if it had been within her power to keep me from the family title, she would have done so.”

“Title?” Hermione asked. “You mean like the title to the house and properties?”

He snorted. “No. Until I fell through that veil, I was Baron Black. Never had the chance to line Fudge’s pockets to stay out of prison, otherwise I’d have walked as free as Malfoy. Since Harry James Potter was my heir designated in the will, the title passes to him, and the title will go to the first male child one of you ladies produces.”

“You know something?” Ron said, out of the blue. “Given the way the Ministry thinks, you may get arrested again once it’s known that you’re back from beyond the veil. After all, you’re legally dead, which means that right now, you’re illegally alive.” He grinned at the table. “Can you deny that some people in the Ministry seem to think that way?”

“We’ll talk ‘em into making him pay a fine and promising to stay dead next time,” Harry chuckled. “That’ll clear things up.” He shook his head. “I’ll worry about being heir to the Black Family at some later point. I’m just afraid that someone’s going to tell me that I’m related to Queen Elizabeth or something.”

“Um, Harry?” Sirius started to say. “I hate to tell you this, but ... well, one of your great-great

grandparents on your mother's side was named Alphonse Gotha. Do you remember learning what the royal family's name was before being legally changed to Windsor?"

"Saxe-Coburg. Why?"

Hermione went white. "Actually, Harry, it was Saxe-Coburg-Gotha." She looked to Sirius. "Please tell me you're joking, Sirius."

He snorted. "Yes and no. It really was the case, but I doubt that her parents ever knew, and Lily would never have bragged about it. If you go far enough back, everybody's family hits royalty. It puts Harry in the situation of being three hundred and eighty third, or thereabouts, in line for the throne of England. It would take a massive family gathering of all the royal families of Europe getting together and being wiped out by a meteor strike for Harry to come close to worrying about it."

"Actually, it would go to Harry's Aunt Petunia first, since she was the older sister and is still alive," said Hermione. "And then Dudley. What?" she said, realizing everyone was gaping at her.

"Only you would work out the lineage like that," said Harry. "Okay, I'll worry about the 'Baron' thing another time. Let's get some food, maybe do a little more cleaning, this time with magic, and then get some sleep. How does that sound to everyone?"

#####

The seventh dawned bright and apparently cheerful. It was certainly more cheerful in the Black Family home. They had spent one day tearing out everything – wallpaper, curtains, and scraping the old paint off walls. A large number of gallons of paint were purchased, and painting was done in record time, brightening the home even further. Furniture was purchased, and soon places such as the drawing room reminded Harry comfortably of the Gryffindor common room. They weren't completely finished with the place, considering the fact that it was far larger than it appeared, but it certainly was far more pleasant than what it had been when they first arrived.

Hermione awoke sometime around ten a.m. to find one person missing from the tangle of bodies on the bed, but gathered almost immediately where he'd gotten to when she smelled something coming up the stairs. *Hmm, bacon, I think, and it smells as if he's decided to do some baking as well.* She sat up, wincing slightly, and smiling at the reason for her wincing. *I'll have to remember the mixture of Sexy Librarian and bondage again. Chaining him to that wall to make him pay off his library fines was brilliant!*

She climbed from the bed, not bothering to dress, and walked downstairs to the kitchen area, where Harry, wearing shorts and an apron for safety, was finishing up his cooking. He was about to cast some heating and protective spells when he saw her and his face lit up. "Hermione! How are you feeling?"

"A little tender, thank you very much, and I do mean thank you! That was incredible." She blushed. "I don't know if I'll ever be able to tell you what it meant to me when you immediately

relaxed when you saw those manacles around your wrists and ankles. No questions of what I was doing or anything like that – just simple acceptance.”

He looked honestly puzzled. “Why wouldn’t I relax? You wouldn’t intentionally hurt me unless it was for a good cause, such as my truly deserving it.”

“That’s what I’m talking about,” she sniffed. “You automatically decided that you were safe. The level of trust that showed was astounding, and the fact that you can’t wrap your head around why it touches me so much is ... I can’t find the words.”

“You love me, and I love you. If I can’t trust you, or Ginny, or Tonks, then who can I trust?” he shrugged.

“Give it up,” said Tonks as she walked into the room, dressed the same way Hermione was. Her hair was the bubble gum pink it had been the very first time Harry had met her. “He’ll never understand why his attitude toward us makes us melt, or why it puts his virtue in danger.” She chuckled at the last comment.

“He’s the perfect man,” Ginny said quite seriously, completing the trio of beautiful women. “He treats us as priceless and perfect, but doesn’t try to keep us from being ourselves. We can get in danger right alongside him without him verbally telling us he’d rather not see us there, although we all know he’d like to.”

“It’s not like it would be all that effective, right?” Harry asked with a smile. “You’d do it anyway, and I’d have wasted breath trying to stop you. Sisyphean effort is not my thing.”

“I’m not sure, girls, but I think we might have been called hard-headed,” Hermione said with a smile.

“The rest of you is delightfully soft,” Harry offered by way of apology.

“Are you saying I’m fat?” she asked, a twinkle in her eyes. His response was to walk over to a wall and begin smacking his forehead lightly against it. “What are you doing?” she squeaked.

“I can’t win this one, so I’m not even going to try,” he laughed. “I figured I might as well be banging my head against a wall, so I did.”

“Did she bother you with that?” Ginny asked, worried.

“If she’d been serious, she would have, but it was obvious from her eyes that she was having me on.” He walked out the doorway and yelled up the stairs, “Hey Ron! Food!” He was answered by a door slamming open and feet pounding down the stairs. Sirius and Moira came out of a different room and walked down at a much more sedate pace. “Hurry up, guys. If Ron’s here, you might not get any food by the time you get to the table.”

#####

That breakfast worked out quite well, Tonks thought as she looked at the wizard lying next to her on the bed. *And think how well my occasional clumsiness paid off.* She purred quietly to herself. She had picked up one of the cinnamon buns that Harry had baked and dropped it on the way to her mouth. It had landed icing side toward her skin, and had slid from her collar to her pubic hair before she could grab it. Harry's eyes had lit up, and as soon as she had finished the bun, he picked her up and carried her upstairs to get the icing off her body. Since he had rather carefully used his tongue to achieve this goal, she certainly was not complaining.

The afternoon arrived, and they finally climbed from the bed and dressed. Knowing the crowd that would be arriving shortly, she contemplated wearing something that would make Harry want to have her sitting in his lap, but decided instead to go with a form-fitting tank shirt and a pair of pants that were loose in the legs but fit her hips beautifully.

She looked at Harry, who was rather obviously admiring the fit of her clothing, and said, "It's time you get dressed too, sexy. Unless you intend on having the meeting in the nude."

"Wouldn't that shock 'em all? The group of us walking in starkers?"

"Yeah, but what if the others decided to follow form? Fred and George would be a pleasant bit of all right, but Moody?"

Harry shuddered. "I may need the image that brought to my mind *Obliviate* d, Tonks. That was beyond horrifying," he laughed. He climbed from the bed and dressed quickly.

The day went fairly quickly after that, and soon it was time for the first people to show up. Remus Apparated in at roughly seven p.m. with Amelia Bones. She took one look at Sirius and immediately looked to Remus. "You told me I wouldn't believe one of the things I'd see here tonight." She looked back to the group. "Everyone else will arrive and come in the front door. They're all aware that you're back, Harry, because they know what the goblins told Albus – only the owner can re-open the household."

"Who's coming?" Harry asked.

"Obviously Remus and myself," she said with a smile. "I've also told Kingsley to come, and he was going to contact Moody. Remus contacted Arabella and the Weasley twins, so that's about it."

"Petunia will be here," Remus said quietly.

"Good," Harry said. "I'd like to talk to her."

In short order, the rest of the people were there. Petunia was quite nervous until Harry walked over and pulled her into a tentative hug. "People I trust vouch for your change, Aunt Petunia. We'll talk later, but you have that second chance that they told me you wanted." She smiled at him and nodded, relaxing somewhat.

Harry walked to the head of the table. “Okay folks, it’s time we get down to business. First off, to those of you who just arrived, I think you’ll be pleased to meet an unexpected guest to this meeting. If you would?” Sirius walked into the room to the silence of the entire crowd.

“Hi guys – miss me?” he grinned. “Yes, Moody, it’s me – if you need proof, I can talk about that time that you, me, and James were dealing with that house out in Brighton?”

Alastor Moody snorted, putting his wand away. “Just the fact that you know about it tells me everything I need to know, since we all swore to keep silent about it,” he growled at Sirius, although there was what passed for a smile on his face.

“Okay, now that we have *that* little surprise out of the way, I need to explain why I broke my word and returned to the Isles. You’ll also understand why I only wanted you people here when I explain.”

“Our little Harry’s grown up and learned suspense and pacing,” Fred Weasley said, wiping a non-existent tear away.

“We’re so proud of him,” George sniffed in response.

“The twins are right, Harry,” Remus said. “You’ve told them,” he said, pointing at the group that had been in the United States, “but you’ve not told me, for example. Why have you returned?”

“I know who the traitor in the Order is – the one who had both Lucius Malfoy and Cornelius Fudge being murdered.”

Amelia sat up. “Who? Do you have proof?”

“Nothing that will stand before the Wizengamot, but logic told me that it has to be Albus Dumbledore.”

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Harry Potter and the Paradigm Shift

Chapter 12

“You’re crazy!” Kingsley Shacklebolt cried out. “He’s fought harder than any of us against He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named!”

“Nevertheless,” Harry said implacably, “logic states that it must be him.”

“Mind telling us how you came to that conclusion about the most celebrated hero of the last hundred years?” Moody growled.

“Let’s start simple. I apologize for this, Aunt Petunia, but ...”

“You go right ahead, Harry,” she said, her chin quivering slightly. “It’s merely the truth.”

He nodded. “You have probably all heard the story about living with a family of loveless Mundanes – sorry – Muggles. From fifteen months until after I received my letter from Hogwarts – well, the first of what I think were several thousand – I lived under the stairs, in a cupboard. Just enough food to keep me going, to do all the household work that was assigned to me. For all intents and purposes, I was a slave – no rights, no freedom, and certainly no love. I was also regularly abused by Vernon, and ...” He looked to Tonks, who immediately came over and hugged him.

Taking a deep breath, he continued. “Dudley Dursley and his gang regularly used to rape me from the time I was ten until the early part of summer before my fifth year.”

“Oh my God,” breathed Petunia before she fainted. She was quickly *Ennervated*, and stared at Harry for a long time before saying, “Harry, if there were any way to make this up to you, I would. And you’re a kinder, gentler soul than I deserve to know for being willing to give me a second chance. I swear to you, Harry – I will be the kind of family I should have been all those years ago.” The room was surprised to feel a pulse of magic flare out from Petunia and hit Harry, who staggered slightly.

“Goodness,” said Tonks a little breathlessly. “That was an Oath, or I’m not a metamorphmagus.”

Harry only grinned. “That alone tells me I did the right thing in trusting you, Aunt. Welcome back to the family.” He walked over to her and took her into a real hug as soon as she was standing. When he let her go, there were tears in both their eyes, as well as a few members at the table trying not to be noticed as they dabbed at their own eyes.

Eventually, though, he walked back to his place at the head of the table. “As much as mentioning this hurts my aunt, I have to in order to make my point. I was abused, both mentally and physically, at Number four Privet Drive. I had been placed there by Albus Dumbledore, nominally under the excuse of blood protections. That’s all well and good. All evidence points me to believe that I was merely ignored there. Even that’s believable, considering the reaction

that most people have when they hear how I was treated those years.”

“The problem comes down to a bit of information that Dumbledore didn’t tell me until after Sirius fell through the Veil.” He cleared his throat. “*‘The one with the power to vanquish the Dark Lord approaches... born to those who have thrice defied him, born as the seventh month dies ... and the Dark Lord will mark him as his equal, but he will have power the Dark Lord knows not ... and either must die at the hand of the other for neither can live while the other survives ... the one with the power to vanquish the Dark Lord will be born as the seventh month dies ...’*” He looked around at the group. “He’s known that prophecy since before I was born, since he was the one that it was told to. This scar apparently marks me as his equal. Now, you look at a baby who you know is going to be the one to fight the Dark Lord and who is apparently your only hope against this same Dark Lord, and you place him in a home with his relatives. Are you going to ignore him completely until he becomes old enough to go to Hogwarts?” He sighed. “That’s what Dumbledore did with me, at the very least. At worst, he knew and didn’t see fit to remove me. I didn’t find out until last year that the only real watch I had over me was you, Mrs. Figg.” He looked around again. “I can understand not wanting me to grow up with that arrogance that a certain Potions professor is so certain that I have, but to leave me so utterly out of the loop? To intentionally leave me with a family that hated me? One or two visits from him or someone else, when the Dursleys weren’t aware of it, would have made their treatment of me rather obvious. Nobody even had to visit physically, for that matter. I’m sure Dumbledore knows how to use a crystal ball to watch someone. He has several of them in his office. I know, I knocked them off their stands.”

He shook his head, looked apologetically at Petunia and mouthed “Sorry,” before he continued. “Let’s hit my schooling next. I had no preparation at all for entering Hogwarts. Even Hermione and Justin had more of an idea how things worked than I did. I have no complaints about the teaching itself, except for the fact that Binns should be exorcised before he kills someone from boredom. Well, and the fact that Snape is a jerk who couldn’t *teach* his way out of a wet paper bag. But you’d think if I was the only hope against Voldemort, I would have been pushed a little harder. Given some extra work. Something. Especially after the first year, when it was obvious to Dumbledore, anyway, that Voldie was still out there and trying to get back. The only extra training I ever got was with Professor Lupin, and that was only because I thought to ask for it. And I’d be willing to bet that your giving me that training, Remus, had a lot to do with why Dumbledore let you leave without complaint after Snape outed you.” Remus nodded thoughtfully.

“Back to my first year and the scenario with the Philosopher’s Stone. I can’t believe nobody ever questioned how it worked out. First off, why in hell did Dumbledore send a man who can’t keep a secret to save his life to get the Stone? I love Hagrid dearly – he was the very first friend I ever had in the magical world – but the only secret I’d ever give him is one that I wanted to get around to everyone else. On top of that, that same person was given this task on the same day that he was picking up a curious child! I’ll ignore the ridiculousness of expecting a child to know about Platform 9 3/4, and skip straight what happened in school. He had Hagrid put Fluffy the three headed dog up there to guard that trap door. See my previous comments about Hagrid’s ability to keep secrets. Then he drew more attention to it by announcing at the Sorting Feast that everyone should stay away from there. I’m surprised Fluffy didn’t eat half of Ravenclaw House – they’re

all nosy parkers. Also, if it was that important, don't you think that he could have seen to it that the stairs only moved to that wing when there was a teacher present? At Christmas, he gives me my father's Invisibility Cloak, which is a device designed for helping a student sneak around after hours! We were given clues left and right to point us at the Stone, and I was introduced to the Mirror of Erised, supposedly by accident, but I'm not so sure anymore. I think he knew the areas where I was poking around and deliberately put the mirror there so I'd find it. Or he had the halls shift to get me to the right place. One or the other. Okay, we discover who Flamel was, what he was famous for, and that it's at the school. Now we get to the actual chase after the Stone. Has anyone realized that damned near anyone could have beaten those puzzles? After all, three first year students did! Devil's Snare, which can be gotten past by either relaxing or lighting a fire under it – and is taught about in first year. The key test, which Quirrell probably got past with an *Accio*, but I needed to fly to capture that key. Ron could probably have got it, too – he'd had more practice flying than I had at that point. Actually, Hermione, you're a pretty good flier, you know.”

“Yes. I don't know where everyone got the idea that I hate flying. It was riding Buckbeak that I had a problem with. Couldn't control him as well as I can a broom. Never be a professional at it, but I can at least deal with it.”

“True. Anyway, we had the key test, which was really designed for someone just like me – a flier. Then we had the chess board, which was designed for our resident chess master. Then there was the troll, which was unconscious, so we walked right past it, but we'd already shown we could deal with one of those anyway. After that, we had a logic puzzle – something designed for a girl who became the sexiest brain I know.” She sketched an amused bow from her seat, blushing furiously. “Now that I'm inside with the offender – Quirrell, in case you've forgotten – he's facing a mirror. Can anyone guess which mirror? That's right, Erised strikes again. So we have an evil wizard and an eleven year old boy facing this mirror. I wanted the Stone to keep it away from Quirrell and Voldemort. Now, the enchantment was that only someone who wanted the Stone but not to use it could retrieve it from the Mirror of Erised. I got the Stone, Quirrell tried to take it, and the power of my mother's martyrdom saved the day. Now, does anyone see the inherent problem with this scenario? You guys don't count,” he finished, pointing at the group that had been in America with him.

After several moments of confused conversation amongst the group, Petunia looked up and asked, “Why did he set an eleven year old boy after it? Why not do everything in his power to actually prevent you from going after it? After all, from what I've heard people say, he can get the school to do nearly anything. You would have had a much harder time of it without that cloak. Make the puzzles harder. Set that charm so that only he personally could retrieve it. Anything.”

Harry looked to Hermione. “I'm beginning to think you're right. Logic is not a thing they teach wizards. Aunt Petunia got it right away.” He looked to the rest of the group. “Ron and Hermione and I even suspected it then, but I – in my desire to believe the best of a man I thought was my mentor – dismissed the possibility and made excuses. In retrospect, it was obvious that we were right. I was meant to retrieve the Stone, and by rights, Voldemort should have got it then. He would have, and then my mother's protection could have killed him, and it really wouldn't have mattered if I lived or died. There was no way to predict the effect it would have when Voldie

actually laid hands on me. Afterwards, Dumbledore said the Stone was destroyed, but for all I know it went back to Flamel, because word got around about it, and it now would have looked bad if Moldieshorts got his hands on it anyway.”

“On to my second year – the year of the Flying Ford Anglia. Remember ripping those bars off my window, Freorge?” They nodded silently. “Vernon wasn’t pleased with continually losing his slave to Hogwarts where I could learn all that ‘freakish stuff’. That was the year of Dobby trying to save my life by trying to keep me from going back to Hogwarts. Now, why would Dobby, a Malfoy house elf, be trying to keep a non-Malfoy from returning to school? Why me specifically, unless the diary going to a friend of mine was intentional? Which means that Ginny was most likely the intended victim of that walk-by reverse-pickpocket scheme by Lucius Malfoy. Either her or Hermione – guys tend not to use diaries. This gives him the ultimate revenge by using the only daughter of a family sworn to fight Voldemort in order to bring Voldemort back.”

“What does Dumbledore have to do with this?” Shackbolt asked.

“It’s obvious from what happened in first and fourth years that he actually wanted Voldemort back. The bit with the diary was another try at that. And since Malfoy had the diary, the two of them had to have set it up together. Is there anywhere in the castle that Dumbledore doesn’t know about? He knows everything that happens there. How could he *not* know about the Chamber of Secrets? Hell, he had been there fifty years earlier, when the previous round of deaths happened. How do you *not* figure out that it’s a Basilisk killing everyone? It’s in the damned textbook for anyone to see! Anybody who actually reads it, that is ... which is why Hermione found out about it and not me ... For that matter, name me another teacher who was actually *at* Hogwarts fifty years prior. McGonagall wasn’t, because Dumbledore was the Transfiguration teacher. Binns might have been there, but since the only thing that ever got him excited was the Goblin Rebellions, *he* wouldn’t have noticed. No other teacher around knew about it. No, he knew what was happening, all right, and was ready to let Tom come back. Perhaps he was planning on fusing the old Voldemort spirit with the resurrected body and then using me to take him out while he was still weak. But instead Tom takes things into his own hands and orders the Basilisk to kill me, which it would have. Dumbledore had to send Fawkes with the sword to save me from my own idiocy. He still needed me for something.”

“Third year, I don’t think what happened was part of his long-term plan. He was busy doing the negotiations for the Tri-Wizard Tournament that year. But he still did his best to keep me off balance. How in hell did Dementors get through the wards? Dumbledore controls those. Easy enough to keep them off the grounds, wouldn’t you think? I think that year was really more of a respite from everything as far as he was concerned. Up to the end of that year, I think Dumbledore was still working on the idea of taking Voldemort out permanently. But by that year, I think he’d decided to go over to him – or at least to agree to split the power with him. So at the end of the year, he didn’t need me anymore. And then comes the whole time turner loop. Ron and Hermione and I just barely escaped being eaten by a werewolf, and quite frankly it would have been better for Dumbledore if the Dementors had gotten Sirius – but instead, he takes the opportunity to send Hermione and me out, allegedly to save Sirius and Buckbeak, but really so I’d have another go at getting killed? Weak evidence, I know, but given everything else, a

possibility.”

“Fourth year. He had to have been in this one from the ground up. Jesus, where do I start? Moody. How in hell did Barty Crouch Jr. learn so much about you to be able to fool Albus ‘All I Have To Do Is Twinkle At You And I Know Your Life Story’ Dumbledore? The man is a master Legilimens and Occlumens, apparently second only to Voldemort, if his comments at the end of fifth year are to be believed, but I’ll get to that later. So, we have Barty Crouch Junior as Alastor Moody as DADA teacher, most likely with Dumbledore’s knowledge. The Goblet of Fire, and that whole fiasco with my name in the Goblet. He personally guaranteed that no one would hoodwink the judge. And yet my name came wafting up out of that fucking cup. If Dumbledore really was protecting the cup, then he’s a total incompetent. But if he really is ‘the greatest wizard of our time’, then he had to be in on it. How did my name get into that Goblet? Anyone have any guesses? Maybe you, Moody?”

“Enough with the cute repartee, Potter. Get on with it,” the grizzled old Auror growled at him.

“Okay, don’t get your knickers in a twist,” Harry said brightly, blowing him a mock kiss. “The fake Moody drops my name in and helps me all through the year, trying to make sure I win, so that the portkey he’s turned that Tournament Cup into will take me to Voldemort.” He paused. “Why not grab me at the beginning of the year, before I had any ability to protect myself in any way? Or at any time during the year? I was alone with him more than once. I don’t believe that the spell Moldie enacted had a time constraint, such as being performed under a full moon, or must be done in early June. Or why not grab any other student? He referred to Cedric as ‘the spare’, which implies he would have served the purpose as well.” He shrugged. “That’s Tom’s problem. His plans are too damned convoluted. Be that as it may be, when I come out of the maze carrying Cedric’s body, who does Dumbledore allow to take me to the castle? The very man who put me in that predicament. When his insanity lets too much slip, Dumbledore allows Dementors on the grounds again, in time to kiss Crouch so that he can’t give anything away. And I still remember that look of triumph that went through Dumbledore’s eyes for just a moment when he heard how Tom and I share a blood link now. This is the best possible outcome for him – Voldemort is back, but there’s still the possibility to use me against him if necessary. If he turned out to be a less – compliant – business partner than Dumbledore expected.”

“Fifth year was the worst of them. Suddenly, this man who acted as my grandfather for four years doesn’t even want to know me. At the end of the year, he hints that it’s because the link that Tom and I share would allow Tom to come in and read Dumbledore’s mind.” He paused. “Excuse me? One of the most powerful Occlumens around is worried about a fifteen year old boy carrying a Dark Wizard in his head? I did a little studying, and there’s no way that Tom could have pulled *that* much power through the link. If so, he could simply have ejected my mind and taken over in my brain, and then he’d be back. So Dumbledore’s worries about having his mind read by Voldemort just don’t work. He wants me to come to him with problems, yet he won’t even look at me, and now treats me *exactly* the same as the other students, which is how he *should* have been treating me from the beginning. I started that summer angry, never having gotten grief counselling for Cedric’s death, and I think that he acted the way he did for the purpose of keeping me on edge and angry. And I won’t even begin to go into his treatment of the people around him

as mildly stupid and acting condescending to them. Cage someone who spent twelve years in prison unfairly. Tell them they're back in a prison again, although they're 'free', because it's for their own good. Do what you can to make him stir-crazy, and then when he goes and gets himself killed, supposedly, blame it on *him* for not doing the right thing!" He paused and calmed himself slightly, since he had begun to shout. "And, while the boy who brought him to his death is grieving in the minutes after causing that death, quietly blame the one who died for his own death, and hint that he did in fact deserve to die, even though you'll never use those words. Kick him while he's down, too. Tell him the prophecy you've known since before he was born. Let this boy who hates death know that it's either kill or be killed. No other way."

"I was still a useful pawn against Voldemort, you see. And partnership or not, Voldemort still wanted to know what was in that prophecy. But from this point on, it's best for Dumbledore that I be an emotional wreck and unable to figure out how I'm being used."

"Let's keep going while I have momentum. We now get to the summer that I left England. I said something to some people during that summer. It was rather important in an odd way, since it concerned the Dursleys. Other than myself, Tonks, or Aunt Petunia, can anyone here tell me what that conversation was about?"

"How could we?" Moody said.

"Did you ever see a report about that conversation, Madam Bones? Kingsley – sorry, Mister Shackbolt?"

"No, Tonks never put in a report about it," Amelia Bones replied. "Why?"

"Because the report went to Dumbledore, as an important aspect of my guarding, and he would have disseminated it where he felt it best needed to go," Harry replied. "Make sure those who needed to know knew, if that makes sense."

"What did the report say, Harry?" Fred asked.

Petunia spoke up. "Harry informed me that he honestly didn't care whether or not V ... You Know Who tortured and killed us. He said that it bothered him that he was likely to throw a party when he heard that Voldemort had killed us. Honestly, for the way we treated him, we *deserve* death." She had tears in her eyes.

"That was what I told her. I didn't give a good God damn if they were murdered by an insane wizard. I disappeared from England before the blood protections were completed, if I understand things properly. They should have been easy to find and deal with, and I was convinced Voldemort would have used them to lure me back – if he'd thought it would be any use. Yet nothing happened to them. I've heard people say that they still want to deal with the Dursleys – which means they were left alone by both sides." He looked at Petunia suddenly. "Divorce?" When she nodded, he asked, "Evans?" and received a second nod. He grinned widely at her to her obvious surprise.

He shook his head. “Now, she knew,” he said, pointing at her, “and the only other three who knew were me, who was in the United States later that day; Tonks, who was working hard to find me and catch me; and Dumbledore. Since Tonks and I have been in the States for four years, and it’s fairly obvious that my aunt didn’t have Death Eater ties, who else would have told Voldemort that it was a lost cause to attack the Dursley home? Who else *could* have?”

There were scowls around the table. Harry was obviously making a good case for his point of view, and that was seriously disturbing them. Harry bulled onward. “Now we get into things that have happened recently. Lucius Malfoy was killed, and a Dark Mark was seen over his home. Am I the only one that finds that a little odd? How often are Dark Marks seen floating over the homes of Pureblood wizards? This happens after Voldemort takes on a new advisor that no one else has ever seen or heard. Voldemort kills his right hand man? Something is going wrong here.”

“Then we get to Fudge’s death through the natural cause of a knife to his ribs. Who knew about that meeting? I’d imagine that it wasn’t trumpeted in all the papers, was it? And who was he meeting? Dumbledore. Fudge had also covered up the Dark Mark floating over the Malfoy home. Someone in Moldie’s crew was likely quite angry at the cover-up. Not many knew that he was meeting with Dumbledore, did they? That tends to lower the list of suspects immensely.” He turned to face Moody and Remus. “By the way, were either Mundungus or Snape ever punished for anything about four years ago, just after I left?” They shook their heads. “Trust Dumbledore to sweep it under the rug once I was gone and not getting snarky about it.”

“What are you talking about?” Amelia Bones asked.

“The day that I blew out the wall in Dumbledore’s office for him threatening to put Tonks in Azkaban for loving me, we’d gone there to tell him about the rapes and to request that some sort of punishment be meted out to the guard on the days in question at the beginning of the summer after fourth year. Yeah, I’d been raped a couple times early that summer. And it was during the period when I was supposedly under surveillance by the Order. Someone knew, and allowed it to happen by malicious intent. Probably watched. Anyway, we get told that he’ll do something about it, and then he asked to speak with us separately. Then he threatened her job to get us to break up. When I went in, he informed me that we were going to break up – for my safety, her safety, and the safety of the Order. When I balked, he pulled out the big guns by getting all fatherly and doing the ‘this is for your own good’ shtick when he informed me that he would request that Amelia Bones bring the full weight of her position down upon Tonks, up to and including putting her in Azkaban for six months if necessary. That was supposed to impress me with how important it was that I be safe, that he’d do that to a friend of his.” Harry shrugged. “All it did was prove to me that I can never trust him. I blew out the wall and headed for Gringott’s, with the help of Fawkes. And the fact that Fawkes abandoned him told me everything else I needed to know at that point.”

“Where is Fawkes, or don’t you know?” Remus asked.

The American crew chuckled. “He’s busy being a daddy at the moment. Hedwig apparently seduced him.” The chuckles spread to the rest of the crew.

Moody spoke up. "You make a compelling case, Harry, but none of it proves beyond the shadow of a doubt. Anything else you can give us?"

"Now we get to the one thing that sold me on the issue of Dumbledore as Dark Lord. Moira, since it was you who reported the prophecy, would you care to repeat it to our eager ears?"

"Do I need to do that voice, too?" she asked with a smile.

"Not unless you want to. Sounds like it's a bit rough on the windpipe, you know?"

"It is," she laughed, but sobered quickly. "Okay, this prophecy was reported through me, and unlike Sybil Trelawney, I remember the prophecies I make." She closed her eyes for a moment before reopening them and saying, "*The Dark Lord rises at the Dark Lord's death and falls by his right hand ... betrayer shall become saviour by betraying the saviour ... deceit is the Dark Lord's coin, and in silver shall he be paid ... the Dark Lord rises at the Dark Lord's death and falls by his right hand ...*" She shook her head. "That's what it said."

"If Dumbledore is our traitor, then what hope do we have?" Amelia Bones asked. "If the greatest living wizard on the side of Light has gone dark, then how can we even begin to fight him?"

"Easy," Fred replied. "Pay attention to it. This prophecy predicts the fall of the new Dark Lord. The one Harry reported simply says that one or the other must die. This one states that Harry wins against Voldemort."

Harry winced. "It doesn't predict my survival, folks, although I'm pretty damned sure I will survive. But Fred's right. Not only does it state that Voldemort is going down, but his successor will too."

"Can't be a real prophecy then," George laughed. "It makes sense, and tells us something useful!"

"Maybe, but you explain the betrayer and saviour lines," Hermione said with a chuckle. "Does the silver reference mean that Pettigrew finally turns on Voldemort and helps Harry win?"

"Beats me," Fred said. "Our question now is how to defeat Voldemort. Kinda need to worry about that before we start thinking about dealing with anyone else, you know?"

Harry laughed. "Oh, I've known how to defeat Voldemort for more than two years now. Figured it out while I was still at the Norton Academy." Everyone looked at him as if he had suddenly turned purple and grown a hand out of the middle of his forehead. "What? It's so simple that a seventh year could do it, with some training, at least. I figured it out while I was working on something." He reached out with his wand and said, "*Accio bag!*"

His small bag came floating down the stairs, and flew into his hands. Setting it down, he opened the top and pulled out several of his wizarding PDAs, passing them around. "This will likely prove useful as well," he said. "The record function especially."

"So how will you defeat him?" Moody asked.

“Not saying. It’s so dangerous that I’m taking the secret to my grave.”

“All well and good,” Kingsley Shacklebolt said, “but how does this prove that Dumbledore is the traitor?”

“This prophecy came right on the tail of my discovery that nothing was ever done to the Dursleys – a very unusual thing in itself. I mean, it *literally* was within a minute of learning that. Strikes me that the two are sort of connected, wouldn’t you say?”

The table was silent once again while the assembled people mulled over the evidence that Harry had brought before them. Even though those who had been in America had heard it before, this was the first time they had heard it delivered as a presentation, rather than Harry offering it up to be punctured.

Finally, Fred and George looked up. As they did, Moody stood and grumbled. “Damn you, Potter. I used to trust that man, but I can’t logically poke holes in your evidence. I could probably find someone else that fit, but I’d have to stretch it too far.”

“Occam’s Razor,” Hermione said. “‘Plurality should not be posited without necessity.’ Most people think of it as something like ‘The simplest explanation is usually the right one.’ The shortest version I’ve heard though, is KISS – Keep It Simple, Stupid.”

“A lesson that neither Dumbly or Tommy have learned yet, thank Merlin,” Fred said with a grin. “So, Commander Potter, what is our next move?”

“Get me a meeting with Dumbledore. I’ll get him to make the next move.”

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Harry Potter and the Paradigm Shift

Chapter 13

“Are you sure about this?” Hermione asked with some worry in her voice. “You know what he’s become. Are you sure you’ll be safe with him in there?”

“Well, I’m a pretty good Occlumens now, so I think I can keep him out. Plus, by meeting him in his office in the Ministry, it’s harder for him to get away with some of what he’d be likely to try. This way, I’ve got people like Amelia Bones and Kingsley Shacklebolt to step in and at least make a note of what’s happened to me. Additionally, since I’ll be walking in there with no appointment in the middle of the business day, I’ll be catching him by surprise. He doesn’t like doing things on the fly. If I give him an excuse to wait until a later time at a more secluded location, he’ll take it.”

“Why did you choose that particular location for the supposed Order meeting?” Tonks asked.

“I chose there because of a few things. First off, it’s not someplace we’ve ever really gone before. Second, it’s secluded, and innocents are much less likely to be hurt, as opposed to if we chose Hogsmeade or the like. Third, well, consider it a sense of rightness, or closure or the like. If I kill Voldemort in the place where he tried to kill me nineteen years ago, then it’s come full circle.”

“Forgive us if we’re worried,” Ginny said. “We love you.”

“And I love you. I have something in mind to surprise Albus with if he tries anything in the Ministry. They won’t be able to hold me for long.”

“Harry, be careful,” Tonks said with intensity. “Be serious about this!”

He looked at the three ladies before him and lost all sense of playfulness. “Despite how I’m acting, I am serious about this. I love you all, and I want to spend the next few years fathering as many children as you want to bear. I want to be there hiding my sniffles as we watch our kids head off to school for the very first time, and doing it for every child. I want to hold my grandchildren, and my great-grandchildren. And I want them to be from you ladies. There is not a word in the English language to describe how I feel about you. All I can fall back on is the pale thing called love.”

He sighed. “I do this for you, and for our children. I want them to be in a Dark Lord free Europe.”

The only sound was sniffing for a moment, and then a deep voice said, “What do you think, Remus? Run him for Minister for Magic when Dumbledore’s out? He certainly knows how to talk, and he has ideas on the right things to do to improve wizarding life in Britain.”

“Sounds like an idea,” said the other surviving Marauder. “Should we tell him about it before or after we put his name on the ballot?”

“After,” Hermione said. “Harder to pull out from it then, especially if we all do the puppy dog eyes thing at him to get him to run.” She laughed at the look on Harry’s face as he imagined them doing that.

He shook his head. “You have to admit that Remus and Sirius have the puppy dog look down to a science, though,” he finally said, chuckling. His watch beeped. “Ah, it’s time. Be back in no more than three hours, people. That’s a guarantee.”

He headed for the Underground, and took it to the necessary stop. As he walked to the eternally broken telephone box, he found himself thinking absently, *Is that the same refuse in that skip as five years ago, or new?*

After dialling six-two-four-four-two and informing the voice “Harry Potter to see the Minister for Magic,” he dropped down into the Ministry building, and was quickly ushered into Dumbledore’s office. It was a far cry from either time he’d been here before.

“Harry,” Albus Dumbledore said with a large smile, rising from behind the desk. The smile disappeared quickly. “Actually, given the mistake I made four years ago, I think you would perhaps prefer I not be quite so familiar. My apologies, Mister Potter.”

Harry smiled back at him. “Honestly, sir, go ahead and call me Harry. I’m just glad I didn’t make that statement of mine an oath, or else I’d have some serious problems right now.”

The smile returned to Dumbledore’s face. “Yes, I imagine you would. I suppose we should get right to business, however. As much as I would like to spend a large amount of time chatting with you and finding out how you are doing and how you spent these past four years, I now have even greater constraints on my time than I did as headmaster of Hogwarts.”

“I’d imagine you hated giving up that job,” Harry commiserated with him.

“Yes, I have always enjoyed teaching the next generation of students, in whatever small way I can, but when it became evident that someone that at least we knew to be a Death Eater was likely to become the new Minister for Magic, I had no choice but to accept the nomination.”

“I can understand that,” Harry said. “Either put Voldemort in office, or take the office yourself.”

“Exactly. So, what is the nature of your request to speak with me?” Albus asked, his face showing sorrow that he had to drag this back to business.

“Well, I was wondering about certain groups out there, and wondering if they’re still in business?” Harry gave the man a knowing look.

“The Order? While not an arm of the Ministry, they have at least been recognized for their efforts. Yes, they are still working for the downfall of Voldemort.”

“Good. I need to meet with them. I came across some disturbing information while I was overseas, and I think the Order needs to be made aware of it.”

“By all means, Harry. What is it?”

Harry grimaced apologetically. “For multiple reasons, sir, I’d rather not say here. I’ve already got a site in mind that isn’t likely to have a lot of traffic, and is not likely to have been previously charmed and trapped.”

“All right. What are your reasons for not telling me here?”

“Well, we don’t know who all the Death Eaters are, and you may even have a secret one or two on your staff, who could have bugged the office.” At Dumbledore’s puzzled look, he explained. “Sorry, a Mundane – Muggle term meaning that someone has put a listening device, or in this case spell somewhere in the room. This is sensitive enough that I feel I need to take a page from Moody’s book.”

He shrugged. “That’s the first reason. The second one is related – quite similar, in fact. Basically, it’s not something I want overheard, even by someone reading lips, which is a possibility. Third – well, I’m sorry to say it sir, but you’re going to have to earn my trust again. I think the entire Order needs to know this, not just the ones you deem necessary.”

“I understand, Harry, and while I am not happy with it, I do in fact understand and even support your reasoning. I was foolish four years ago, and allowed myself to do something that hurt you greatly. I wish to make up for that, and I know that the road to a renewed bond between us is a long one.”

“Thank you for understanding, sir,” Harry replied. “As for where to meet?” He borrowed a parchment and quill and simply scrawled, ‘Where lightning struck’ and sketched a decent copy of the scar on his forehead. Dumbledore’s eyebrows rose, and he cocked his head questioningly and pointed at the scar. Harry nodded.

“Understood. It will take a short amount of time to gather all the members. Shall we set the meeting for the eleventh?”

“Will noon work for your schedule, sir?”

“I think my noon schedule has just miraculously become clear, Mr. Potter. I look forward to the eleventh.”

Harry stood and held out his hand. “Then I’ll let you back to your work, sir. I will admit that I hope that this is the beginnings of healing our rift.”

“A hope I fervently share as well, Harry. To a new beginning.” He escorted Harry back to the lobby before unwillingly turning back around and returning to his paperwork.

#####

Back at Grimmauld, Harry immediately headed for the shower. “Gah, I feel so dirty,” he grumbled. “Having to play friendly to that old bastard was disgusting.” Soon clouds of steam

were filling the bathroom.

The door opened, admitting a burst of cooler air, and then he heard someone enter the shower behind him. He got a grin on his face as he felt himself already beginning to react, and said, “Here to scrub my back, and anything else you can reach?”

“Actually, yes,” came Moira Cybelle’s voice. “I’m here with the blessing of Sirius and the girls.”

Harry looked over his shoulder at her and then let out a noise that was embarrassingly like a squeak. “But you’re ...”

“Naked? Yes, glad you noticed. So are you, and I plan on taking full advantage of that.” She reached around him and took the soaped-up flannel from his suddenly boneless hand. “Oh, thank you for the compliment,” she said, caressing him gently with it.

Harry panicked. With a sharp CRACK! he vanished from the shower stall. He reappeared in his bedroom, grabbed a robe, and stumbled out into the hall and then downstairs. He nearly fell into a chair, with soapsuds trailing down his legs at the table, and several pairs of eyes looked up in amusement. “Damn, Harry,” Sirius said with a laugh, “I’ve heard of a quickie, but that’s ridiculous!”

Harry looked at him with shock in his eyes. “Sirius! Did you know she ...” Sirius nodded, grinning. “She wanted to ... and I ... no!”

“Didn’t she tell you why she was there?”

“She made it bloody obvious!”

“No, about her vision!”

“I don’t care about any vision! I am not cheating on my three ladies for some damned vision. I am not going to disrespect the relationship you two have spent four years building. Destiny can just quit fucking over my private life!” He put his head in his hands. “Damn,” he whispered. “Even thinking some of what I’m thinking feels like I’m cheating on the girls.”

That brought conversation to a halt. “Do you mean to tell me that you won’t even allow yourself to *think* about another woman that way?” Ron asked. “What do you have to do now that you’ve contemplated shagging another woman – iron your ears or something?”

“She’s my godfather’s fiancée, for God’s sake!” he said, looking up at them. “I’m sitting here with images running through my head of what I would have liked to have done to her. He’s my godfather! He’s the closest thing I have to a father now, ever since Voldemort killed my parents. So here I am contemplating screwing his intended.”

“So you’re not even allowed to think about that sort of thing – fantasize about it?” Tonks asked quietly.

“Not when it involves hurting people who mean more to me than my own life – no!” he yelled, and rose from the table. As he left the room, he almost collided with Moira, who was wearing a towel around her torso, exposing the entirety of her rather impressive legs. He stared at her for a long second before he ran off again.

#####

The silence was palpable in the dining area as they let him escape for the moment. After several heavy moments, Remus murmured, “I think I need to make a trip to Surrey for the next full moon.”

“No, Remus,” Moira said. “You’d hate yourself in the morning. Not to mention having an upset stomach.” She spun a chair around and straddled it, giving those near her quite the view. “I take it the reason I was abandoned in the shower is something we can lay solidly at the feet of those monsters that Dumbledore forced him to live with?”

Hermione scowled. “Well, let’s see – even *thinking* about doing what could have happened up there in the shower is cheating on the three of us, and disrespecting the relationship between you and Sirius. In his own way, he’s as bad as some of those religious fanatics we came across in the United States, and it’s all because of the Dursleys.”

“We tell Petunia about this, I think,” Ginny growled. “Make her prove that she’s serious about being the mother to Harry that she should have been. Help him work *this* thing through.”

“What do we do in the meantime?” Moira said. “I didn’t get a chance to tell him about my vision and that we need to ... well, this leads to problems.”

Remus looked thoughtful for a moment. “I think I know why it needs to happen, Moira. We need to talk him into it, but all you saw in your vision was the shower and you two in the throes of passion – and the knowledge that it was important that this happen, but not why. I don’t think it’s adding a fourth person to the mix, or even turning this into a massively confusing love nest that’s the desired outcome.” He turned to Sirius. “What would be your reaction if Moira’s first child was fathered by Harry?”

Sirius’s eyes widened. “Of course! Knowing there’s a new generation – he talks about having children, but he’ll fight all that much harder if he knows that one is already coming!” Sirius looked up at her. “I know he referred to you as my fiancée, which tells me that his ears are better than I thought, but I’d like to make it official, honey. Knowing what this crowd is trying for, and knowing that you aren’t exactly against the idea of being pressed up against a shower stall with my rather sexy godson, I am asking you in front of witnesses if you will marry me. Will you marry me after this Voldemort debacle is through?”

“Yes,” she said simply, her face glowing.

Tonks snapped her fingers, a grin on her face. “Damn, he beat us to it!” she laughed.

Moira looked to Sirius, who nodded with a grin. Turning to Tonks, she said, “Well, if you can get Harry to agree to it, and the three of you are agreeable to it, then I see no reason why I can’t be part of your family as well. In fact, it might be an idea to set up our relationship along the lines of Robert Heinlein’s Long Family. We marry officially for the support of the children, but if love happens to exist between us, that’s wonderful. The family is for the children, though.”

Everyone looked at each other for a long time as if asking each other wordlessly what they thought of the idea before Ron spoke up. “Well, I for one would be proud to be a member of the Potter family. I’m in.”

Grins erupted around the table, and it was soon decided that the only person left was the one the family was to be named for. “That’s the difficult part,” Tonks said. “You know how deep into himself he can get when he thinks he’s hurting the ones he loves.”

Moira shrugged and flipped the towel off as she stood. “Well, it’s time to go talk to him. If he’s going to head a family, he really ought to be apprised of the situation.”

She walked up the stairs to an appreciative audience – even Ron had to admit that she was pleasant to look at – and looked down at them from the top of the stairs. “Stop watching my ass and get up here,” she laughed.

“But it’s worth watching,” Ginny mock-whinged before bouncing up the stairs behind her.

“We’ll need to present a united front on this,” Moira said. “He’s going to be resistant to it, you know that.”

Tonks came to the fore. “Moira, let me talk to him first. I think he’ll take it better from me.”

“All of us,” Hermione said. “If we talk to him as a group, then he should accept it far better.” She pulled out her wand and cast the Four Points Spell, which pointed them toward the master bedroom.

Tonks gently opened the door and walked inside. Moira stayed by the door, seeing a profoundly unhappy man. *How is someone who looks that pained over this scenario going to save the world because of it? I may have the visions, but I certainly do not understand them.*

“Beloved?” Tonks said quietly.

He looked up, and Moira was surprised to see that he had been crying. “What’s wrong with me, Tonks?” he asked. “A woman who is as beautiful and sexy as you walks into my shower, and all I can do is think about what kind of vile and disgusting beast I must be for wanting to break the sacred bond between us, and the one between them.”

“Harry, we’re not married,” Tonks said quietly, but with a smile.

“In here we are,” he said, tapping his own chest. “I swore to myself that I’d never cheat on you. Since you three made it rather obvious that it was a package deal, I wasn’t exactly complaining,

since I love all of you anyway.” He sighed. “Did Ginny tell you about the proposal in the shower the other day? I intend to propose to all three of you, and use the notoriety from killing Voldemort to get special dispensation to marry you three – legally.”

Hermione came up beside him. “I accept, Harry,” she said and kissed him on the cheek.

Ginny spoke up next. “We were talking downstairs after you came up here. This is going to sound a little odd, but have you ever read anything by Robert Heinlein? Especially something called *Time Enough For Love*?”

He looked up and nodded. “I always have tears in my eyes at the end of the story about Dora.”

“Remember the family set-up they had at the end of that book, what they called the Long Family?” He nodded, and Ginny continued. “We were thinking of starting that, with the Patriarch of the Family being you. You are the glue that keeps us all together, Harry. For you, we moved three thousand miles. For you, we gave up the lives we might have had if we’d stayed at Hogwarts, and don’t you dare apologize,” she interrupted as she saw his mouth open, “because life wouldn’t have meant anything knowing you were elsewhere. It was hard enough as it was, being elsewhere from you for your protection, but we always had in mind to find you again. To all of us, the idea of staying in England would have been the same as saying ‘Well, it was nice while it lasted, but goodbye.’ We were damned if we were going to say goodbye to the man we love.” She knelt and kissed his other cheek. “For you, Harry, we saved our virginity until we could find you again. We love you, Harry James Potter, and I for one look forward to being Ginevra Molly Weasley Potter right alongside Hermione Jane Granger Potter.”

“Let’s not forget Nymphadora Marie Tonks Potter,” Tonks said with a smile, motioning the others inside the room.

Remus spoke first. “Harry, if you’ll have me, I’ll join this Family they speak of. I can’t think of anything that would make me prouder than to be able to call myself a Potter.”

“Your dad’s family took me in when I ran away from that bitch whose painting we destroyed. In all but name, I already was a Potter, so why not make it official?”

Harry was stunned, to say the least. He found his eyes sliding to Moira again, and cursing his reaction to her nudity. It showed on his face, and Sirius said, “Harry, we all love you. Moira was the one who suggested the Potter Family solution.” He walked over to his godson and said, “If you happen to find my future wife sexy and want to pin her to that shower wall, I’m not going to complain.” He snorted. “May conjure a chair and some popcorn and see if an old dog like me can learn a few new tricks, though.”

Harry was looking bewildered, and it was obvious. “Why? What reason ... how ... what is leading to this decision? Is this vision so important that ...” He stopped, unable to find the words.

Moira spoke up. “Harry, I had a vision showing the two of us making the Beast with Two Backs

in that shower. That's all. I don't know why it's important, but it is." Harry's eyes widened. "And no, before you start beating yourself up over it, it's not too late yet. But it should be sometime today, if it's going to happen at all. But before you start wondering if I'm nobly sacrificing myself to the vision and expecting you to do the same, I'll tell you I'm not. I've been thinking about this for weeks. Months, even. In general, I mean, not this specific thing. Just because I was your teacher at one time doesn't mean that I can't have been waiting for you to turn eighteen, sexy," she said with a laugh.

She knelt in front of him after the other girls parted to allow her space. "I've known about Remus for a long time – Sirius told me about him before we ever got intimate for the first time." She grinned suddenly. "Doggie style, in case you're curious." Harry snorted his laughter at her sudden impudent tone. "Be that as it may, when we were having those long talks about our histories, and the fact that Sirius loves Remus so much he'd have actually given me up came to light, I told him that I was harbouring more than a little feeling for a certain student of mine who had the sexiest Animagus godfather. I understand how Tonks fell for you, and how Ginny and Hermione did as well, because I did as well. It was obvious, though, that these three had your heart, and until you were reunited with them, there'd never be room for anyone else in there."

"Harry, I can understand if you don't want to do it because of the vision or destiny or whatever. Especially when it's so nebulous. But I just want you to know that I'm not in it just for a one-night stand. This is just a window of opportunity for something, I don't know what. But if we do start this, I'm in it for the long haul. Because I love you as much as everyone else in this room, even if I haven't known you as long."

Harry still looked troubled. "I still won't cheat on-

"It's not cheating if we approve," said Tonks. "If you want, we can sit in the hot tub with Sirius and wait for you two to finish, then make it a mad party to celebrate the beginning of the Potter Family," Tonks said with a smile. "Hell, I think we ought to do that anyway."

"Um, this place doesn't have a hot tub," Harry said quietly.

"It will when we're done," Ron said with a chuckle. "What do you say to Tonks and the girls enlarging the bathroom, Remus and I making the popcorn, and Sirius making sure we have enough towels? While we're all doing those tasks, you two can get to nuzzling each other, and maybe take another shower."

"Aren't normal people supposed to be bothered by what we're talking about here?" Harry asked, obviously feeling out of his element.

"Normal people aren't geniuses charged with saving the world," Hermione said simply. "Geniuses make their own rules about everything, including sex. And I remember you saying that one of the things you found sexy about each of us is our intelligence. We're all well above average intelligence, so we decided to do what works for us." She shrugged, and Harry was back to himself enough to enjoy the sight this time.

“So the general consensus here is that I should listen to my hormones and enjoy what Moira was offering?” Harry asked quietly.

“Only if you want to,” Tonks replied as quietly. “Don’t go in there and fuck her because you think we want you to. Go in there and make love to her.”

He nodded at the distinction, and Moira could tell that he understood it. He closed his eyes for a long moment, and when he opened them again, Moira chuckled to herself. His eyes held a fire she’d gotten used to seeing since these people had arrived in his life again, and for once it seemed to be aimed at her. She was surprised to feel her pulse pick up as he stood and took her hands, helping her to her feet. “We had a conversation rudely interrupted by me,” he said, motioning her toward the bathroom. “Can you forgive me, and perhaps permit me to pick up the conversation where we left off?”

“A gentleman,” she said, surprised that her voice was quavering slightly. “Of course we can pick the conversation up where we left it, if you’re up to it,” she finished, smirking at the double entendre.

“Around you ladies, being ‘up to it’ is the least worry any of you will ever have,” he replied as they entered the bath.

#####

An hour later, Harry carried Moira out of the bath and set her on the big bed. She was grinning widely. “She was having a little trouble walking afterwards,” Harry said a little bashfully.

“I’m not surprised,” Hermione said. “I think we heard at least five separate orgasms from her. How many for you?”

“Only one,” Moira said, “but that was enough.” She pulled Harry down to her and kissed him rather thoroughly. “I’m marrying your godfather, but if you’ll have me, I’ll join the Potter family.”

Everyone in the room could see the comment arriving, if only in the grin that crossed Harry face. “I’d say that I already had you, Moira. It certainly sounded like it in there.”

“If I had the strength to sit up ...” she said. In answer, he leaned down to her. She threw her arms around him and kissed him rather thoroughly. “Thank you,” she whispered after releasing him. “I look forward to further conversations like that.”

“I shall endeavour to be as engaging a conversationalist as I was,” he grinned back. “Think we’ll ever know why that enjoyable interlude that I fought so hard against was necessary to save the world?”

Remus winced. “My suggestion was that ... well, you may have just fathered the first Potter heir.”

Harry blinked and stood up. “You all knew this before walking into this situation, right?” he asked, worried.

Tonks kissed him. “Yep. It’s part of what drove us to make sure you knew we were okay with it.”

Sirius walked over. “Harry, as far as the world will be concerned, if you’re worried about this, the baby will be mine. But I have no problem with my future wife carrying your child.”

“How long before we’ll know?” Harry asked.

“A few hours,” Hermione answered.

“Yeah, need to give the little wigglers a chance to find their target,” Sirius chuckled.

“Can I assume that someone here knows the charm to find out, or do we need to go to St. Mungo’s?”

Hermione laughed. “It’s really a simple charm,” she said, and pulled her wand. After a simple pass or two, she held it in front of her own stomach. “See the pale white glow? It means that the person isn’t pregnant. If the glow changes to a bright gold, then we have a pregnant woman.”

“Is it a single person spell, or ...” Harry started to ask.

“No, it stays up as long as I concentrate even a little. See?” she asked, waving it in front of Tonks. It stayed a pale white glow. As her hand came back toward the bed, Ginny came closer to her, and the glow flared gold for a second. Everyone’s eyebrows rose for a moment, and Hermione brought the wand back before Ginny’s abdomen. The wand glowed a brilliant gold.

Ginny’s eyes went wide, and she looked at Harry, some fear evident in her eyes. His response was, “Ginny? Do you want this child?”

“Do you?” she asked in a very small voice.

“Right now, Ginny, I want to talk you in my arms, spin you around, and scream to the world that I’m going to be a father. But you have to ...” He stopped speaking as he saw her relax. “You were worried that I didn’t want the baby, weren’t you?” She nodded a small nod, which he responded to by putting his arms around her waist, picking her up and spinning her around as he said he wanted to, and shouting into the room, “I’m gonna be a daddy!”

“That sounds awfully familiar, doesn’t it?” sniffed Sirius.

“That it does, Padfoot. That it does,” Remus replied.

Ron walked over to Harry. “Potter, that’s my sister you just got pregnant,” he said in a stern voice.

Harry gulped. “Ron, I love your sister very much, and ...”

“Shut up,” Ron said. He jabbed his finger into Harry chest before saying, “Thanks for making me an uncle.” He threw his arms around Harry, who stood there stunned for a moment before realizing that he’d been ‘gotten’ and returning the back-slapping hug.

Sirius walked over to Moira and sat down next to her. “I’m glad of this. Whether or not he managed to get you pregnant, he’ll fight better now. He knows he’s got future generations ahead of him that need to know their daddy.”

“I’m pretty sure that I’m pregnant too, or will be, but this was what he needed. How likely would it have been for anyone to check without this ... well, explosion is a good word, I guess?”

“Probably not until Ginny missed her next couple cycles,” Remus said, joining them. “Stress does things to the cycle, I understand.” He received an understanding nod from Moira.

“So where do we go from here?” Ginny said. “You have to meet Dumbledore on my birthday, in Godric’s Hollow. I’m worried for you.”

“I’m a little worried too, but that’s why I’m hiding you guys around the place that day. My own personal Order of the Phoenix will be sitting around with members of Dumbledore’s Order, and you guys will all have those wizarding PDAs I built. I’ll be broadcasting the conversations, including the one I expect to have with Dumbledore.”

He sighed. “Maybe I’m a seer myself or something, but this is going to get ugly on the eleventh. I chose that place because I’m positive that Dumbledore is going to go to Voldemort and tell him, which means that I’m likely to see Voldie on that day. I’m going to kill him, pure and simple, and then do what needs to be done with Dumbledore.”

“Will you kill him?” Hermione asked, worried.

“Possibly. I won’t have the little ‘in’ that I’ll have with Tom. That blood connection we have has been good for him, but it’s going to kill him on the eleventh.” At the look of horror on everyone’s faces, he added, “I have no idea what you all are thinking, but I have every intention of raising this child.” He placed his hand on Ginny’s stomach. “I’m not abandoning this child. I *will* survive to be a father to this baby.” A slight flare of magic shot from his hand into Ginny’s stomach. “Damn. We’ve had oaths flying left and right around here recently,” he said with a shaky laugh.

He shook his head. “Well, Remus, I think that I need to ask you to find the others, like Molly and Arthur, and get them ready for this. I’m predicting Dumbledore won’t actually be contacting anybody – he doesn’t even know I’ve been in contact with you, so if you don’t hear from him telling you I’m back, then that’s the final confirmation of everything we’ve guessed. But I want all the other Order members there on the eleventh.” Remus nodded and left. Harry walked over to Moira and leaned down and kissed her again. “If I were crass enough to say anything, my fellow students would be damned jealous.”

“As well, they should be,” Sirius laughed. “Now go – you’ve got to make sure you’ve got everything ready for four days from now.” Harry nodded and headed downstairs to the room he’d

set up in the basement as his armoury.

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Harry Potter and the Paradigm Shift

Chapter 14

Harry woke early on the morning of the eleventh and headed downstairs. He felt the same way he did on the mornings he'd had a big Quidditch game – fairly nervous and not sure if he was ready for what was coming. He began to cook a small breakfast, since he wasn't sure how much anyone was willing to eat on a morning like this. *If I judged Dumbledore right, this all ends today, one way or another. I'm walking out of this alive, though. I swore that to Ginny's baby, and if I heard the comments correctly, I may have gotten Moira pregnant, too.*

The group came down as well, and settled quietly around the table. They had already dressed, and it was quite obvious that they were ready for battle, since they were in form fitting clothing that was far less likely to catch on stray branches and the like – the women in armoured leather catsuits. They ate quickly and with little extraneous conversation, and headed downstairs as a group to prepare for the upcoming confrontation.

“Are you sure that Voldemort will arrive today?” Hermione asked. “What if Voldemort doesn't show up? What do you tell the Order then?”

Harry snorted. “I make Dumbledore unhappy by putting forth the same evidence that I gave to the others about a week ago. See who it sways. But Remus was never contacted about the meeting, which confirms Dumbledore is dirty, and means Voldemort is going to be there. I've felt him probe a few times since the seventh, which he hadn't been doing earlier. Amazingly, it was only *after* the meeting with Dumbledore that the probes started.” Harry grinned wolfishly. “He knows I can see through his eyes sometimes. Sometimes he could actually force me to. He's done it off and on over the last four years just to let me know he's still out there. But he doesn't know I can do it at will now. Or that I'm a good enough Occlumens now that he can't sense it if I am there. I saw him last night, giving his instructions to the Death Eaters. They'll be there.” He shook his head. “Now, if I'm reading Dumbledore right, he's hoping to see me kill Voldemort, but I think he's also decided that he's not going to be unhappy if I die instead. He and Voldemort have shared power for a while, so they may have come to an agreement.” He paused. “Hmm, wonder if either of them have read the Evil Overlord list? Nah, can't have – too many things they do are straight off the list of things *not* to do.”

Each of them prepared in what small way that they could – practice with some small hexes and shields, some minor target practice and the like. Meanwhile, Harry was finishing his preparations. He clipped a holster onto his belt on his right side and pulled the weapon currently housed from within it. He quickly stripped and oiled the Browning 9mm pistol before reassembling it. He made sure the safety was on before putting the magazine into the weapon, and then chambering a round. Dropping the magazine, he put one more bullet into it and reinserted the magazine into the weapon. Ensuring the safety was on, he reholstered it and began taking filled magazines and loading them into a separate holster he'd prepared, so that if he needed to reload, he always had one available. He clipped this holster onto his left side.

He looked up to see the others looking at him. “Hollow point bullets. I intend to discommode as

many of the Death Munchers as I can. They'll be prepared for curses and such that they can block, but how many of them can get a shield in the way in time to stop something moving at the speed of sound?"

Hermione walked over to him. "To quote a friend of ours: 'You're scary. Brilliant, but scary.'"

His face became deadly serious. "You know that I do this for you, don't you? For all of you and your families? That I don't want to become a monster, but I think I'm being forced into it?"

She kissed him thoroughly – a kiss that promised far more after this day was over. "Do you think I'd kiss someone I thought was *ever* going to be a monster like that?"

"I just ..."

Tonks walked over and pulled them into a hug. "It's your fear that you could become a monster that ensures that you won't become one, Harry." She also kissed him deeply.

"Jesus, girls, I need some blood making it above my waist for this fight," he laughed weakly, and then groaned as Ginny flowed into his arms. "Hello, mother of my child," he breathed unbelievably, a wide grin on his face.

She kissed him as well and rested her head on his chest. "It makes me feel so good to know that you want this child, Harry."

"How could I not? It's going to have a beautiful mother, so with luck it will be as beautiful. Even if it's unlucky enough to look like me, it'll still have you as its mother, so it's blessed no matter what."

"And even more blessed to have a handsome man as its father," Sirius said.

"Hey, I thought *I* was the father, not you!" Harry laughed.

"Git," Sirius laughed for a moment. "So what's our plan, commander?"

"Well, my thought was to get there early and set ourselves up around the perimeter as best we can. I haven't seen the place since I was this high, remember," he said, holding his hand at knee-level. "I need to take a look at it and find the right place for the showdown. My hope is that some of the other members of the Order can be there as well to listen in when I talk to Voldemort. That's the reason we're walking in with the PDAs. I want them on and recording the second we show up, no matter what the conversation happening. Since I'm using a rather bizarre version of wizard space as my storage medium for the sound, we don't have a time limit the way Muggle recorders do." He looked at Tonks. "An amusing aside that I never showed you about these is that it writes out dialogue in the handwriting of the speaker. My voice has my handwriting, Tom's voice will produce Tom's, and Dumbledore will write out in his hand." He snapped his fingers and ran to a cabinet and pulled out a small box. "I didn't need mine on the seventh. I want you all to wear these." He pulled out several small, thin, flat disks about the size of a Sickle. Once you put

this somewhere on your body, I'm going to activate them. There will be three settings on them."

"What are they for?" Moira asked.

"I call them jump discs. They use Apparation coordinates, but use quantum tunnelling to travel. Yes, they've been tested on living things, and yes, they work. Right now, I have them set for three points. They'll take a reading of how you are right now and treat it as a baseline. If your condition changes radically, you will be immediately sent to St. Mungo's."

"How do you mean radically?" Hermione asked, narrowing her eyes.

"Major medical condition. A slice on the arm won't set it off, but losing the arm altogether might. Going into shock. Going unconscious. Like that. In answer to your unasked question, I am not trying to keep you out of the fight, since I would hear no end of it later, and far worse, possibly lose one or more of you from my life for doing your thinking for you. I will, however, do what I can to keep you alive."

"The second setting that I have in there is to come back here at six p.m., no matter what. That one can be shut off by any one of us, or I can shut it off for all of us."

He smiled wryly. "The third setting is more of a 'Scram!' setting. If necessity kicks in, any one of us can set off a signal that will grab *all* of us and throw us to San Francisco. This one can not be shut off, and is guarded against accidental set-off. If one of us decides that we *have* to be out of the area *yesterday*, get as many people as you can to grab you and set off that setting. That one is honestly the least likely one to be used, but it's there as a just in case. Two other settings are possible if you have an idea, but we'll need to know before we leave." He gave them a quick tutorial on how to activate the scram.

"If I were going on my own, I'd set land mines around the place to surprise the Munchers, but since I'm hoping the Order will be there as well, that would be a very *bad* idea. Blowing up your friends is usually contraindicated."

"Usually'?" he heard Sirius ask Remus quietly. "There's a *good* time to blow up your friends?" Remus only chuckled in response. The girls took the time to strip down somewhat and slapped the small discs onto their buttocks. "Makes sense," Remus said. "Not often someone gets shot there." He slipped down his own trousers to wolf whistles and placed the disc in the same area.

Harry chuckled as he watched everyone finish attaching the discs. "Okay, I've got my wand and my quarterstaff, and I'm also carrying my PDA and my pistol. Is everyone else as loaded as they're going to get?" He watched as everyone verified that they had their wands in easy reach, and only Moira grabbed a handgun as well, doing the same things he had – stripping, oiling, reassembling, and arming. She clipped her own holster and magazine onto her hips, and Harry found himself thinking of a much more intelligently dressed Lara Croft. He shook his head at the image that presented. *I can think thoughts like that about her after I win.*

"We've got our PDA's and the charms prepared for preventing Apparation and Portkey travel?" he

asked. “That last should serious annoy the Tossler and his minions. Preventing Portkey travel is not a common thing.” He looked to Remus. “Do the others know to show at Godric’s Hollow by ten o’clock at the latest?”

He nodded. “If I know Amelia, she’s also going to have a team of trustworthy Aurors nearby.”

Sirius snorted. “Yeah – Kingsley and Moody.”

“We’ll find out when we get there. Let’s go.”

#####

They Apparated into the spacious back garden of the Potter home in Godric’s Hollow, using the coordinates that Remus and Sirius still remembered after all the years. Surprisingly, the garden was fairly well-kept; Harry had expected to be in knee-high grass or the beginnings of a small forest after almost twenty years of abandonment. Instead, it looked like a garden that had been let go for a couple of weeks and needed a bit of a cleanup. The house itself was brick, fairly large, and in good shape. He turned to Sirius, quizzically. “You sure we’re at the right place? I thought the place got blown up or something.”

Sirius seemed to be stunned. “It was, it was! The top story was blown up, that’s where your nursery was. The roof was pretty thoroughly burnt up. And that whole chimney over there came down and was all over the side garden. Somebody’s fixed it up, but who?”

“Whoever it is, we’d better get them out of the house now, or they’re going to be up to their ears in Death Eaters.” Remus strode to the back door and reached for the doorknob, but drew back his fingers abruptly as magical energy flared. “Whoa! That’s one of the tightest wards I’ve ever seen!”

“That’s James’ work, I’d recognize that signature anywhere. So the family wards are still up!” Sirius whistled in astonishment. “That still begs the question of who did the rebuilding, since no one can get in but a member of the family. And that’s you, Harry.”

Gingerly, Harry reached for the doorknob, but there was no flash, just cool metal in his palm. He did feel a shiver of magic as the wards recognized him and reset themselves to allow normal entry and exit. The door didn’t even seem to be locked, and he opened it and walked into the spacious Muggle-style kitchen. The rest of the group followed, looking around curiously. Harry had no memories going back to when he had lived here, so it was essentially the first time he ever saw it in his life. Sirius had tears in his eyes as he looked around. “Merlin! It’s just like it was then. Look, that was Lily’s favourite blue teakettle. But how-” How was answered abruptly when the crowd in the kitchen was suddenly augmented by six house-elves, an older male and female and four younger ones of indeterminate gender.

“Master Harry!” squeaked the oldest female, who was clad in a sarong made of an old set of curtains. “You is back! You is a naughty boy, surprising your Tweeny and Woolly like this!” Then suddenly the two eldest house-elves were clinging to Harry’s pants legs sobbing tears of joy

while three of the younger ones jumped up and down singing, “Master Harry’s here! Master Harry’s here!” and the fourth examined him solemnly as if he had had no idea what a ‘Master Harry’ would actually look like.

“You have house elves?” asked Hermione.

“Apparently.”

“You have *house elves?!?* ”

“Well of course they did, Lily needed help with the baby and all,” said Sirius. “Looks like they stayed here all this time and took care of the place. And had a family of their own while they were at it.”

“YOU HAVE *HOUSE ELVES?!?* ” Hermione was getting dangerously wound up, until Ron dragged her into a corner to have a few words with her. Whatever he said cooled her down, but she was still fuming by the time Harry got the elves to let go of his legs and stop crying.

“Look, er, Tweeny, is it? And Woolly? You’ve been here all this time and took care of the place?”

“Oh yes, Master Harry, Tweeny and Woolly is kept it just the way Mistress did. Poor Mistress, she was so kind to Tweeny and Woolly, yes she was. So the house is kept just the way she liked it until Master Harry comes back. Tweeny and Woolly is even putting back the chimney! And now Master Harry is back and he is brought his friends with him and it will all be happy again!” Tweeny blew her nose on the corner of her sarong.

Remus touched Harry on the shoulder to get his attention and mouthed, “We have to get them out of here.” Harry nodded.

“Look, Tweeny, you’re not bound to this house or anything, are you?”

“No, Tweeny and Woolly and Bili and Fili and Kili and Mili can go anywhere Master Harry wants them to go.”

“Good, because I have another house that needs a bit of ... a special touch, you might say. The house elf that was there before was a bad house elf and didn’t take care of the place right.” Tweeny looked very sorrowful at this. “I’ve been cleaning it up myself.” She was horror-stricken at the very notion. “So I really would be very grateful if ...”

“Oh, if Master Harry is telling Tweeny where this other house is, we is going there immediately!”

“It’s in London, at Number 12, Grimmauld Place. I can give you a port-”

“Is not needing a portkey. We is going immediately!” Grinning and nodding madly, the six elves vanished as suddenly as they had appeared.

“Well. That was – strange. Now then, I’m going to have a bit of a look around the house, and the rest of you can join me or wait out in the garden.”

Most of the group went out to the garden to set up the trap wards, but Remus and Sirius accompanied Harry on his trip through the house, pointing out knick-knacks and things that had been personal treasures of the Potters. Much of the house was non-magical, since James and Lily had been trying to hide and pass as Muggles, but there was the occasional magical personal item that caught his attention, including a book that seemed to be locked stronger than any of the unlocking spells he knew. He stuffed those items into an old string shopping bag he found in the kitchen and used a spare jump disc to send them to Grimmauld Place for later investigation.

Finally, he found himself in a room that had once been his nursery. The elves had even repaired or replaced his crib and kept it with fresh linens. *Mum died for me right about there*, he thought to himself. *Mum, Dad – today I clear the slate and avenge your murders. I may be saving the world, but this is for you, and for those seven out there.*

Looking out the window at them settling into their positions, he smiled sadly. *I wish you could have met them all, Mum, Dad. I mean, you know Remus and Sirius, but I really think you’d have loved Ron, Ginny, Moira, Hermione, and Tonks. I love them all so much, guys, and I do this as much to free them from Voldemort’s clutches as I do to avenge you.*

I miss you. I never really knew you, but I miss you. He saw Tonks look up through the window and smile and wave slightly. He waved back and stood straighter. Speaking not only to the memories of his parents, but to the people outside he said, “This is for you today. I won’t fail you.”

As he headed downstairs, he swore that someone clapped him on the shoulder while someone else kissed his cheek.

#####

Ten o’clock came, bringing Amelia Bones, Kingsley Shacklebolt, Alastor Moody, Neville Longbottom, and every Weasley that Harry knew, save Percy. They were quickly told to stay extremely close to one of the eight of the new Potter family for ease of escape. Molly’s face took on a disapproving look when she saw Tonks, and Harry told her simply, “Later, when you have all the facts. Right now, we’re waiting for Voldemort.”

Most people around winced. “Look, folks, get used to hearing it, because you’ll hear a lot after today. Tom falls today.”

“Harry, be careful,” Molly said, and tried to hug him. He didn’t return it, and she broke from him, puzzled and hurt.

“I’m sorry, Mrs. Weasley, but I heard what happened four years ago, and when we have a chance, you’ll hear everything. And you’ll know what needs to be done. Right now, I’m very disappointed in you.” She opened her mouth. “I’m not getting into it here, because you’ll need to

hear the entirety of it from the horse's mouth, so to speak.”

“He's right, Mum,” Ginny said. “For the time being, though, I will say that it's good to see you again.” She and Ron hugged Molly tightly, and sniffles were the order of the hour.

When eleven o'clock approached, Harry put everyone on their guard. “We know Moldie is coming, and since he wants to surprise us when we get here at noon, I expect him to show up any time now.” The tension was palpable in the air.

Conversation effectively ended at that point, with mild murmuring amongst the various eight groups in their hiding places. At eleven-forty-five exactly, the loud cracks of Apparation sounded in the clearing, and a large number of Death Eaters appeared, with a tall creature in the centre, trying to appear majestic. He waited a few moments for the cracks to end before whispering “Now!” into the PDA. He felt the wards snap into existence.

The Death Eaters looked around. “I'll kill the fool for setting me up like this!” Voldemort hissed, loud enough for all to hear.

“You won't live long enough for that, Tommie,” Harry said, standing up from his hiding place. “Today's the day you finally end your miserable half-life.”

“No, the time has come for you to finally die, Potter,” the high-pitched nasal voice exclaimed. “How stupid of you to come alone. But it will make things easier for me.”

Harry laughed and flicked his wand in the direction that the slight wind was blowing from, and a tumbleweed appeared and rolled between them, with the faint strains of the theme from “The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly“ floating in the air.

“What are you on about, Potter?” Voldemort asked, destroying the tumbleweed easily.

“Come now, Tommie boy ...”

“Stop calling me that, Potter,” Voldemort interrupted.

“Tom, I'll call you what I want to. You know the prophecy – I know that you have to. I figured out a while back who your spy is, and I know that your spy knows the prophecy. So you know that you can send every stinking catamite in your army at me and they won't be able to kill me. It has to be at your hands. Just like I'm the only one who can kill you. So I got sick of it, and decided to set up your spy. He told you there was an Order meeting taking place here at noon. I've been here for a while, Tommie-boy. Wouldn't you like to know what I've done with the place while waiting for you?”

As he spoke, he began to move the quarterstaff in a counter-clockwise rotation before suddenly snapping one of the shod ends to point at Voldemort.

“You think your Muggle weapon can scare me, Potter?” the sneering response returned. “You can't even get to me in time to hit me with it. I end this now. *Avada Kedavra!*”

Harry grinned. “*Rictusempra!*” Their spells met, and as had happened after the third task of the Tri-Wizard Tournament, the combined beam turned gold, splintered, and formed a domed cage over their duel. Harry’s hands were once again tightly locked, but this time he was prepared. A greater will and a greater desire to live than ever before fuelled his fight, and he forced that will through the staff in his hands.

Voldemort was looking quite confused. “How have you ... managed this?” he asked through gritted teeth. “These are not brother wands!”

“Same phoenix, Tommie,” Harry ground out. “Fawkes likes me.” He took a deep breath and forced the bead of power closer to the yew wand gripped furiously in his opponent’s fist. “Holly staff ... phoenix feather ... core. Brother wand.”

Voldemort looked at Harry for a moment and narrowed his eyes. A burst of intense pain shot through Harry’s head as if someone had struck him in the forehead with a twenty pound sledge, and he felt blood trickle from the scar. The bead turned and began to head toward Harry’s staff. “Not so cocky now, are we Potter? I killed your parents, I’ll kill you, and I’ll kill everyone who opposes me. I’ll find the woman you love and torture her slowly for daring to love you.”

Images of Ginny, Hermione, Tonks, and Moira went through his head, and despite the pain, he smiled. Voldemort hissed painfully, and Harry leaned forward menacingly. The bead reversed again, and Harry let images of making love to each of them go through his mind. The sheer bliss of Hermione’s Librarian fantasy flowed through him for a moment, and Voldemort screamed as if Harry had just cast the Cruciatus Curse on him. Letting the memory of her loving ministrations run through his mind, he forced the bead toward Voldemort. The screams became weaker as Voldemort collapsed to his knees. With one last burst of will, Harry forced the bead into the tip of Voldemort’s yew wand.

The cage faded as the yew wand literally exploded into tiny shards, each one burning as bright as a tiny sun. The handle fell to the ground as Riddle’s grip finally loosened, and Harry could see smoke rising from the burnt hand. He remembered the feeling of seeing the tangle of bodies on the bed on various mornings. Voldemort whimpered on the ground before him.

“I’m sorry, Tom, but I have to. You’re too big a threat otherwise.” He pointed the staff at Voldemort and whispered, “May the life after this one treat you better, Tom. *Surujnoc!*” As soon as the word left his mouth, he leapt away as Tom Marvolo Riddle’s body literally disintegrated in a wet explosion that devastated the area within fifteen feet and knocked several Death Eaters off their feet. Harry was struck by something hard enough to stun him for just a moment.

This was all the time that the Death Eaters, showing that exposure to Riddle had not blunted their self-preservation instincts, needed to attempt to leave. He heard a shout of “Anti-Apparation wards are up! Try another way!”

Harry shook his head as the Order members erupted from their own hiding spots. As the Death Eaters suddenly realized that even their Portkeys weren’t working, some of them turned a little green. Harry heard a roar and saw someone fire a blast at one of the Order. The battle was begun

in earnest.

He leaped into the fray, swinging his quarterstaff and hearing a satisfying *THWACK* as he landed. He fired spell and curse into the crowd around him, downing Death Eater after Death Eater. Out of the corners of his eyes, he could see the same from his fellow Order members.

He found himself suddenly before Draco Malfoy, whose wand was aimed directly at his head. His own staff was not in a position to fire a spell that would do any good. “Well, Potty, when it comes to the end, it looks as if you’ve made things much easier. Voldemort was just a little crazy. Now, drop the stick, and stand and face me like the stupid Gryffindor you are.”

The staff struck the ground with a sound loud enough that it actually stopped the fighting nearby. “Now, Potter, you die. I have to thank you for killing off the crazy, but now someone better will step into his shoes.” He smirked. “Like, oh, me for example. *Avada Keda*”

Draco never finished the spell as the back of his skull exploded outward. Harry stood before him with the pistol aimed where the falling body’s head used to be. “That’s the problem with that spell. Takes too long to cast, arsehole.” He looked and discovered that Narcissa Malfoy had been right behind her son, and was now wearing his blood and brains on her skin and robes.

Changing his aim slightly as she shook herself free of the shock of watching her son die before her eyes, he watched both madness and anger flow into her demeanour, and she started to raise her wand to Harry. “I wouldn’t, Narcissa. I can kill you before you can open your mouth.” She sneered and finished pointing her wand at him, but fell to the ground as a bullet struck her in the left eye and tore her brains to a bloody grey mush.

#####

The showdown had been interesting to watch, but Sirius had only paid it cursory attention while sneaking up on one specific Death Eater. Even through the robes they all wore, there was no mistaking his cousin Bella’s figure – he’d certainly admired it enough while growing up. As Harry destroyed Voldemort, the hush was impressive, but it was broken by Bellatrix screaming “No!” and firing a beam haphazardly into the crowd. It was deflected easily, but the battle was now on.

He intentionally broke a twig he was standing near, and watched her as she spun. His wand was already trained on her. “Long time no see, Trixie,” he said conversationally, laughing as he watched her face run through a series of emotions – shock at his being behind her without her knowing it; surprise at his being alive; and a look of desire, not for him but for the secret knowledge he obviously possessed; before finally settling on the hard-faced sneer that everyone knew so well.

“So how did the little puppy make it back?” she mocked. “Does the widdle Potty know? And will he break when I kill you again?”

“You don’t have the skill, Trixie,” he laughed back at her.

“Stop calling me that! You know I hate it!” she bellowed. “*Crucio!*”

He dodged the spell easily and yelled “*Reducto!*” The curse grazed her left leg, which disintegrated in a spray of blood and meat. She screamed and fell to the ground. As she fell, he fired off another *Reducto* r Curse, catching her wand hand and utterly annihilating her wand. “I thought you were better than that, Trixie,” he said sadly. “You’re a mad dog, and from one dog to another, it’s time to put you down.” As she bled profusely from the stump of her wand arm, fear entered her eyes as he pointed his wand at her head and whispered, “Goodbye, cousin. I loved you, you know. *Reducto.*”

#####

The Death Eaters were falling slowly, but not quickly enough. Luckily, and surprisingly, there had not yet been a fatality on the Order’s side, although a few seemed to be injured. Harry felt a hand touch his shoulder and he spun, his gun at the ready. “Don’t!” screeched Peter Pettigrew.

“What do you want, Pettigrew?” he snarled.

“It’s unravelling,” came the response as he held up the silver hand and pulled back the hood on his cloak. The silver had apparently been growing throughout his body – there were tendrils across the rat animagus’s face. The hand itself was losing its definition as strands of silver material spun off and wrapped around each other. “It was pure magic, and with the caster dead, the spell is unravelling. It’s going to go off within the next few minutes. When it goes, it won’t be pretty; it’s going to kill everyone in the area. Save yourself and your friends if you can.” He sighed. “I’m dead, and it’s no less than I deserve. Because of me, you have no family. Because of me, your friend is dead. It ends today, Harry. I pay the penalty for betrayal. Leave now and take the Order with you, if you can. Live, Harry.”

Harry met his eyes. “How long, Peter? Any better idea?”

“It feels like five minutes or so, I think. Maybe a little more. I’m trying to hold it.”

Into the air, he said, “Remus, Sirius, get over here now.” Remus stepped from the battle he’d just finished and saw Pettigrew, and Sirius trotted up a moment later.

“Pettigrew,” Sirius snarled.

“Enough, Sirius,” Harry said. “He’s a dead man walking, and warned me to get everyone out before he explodes. When he goes, he’ll kill everything magical in the area. I thought you might want to say goodbye.”

“No, Harry,” Peter said. “Get out while you can! Don’t waste your time here! I owe you more than a life – I owe you a lifetime you’ll never have because of me. Go!”

Remus looked at his school friend turned traitor for a long moment, and finally softly said, “Welcome back to the Marauders, Peter. I’ll raise a glass in your memory.”

Sirius met Peter's eyes, boring into the man's soul for a time before pulling the man into a tight embrace. "Welcome back. We'll prank someone in your name, too. We'll miss you, Peter."

Harry tapped his PDA and said, "Scram in thirty! Grab all Order members!" He sent Remus and Sirius to grab who they could, and thirty seconds later, the group appeared in the large living room in Harry's San Francisco house.

#####

Molly staggered over to him, unhurt, but obviously still a little shaky from the transit. "I saw you kill He-Who- ... Vol- ... *him* . How in the name of Merlin did you do that? What spell did you use?"

"Trade secret, but suffice it to say that I figured out that 'the power he knew not' wasn't what Dumbledore thought it was. Love helped me disarm him, but the actual killing was something else." He shook his head and looked to the heavens. "Godspeed, Tom. You're not in pain anymore."

"You feel pity for him?" Amelia Bones asked incredulously. "He was trying to rival Grindelwald!"

"I'm no saint, but I have to feel sorry for anyone who simply can not understand the concepts of love or trust, to the point where they actually hurt him." He grinned and looked at Hermione. "I defeated him with the Librarian," he laughed, laughing even harder as her eyes went wide and she bit her lower lip.

"So it is safe to assume that you have ended the threat of Tom Riddle?" asked a voice from behind Harry, and he spun to face Albus Dumbledore and Severus Snape.

"Yes I have, you traitor," he replied. "It was you all along. The pieces all came together a short while ago, and that was why I came back. I set you up, old man."

"What are you talking about?" Bill Weasley asked. "That's Dumbledore you're talking to, Harry."

"I know it is, Bill. What you don't know is that Voldemort wasn't supposed to be there today. It was supposed to be an Order meeting where I explained some 'vital information' to the Order, having chosen that site for the meeting because it wasn't an expected spot."

"Yes, and Remus came to us and told us about the meeting," Molly said.

"Problem is, Molly," Remus said, "I knew Harry's plan in advance. Harry had a meeting with Albus on the seventh where he asked him to set up the Order meeting. If Albus was on the up-and-up, he would have told me or someone else to call that meeting. He didn't. You saw Voldemort and his Death Eaters arrive instead. What's your take on that information?"

Molly was stunned. It was obvious that she still wanted to trust Dumbledore, but Remus was

extremely trustworthy as well. Her confusion was broken by Dumbledore speaking.

"Who would have thought that my role in all this would have been solved by a child one-eighth my age?" he asked with a chuckle. With a flick of his wand, they found themselves divested of their wands, staves, and in Harry and Moira's case, pistols. "Now that I am somewhat safer, why don't you explain to me how you solved my involvement with Tom Riddle?"

Harry's eye flickered to Snape for just a moment, but he was pleased to see the horrified look in the man's eyes as he stood slightly behind Dumbledore. "Sure. Couldn't hurt. Besides, there are other people here who need to know, so that proper apologies can be made." His eyes shot to Molly for a moment.

"First was that little problem with the blood protections. Abandoning me at the Dursleys until the day I did some remodelling to your office. What possible reason could you have had to leave me with a family that hated my very existence, and who abused me? Did you ever punish the people guarding me who allowed those rapes to happen, by the way?"

"Why worry about it? You were gone. Would you be disturbed to discover that it was Severus, working under my direct orders not to interfere?"

Sirius started to lunge forward but stopped as he ran into an invisible wall. Harry laughed bitterly. "It wouldn't surprise me for multiple reasons, but to believe it, I'd need to hear it from his lips directly. You're too good at manipulating people to your purposes."

Snape was looking green. "Unfortunately, Po ... Mister Potter, what he tells you is essentially true. I was convinced by certain means that the pursuit was, for lack of a better term, foreplay. Your silence tended to lend to the belief that it was not necessarily unwanted."

Harry gaped at him. "*Foreplay?*"

Snape frowned. "By way of excuse, I can only say that I am familiar with that type of activity, and had concluded that you, as the vernacular puts it, liked it rough."

Albus Dumbledore looked amused at Severus Snape's phrasing, but said nothing except, "Please continue, Harry."

"Okay, abandonment to abusive Mundanes, check. First year, the Stone would have been safer if I had never had anything to do with it. Instead, you send me after a wizard with half a century on me in skill. Suspect, now that I have the ability to look back on those days. Second year – again, thinking back, it's obvious in retrospect. Opening the Chamber was your purpose. Remember, Dobby was trying to save me specifically, which meant that the choice of girl that the diary went to was on purpose – it would have been either Ginny or Hermione, and for that alone I'd kill Lucius if he weren't already dead. Tom got away from you, though, before you could mesh the spirit and the new body, and when things got too far out of control, you had to send Fawkes to save my life, because you knew you'd need me later."

"Third year was when I think you started to decide to work with him, rather than fight him your own way. I still wonder if the time turner episode was an unplanned attempt to get me killed, because it certainly didn't suit your plans to have Sirius on the loose, although you got him back under control easily enough."

Dumbledore calmly responded, "You are quite correct. That episode convinced me that spontaneity was your forte and not my own. I would have done better to have let Sirius die then, and possibly Remus would have been sacrificed to the Veil instead." A muscle in Sirius' cheek jumped spasmodically, and Remus growled deep in his throat.

"Fourth year is where the fun comes in. You hired Barty Crouch Junior, knowing who he was. With the skill you're supposed to have at Legilimency, you couldn't have *not* known. For all intents and purposes, you had to have worked with him in some capacity. You deliberately didn't take basic precautions to protect the Goblet, for one thing. How difficult would it have been to set up a second spell, along with the age line, to make sure that the person whose name was on the slip was the one putting the name in the Goblet? Then after I came back, sending me back up to the castle with the impostor, who I believe I've already explained you should have been able to see through, Mr. 'Twinkle of Doom'." He laughed again. "I think I annoyed you more than you could ever admit when I came back through alive without having killed Tom."

"'Twinkle of Doom'? I think I like that. May I use it, Harry?" Albus said with a continued smile. "Actually, you won't be in a position to stop me in a short while. I look forward to your explanation of fifth year. I have yet to hear what exposed my machinations to you."

"Fifth was easy, once I got past the angst and crap. You told me you were afraid of Voldemort using me to *Legilimens* you, but that was utter bullshit. With the power that such a thing would have taken, he would have been able to enter my mind, throw me out, and move in permanently. You knew he couldn't do it. I think that's the year that you started to work against us both. You worked very hard to keep me off balance, and to throw me at Tom. You decided that you needed him out of the way, but you also knew damned well that I had to be alive for it to happen. Open my mind enough to let Voldemort in by giving me Occlumency with a teacher too childish to get over his hatred of my father and deal with me as myself." He heard Snape's sharp inhalation and looked to the man. "Tell me I'm wrong, sir." Snape's silence was all the confirmation he needed.

"You couldn't kill me in the Ministry that year because it wouldn't have killed Moldieshorts. So you helped him escape, and then kept me off balance with the death of my godfather over there, and telling me the prophecy while I was grieving. If it hadn't been for a sexy Auror who went behind your back to help me, and a woman who let her, I might still be grieving, at least if you'd had your way."

"Then you discovered our relationship, and it needed to stop before I could get my wits about me, so you told us to stop it or else you would. It was when you informed me that you'd have Tonks prosecuted and thrown in Azkaban for sexually abusing me that I redecorated your office. It was then that I realized you'd kill anyone in your path, and I left simply to protect the people I loved most. It took me four years to piece everything else together and realize that you were working for Voldemort until I could kill him. It was three bits of info that sealed it for me, though. First I

heard that Lucius had been killed, with a Dark Mark over his house. *Very* odd, but not unbelievable. Then Cornelius Fudge comes down with a bad case of Dead from a stab wound, which ends up with you in charge of the Ministry. Suspicious as well, but it was something that *didn't* happen that made me realize that you were playing both sides."

"What might that have been, Harry?" asked an amused Albus Dumbledore, who continued to stand, watching Harry and the crowd there. Occasionally someone would move, but the wand would flicker in their direction and they'd be pressed back against the wall.

"Vernon, Dudley, and Aunt Petunia are still alive. It was no secret who my relatives were, and the most obvious thing for Voldemort to have done to get me back would have been to capture them and hold them hostage, threatening that Tom would slaughter them. If I'd cared at all, that might have worked. Yet Petunia is a member of the Order. Quite alive, as are her completely unharmed son and ex-husband. Thing is, Albus, there were only a total of four people who ever knew what I said to Aunt Petunia, and one of them was her. Being the one who said it makes me the second. Tonks was the third, being there when I said it, and she only ever told you in her report that I wouldn't care if they died by torture. That I'd have thrown a party. Back then, I would have."

"So there you are. It was the lack of an attack that made me realize that you were the traitor in the Order's midst."

"Quite well done, Harry," Albus said. "You would have done well in Ravenclaw."

"And you did quite well in Slytherin, I'm sure," Harry retorted with a smile.

"Excellent! You are the first in quite some time to realize my House. Most of the records from that far back have regrettably disappeared. Ah well, it will be a pity to destroy such an intellect, but you are too Gryffindor to work with me in my conquests."

"Not to mention too Slytherin myself to fall for that," Harry replied. "You betrayed Tom, why wouldn't you betray me?"

"Such a waste of an excellent mind." The eyes twinkled merrily for a moment before he said, "Ah, I know you too well, Harry. You are trying to stall for time, in order to think of a way to defeat me. As much as it pains me to do so, I fear I must punish you for that." The wand slid down the line of people and back again. "Nymphadora is too obvious a choice, and it might actually inspire you to do something. Someone whom you have less of a connection to. But close enough that the point will be made. Ah, perfect. She bothered you through your days at Hogwarts – let me remove the thorn in your side now." He pointed the wand at Ginny and said "*Avada Kedavra.*" "

The sickly green beam lanced out of the wand. Harry screamed "No!" and threw himself into the air to intercept it. To everyone's horror, he was successful. There was a brilliant flash of green mixed with gold, blinding everyone for a moment. When their vision returned, they realized with horror that Harry was completely gone. His body hadn't even hit the floor.

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Harry Potter and the Paradigm Shift

Chapter 15

The silence was deafening. No one could believe what they had just witnessed. Harry had taken an A-K to the chest, and disappeared. As one, the seven who had been in America with Harry looked up with fire in their eyes. “You bastard,” Ron hissed. “You killed Harry. You fucking bastard!” The volume of his words rose rapidly until he was screaming the last word.

Ginny’s words struck fear into several hearts, however, as she said in a cold fury, “You killed my husband. You murdered the father of my baby. You are not leaving here alive, old man.” With that exclamation, it was as if all the magic in the household flowed through her for just a moment, and a beam shot out of her chest and impacted with the new Dark Lord. He was thrown back several feet, landing unceremoniously on his backside.

Moira grabbed the initiative as he flew to shout “*Accio wands!*” Every wand that had been taken from them shot to her, and everyone quickly retrieved their own while Dumbledore regained his feet. He was forced into a defensive battle, beginning shielding immediately, as curses and hexes flew at him helter-skelter. His only defence was the same silver shield that Voldemort had used so effectively in the Ministry all those years ago. This, however, prevented him from firing back as he wished to.

Moira, once again, had an idea, and called her pistol to her. Everybody except herself and Sirius ducked at the unfamiliar noise of the gunshot. The bullet was unable to penetrate Dumbledore’s shield, ricocheting off it, but the shield weakened enough for a stinging curse to slip through, and they heard a shout of pain from the other side as the silver wall returned to full strength. She continued to fire at the wall until she was out of ammunition, by which time several more curses and hexes had managed to slip past his defences and inflict damage upon him.

The fury of the volley of spells was impressive, and against a lesser wizard, would have destroyed his shield long before. “Separate attacks aren’t going to get us anywhere,” said Ron, suddenly. “We need to coordinate. On three. One, two ...”

“Damn it, Severus, DO SOMETHING!” came Dumbledore’s voice from the other side of the shield. Then there was a wet thumping sound, and before Ron could say “Three”, the shield suddenly dropped. Their target fell to the ground, apparently unconscious. Behind him stood Severus Snape, a silver candlestick stained with blood in his right hand.

“As you wish, Albus,” said Snape, looking blankly down at Dumbledore.

Neville stepped forward and looked down at the bleeding but still living wizard on the floor. “Voldemort was Harry’s. This Dark Lord is mine.” With that, Neville closed his eyes for a moment before saying, “For Harry. *Avada Kedavra,*” softly. The sickly green beam struck the elderly wizard, killing him instantly.

Neville turned and handed his wand to Madam Bones. “I place myself in your hands, having cast

an Unforgivable Curse. I expect my wand to be broken and myself to be imprisoned.”

“Then you expect wrong,” she said, handing the wand back to the young wizard. “I was a witness to the death, and it was justified in my opinion. You were fighting a Dark Lord, and using a chance to defeat him permanently. Don’t you ever think you did the wrong thing.”

Moira chuckled sadly. “Besides, you’re in America right now. Jurisdictionally speaking, you guys can’t say squat about it even if you wanted to. Which I know you don’t. The spell isn’t an Unforgivable in the United States, and the death, while perhaps not what some would call ‘sportsmanlike’, it was certainly in defence of all of us, because I have no doubt that he would have tried something else if he had awakened.”

Severus Snape was looking between the candlestick in his hand and the now dead wizard on the floor. His eyes finally rose to the crowd before him, and it was obvious that he felt completely lost. Ron looked up and said, “Well, I understand the prophecy now.”

“What prophecy are you talking about?” Snape asked. He sounded merely confused, rather than having the usual sneer to his tone.

Ron quoted the prophecy that Moira had channelled. “*The Dark Lord rises at the Dark Lord’s death and falls by his right hand ... betrayer shall become saviour by betraying the saviour ... deceit is the Dark Lord’s coin, and in silver shall he be paid ... the Dark Lord rises at the Dark Lord’s death and falls by his right hand ...*” He shrugged. “Dumbledore rose as a Dark Lord at Voldemort’s death, and literally fell when you smacked him a good one. You had betrayed Voldemort, and saved us all by using that candle-holder there against the man who had defeated Grindelwald.” He laughed slightly. “And I’ll bet a hundred Galleons I can tell you what metal that candle thingy is made of. Harry wouldn’t have one of those cheap fake ones in his living room; he’d go for the real thing.” Ron pointed at the sidetable behind Snape, where the mate to the fatal candlestick still stood flanking a floral arrangement.

Hermione looked at Ron in surprise. “Stand still, Ron. I’m going to kiss you for being brilliant.” She walked over to him, smiling slightly, and kissed him.

“What? It fits, doesn’t it?” he asked, bewildered. “Kinda obvious, if you ask me.”

Neville snorted. “Look at which hand he’s holding the candlestick in.”

Snape looked at the makeshift weapon and suddenly dropped it. “What ... where are we?” He looked out the window, where darkness lay between the streetlights. The sudden shift from the middle of the day in England to what seemed to be the wee hours of the morning threw him. “We’re in ... America, you said?”

“We’re in Harry’s house in San Francisco,” Moira said sadly. She walked over to Dumbledore’s body and gave it a rather vicious kick, before turning back to the rest. “Now what do we do?”

“We take his body back to England and explain what happened,” Tonks said quietly. “And we get

on with our much poorer lives.”

“At least he died for what he felt was important,” Hermione said quietly. “He would never have been able to live with himself if he’d not made an effort to block the A-K.” She turned to Remus, who was standing next to her, and suddenly threw her arms around him and began to sob. Tears were in his eyes as well.

“At least he’s with James and Lily now,” Sirius whispered. “Godspeed, my boy.”

At that moment several loud *CRACK*s sounded from outside on the lawn, immediately followed by an Anti-Apparation ward going up. The still-jumpy crowd in the living room immediately leapt to defensive positions, while Sirius looked outside. On the darkened lawn, he could barely see the shimmer of a number of Concealment fields – he wouldn’t have been able to see them at all if he hadn’t been expecting to – and a certain red-headed field agent with pyjama tops tucked into his trousers. “Looks like the cops are here. Wands away, let me handle this.” He went out to the front door and opened it a crack. “Charlie, it’s me, Sirius. I’m going to open the door so you can come in. We’re going to keep our hands where you can see them until you tell us you’re satisfied, okay?” He swung the door open to admit a ticked-off agent and four ghostly shimmers. The shimmers promptly resolved themselves into four agents in various states of dishabille, all holding wands on the British wizards. “People, Charlie Watson’s one of the good guys. He’s been working with us since Harry first came here, so let’s all cooperate, shall we?”

“What happened here?” the older redheaded man asked. “We detected a whole shi ... boatload of magic going on here just a few minutes ago. It set off all Harry’s burglar alarms and almost gave our night monitor a heart attack.” He surveyed the room. “From the way you’re all reacting, or not, as the case may be, can I assume that the guy bleeding into the rug over there was the reason for all that magical hoo-hah?”

Sirius spoke again. “The dead guy bleeding into the rug. He was Albus Dumbledore, and he was an evil son of a bitch who just cost me my godson.”

Charlie’s face went white, and he staggered back into a wall. “Harry’s ... Harry’s dead? What happened?”

“This will take a while, sir,” Hermione said quietly, still sniffling. “Shouldn’t you call in whoever is going to be needed to do a forensic scan of the scene?” She shook her head. “I’m sorry, sir. I shouldn’t be telling you your job.”

“It’s all right,” he murmured, and shook his head. Pulling out a cell phone, he was quickly speaking with someone. “Dale? Full crime scene team. Harry’s place. Yeah, I said Harry. I know his new identity was ... look, he’s apparently dead, and we have a body on the rug, bleeding into the carpet, that isn’t him. Team here, fifteen minutes ago. Move it! Lane, take down the wards so the team can get in.”

“If they could be here fifteen minutes ago, they’d save his life,” Ginny sniffed, “and my baby would have a father.”

Charlie seemed to deflate. "I'm sorry," was all he could say before a series of rapid fire cracking sounds happened out in front of the house. "That should be the team. Be right back." A moment later he was ushering a team of about thirty people into the house. At the raised eyebrows from several people, he said, "Harry was a favourite visitor to our offices. Lots of friends there, and most of them tagged along with the forensics guys. They want his murderer found and dealt with."

Sirius just pointed at Dumbledore's body. "That's the guy who killed him right there, bleeding all over our rug."

The forensics team moved everybody and cordoned off the living room. They began setting up cameras in each corner, pointing in various directions, and stepped out themselves. "How long ago did this happen?"

"We got back here about twenty minutes ago, I think," Sirius said.

"Okay, we'll set it for forty, just to be safe. Charlie, you get them down to HQ and ask 'em what was going on, and you'll see us in about an hour, okay?"

"Gotcha, Dale," Charlie said sadly as he pulled a length of string from a pocket. Lengthening it, he bade everyone to grab hold, and then cast the Portkey spell.

#####

They appeared in a large meeting room, and Charlie motioned for them to take seats around the long table. "Why don't you tell me what happened? How did the British Minister of Magic end up on Harry's rug, dead?"

Sirius cleared his throat. "You know me by now, Charlie, so I guess I should start."

Hermione cleared her throat demurely. "Shouldn't we be separated, as to not contaminate each other's testimony?"

Charlie frowned. "True. I'm not sure I want to deal with complaints from the British Department of Magical Law Enforcement. They were a pain in our asses trying to get Harry back."

"I think I can guarantee with some certainty that the head of the MLE will not complain, sir," Amelia Bones said with a slight smile. She passed Charlie a folder containing a silver badge, the insignia of Magical Law Enforcement clearly visible on it. "Amelia Bones, at your service. Most of the problems came from the corpse in question usurping my authority."

"Your ..." Charlie said, turning slightly white. His face went into his hands. "Wonderful. Just what I need in my record. 'Insulted Head of British Law Enforcement Agency. Caused international incident.'"

"Only if the international incident involves putting us all at greater ease, Mister ... Watson, was it?" He nodded. "I agree that Mister Black should probably explain, since he knows more of the story than I do, and you already know him."

“Harry was ... oh, shit, Charlie – don’t let your forensics team go too far around. Harry was paranoid, and only the two of us know ... knew how to allow others past them.” He looked to the others. “He added you to them when you arrived.” Turning back to Charlie Watson he said, “The usual disabling charms will set them off. Noting lethal, but unless your team wants to be sprouting redwoods from their arses, you’ll need me there to disable.” Charlie dialled his cell phone. “Dale? Yeah – got word the house has mild booby traps. The standard spells to disarm will ... well, Sirius tells me that your dog would be happy, but you’d have a problem sitting down. Yeah. We’ll be by later to help you out. Oh really? Well, I want to talk to them and see those tapes as soon as they come back to the office, okay?”

He hung up and looked at the group before him. “Nice fight you guys had, if what Dale is seeing is correct. What happened?”

“Okay. We were in London, and Harry headed off for a meeting with Voldemort.”

“He was willingly meeting him?”

“Let’s say that Harry was expecting him, although Voldemort didn’t know that. He set an ambush. Short form is fight, fight, fight, blow up the Dark Lord, fight some more, escape exploding henchman, end up in San Francisco. Somehow Albus Dumbledore was able to follow us, and then we watched as Harry talked. Albus had disarmed us in a stupidly loose moment on our part, and he decided to kill a friend to make the point to Harry. He chose one of two women carrying Harry’s babies. Harry threw himself in the path of the *Avada Kedavra* and disappeared. I don’t know what Dumbledore did to him.”

“Your passage to this city, by whatever means it was, left such an easily traceable signature that I would almost suspect that you had intended to have us follow you,” Snape sneered, his old self returning.

“Considering we were escaping en masse an exploding Peter Pettigrew,” Remus barked, “I think that a little laxness in our escape plans might be forgiven.” Snape blinked and wisely chose to fall silent.

“There are bullet holes around the room. What happened?”

Moira spoke up. “That was me. I couldn’t get through his shield, but it took so much power from him that the others were getting spells through. Finally, that guy over there,” she finished, pointing at Severus, “brought a candlestick down on old white hair’s skull.”

“I killed him while he was unconscious,” Neville said sadly. “He was too dangerous to be allowed to wake up.”

“You put down a rabid dog, basically, from what I’m hearing from you all. We’ll talk a bit more about this, for the paperwork, but I can pretty well – well, we all knew Harry, and what his problem was, and all the rest. The recording those guys were doing seems to back up your story. He shows, disarms you, *he* fires the first offensive spell, and then all hell breaks loose. Self

defence on killing him, and that's how we're going to mark it, unless something else says otherwise. I would like to know, though, why you decided to cosh him, when it looked like you were on his side?"

Snape clenched his fist on the tabletop. "I had just spent twenty years trying to free myself from service to one Dark Lord. I did not wish to spend the rest of my life in service to another. I saw an opportunity, and I took it."

Charlie opened his mouth to say more, but was interrupted by a loud chirping noise coming from seven pockets. Sirius, Moira, Ginny, Tonks, Ron, Remus, and Hermione pulled out their PDAs with an odd look on their faces. Suddenly a voice came from them, in seven speaker stereo. "Old man, you'll have to do better next time. I'm coming back for you, you son of a bitch – get your hands off me, damn it! Don't make me break something expensive! I need to get back there! Why? I have some deaths to avenge!"

"Harry?" asked a quavering voice, unbelieving.

"Ginny? Is that you?" the voice asked, much quieter than the previous message. "Are you all right? Are you *all* all right?"

"Prove that you're really Harry," she said, trying very hard not to cry.

"Well, you put your elbows in the butter when you were eleven because you were embarrassed about ... things. If you want me to continue, I can say a few things I don't know if you want broadcast with your Mum in the area."

"Go ahead, I don't care," she replied, biting her lower lip.

"You make the most delightful squeals during love-making, and it can be an interesting fight trying to disengage afterwards, because of the feeling of completeness."

"Oh Harry!" she sobbed suddenly. "It is you!"

"Yes, it is. You guys are all okay?"

"Yes, Harry, we are," Sirius said. "Severus and Neville took down Dumbledore, and we're with Charlie right now, who appears to be on the phone telling his people that it's gone from being a double homicide to a single one. How in hell did you ... where are you?"

They heard a laugh. "Remember the three settings I had on those disks?"

Hermione slapped her forehead. "St. Mungo's! Of course! If a shock to the system like the one you had wouldn't cause that disk to transport you there, nothing would."

"Exactly. Shocked them when I sat up, making the sheet fall off my face." There was a pause, and then he said, "Look, I'll explain the rest later, when I see you guys. Now that I'm *not* avenging your deaths, I can be a lot happier, and make the healers here happy as they check me over to

make sure I'm not going to sprout a third penis or something."

"Well, we'll be there as soon as Mr. Watson clears us to go," Tonks said.

"Harry," Charlie said, "you have no idea how good it is to hear your voice after what they told me had happened."

"Oh yes I do," came the quiet response. "I was expecting to be returning to a mass of dead people, and being forced to tear Dumbledore apart with my bare hands." He finished with a sigh, "I think I'll wait here for you, and see if I can keep people from trying to take pieces of my pants to sell on eBay, or the wizard equivalent. I pity the idiot who takes the job of Minister for Magic when things settle down here. He's going to have a long road ahead of him fixing the damage that Fudge and Dumbledore did." The line went quiet.

"Wow," Hermione said softly. "He's going to get really quiet for a while, and maybe even depressed. I hope we can get there fairly quickly."

Ginny's PDA chirped suddenly. "Ginny?" came Harry's voice. "Happy birthday." She laughed her thanks softly and joyfully.

#####

Charlie Watson walked into his supervisor's office. "Boss, I have a really weird request."

"Must be part of the Harry Potter case then," came the chuckled reply.

Charlie snorted. "You don't know the half of it. How much of the case have you heard?"

"Not much. One victim was A-K'd and disappeared into thin air, and the other was bashed in the back of the head with a candlestick and A-K'd to make sure he couldn't get up and try again. The caved in skull guy was the one who'd A-K'd the first one."

"Pretty good, but not all of it. I need permission to go to London and interview someone."

"A witness?"

"The first victim."

"Potter. The first victim *had* to be Potter." Charlie nodded. "Casting *Avada Kedavra* on most people kills them. It just pisses him off. How in hell did he get to London?"

"I don't know, that's the thing. We're pretty damned sure that it's him, but I want to eyeball him to be sure, and talk to him face to face. I mean, the kid lived with me for a while – I think I've got a feel for how to tell if this guy over there is the real deal. His girlfriends think it is."

"Okay, I'll agree." He paused. "Two things. You know you'll have to write this report under Veritaserum just for anyone to believe it." Charlie nodded. "Second – girlfriends? Plural?" At the

amused nod, he finished, “God damn kid is luckier than I can imagine. Lookers too, aren’t they?”

“Boss, if I weren’t so damned happily married, I’d contemplate doing any one of ‘em in a heartbeat if they’d have me. Only woman I’ve ever seen who was sexier is my own wife.”

“High praise indeed! Well, you’re approved. Make your arrangements, and we’ll see what comes of it. Just make sure the Brits know you’re coming.”

“One of our witnesses is Amelia Bones.”

“The Brits’ top dog in Law Enforcement? Damn, that kid has friends!” He shook his head. “Get going, Charlie.” Charlie turned and exited the office.

#####

A rather large group appeared in the foyer of Number 12 Grimmauld Place. Molly Weasley had been uncharacteristically silent since Dumbledore’s death. She frowned, and finally turned to Tonks. “Miss Tonks, when we have a chance, I need to speak to you. I wronged you four years ago, and I need to make amends, if possible.” She closed her eyes and put her hands to them. “I lost Fred and George to their business, and Ron and Ginny to my own stubbornness. I trusted people I now know that I shouldn’t have. I start to wonder if I’ve done anything right as a mother.”

Tonks walked over to the woman and put her hands on her shoulders. “You did the best thing right. You taught them to make the decision to do what they felt was right, and stick with it. They didn’t learn that from Harry, or Hermione, or me, or anyone else. They learned that from their brothers and their parents. I said some ugly things in anger those four years ago myself. If we both agree to learn from what happened, then I can consider the problem null and void.”

“Not until I right another wrong, which can’t be done until we get to the Burrow. You *are* welcome there, Miss Tonks.”

“Tonks is just fine. May I call you Molly again?” A tear-filled nod and hug later, tensions were much relaxed. “We’ll need to talk, but I predict, probably with greater accuracy than that quack in the tower at Hogwarts, that we’ll be back to our old relationship in no time.”

They were soon in the lobby of St. Mungo’s, asking to see Harry Potter, and were quickly taken to a separate waiting room. A healer came out, a bit shocked to find seventeen people waiting to see Harry. “I can’t let you all in to see him at once, but small groups won’t be a problem – no more than four at a time.”

“What’s wring with him?” Ginny asked in alarm.

“Exhaustion mainly, and we’re treating a nasty curse mark on his chest, but that seems to be healing pretty well. That trademark forehead scar is finally responding to treatment, and though he’ll always have it there, it won’t bleed out like it used to. It’ll eventually fade to a point where

you'll have to look hard to find it.”

#####

Harry sat up in the bed. He was tired, but he wasn't going to rest until he'd seen them all. He'd heard their voices, but he needed to know that they were all right. The door opened to admit Charlie Watson, Sirius, Remus, Amelia Bones, and Kingsley Shacklebolt. “They wouldn't have allowed us all in here if we hadn't agreed to leave soon,” rumbled Shacklebolt.

“Well, I survived it,” he said. “I'd prefer to explain to everyone all at once when I get home, but it comes down to Mum saving my life one more time. Long story. Any way I can prove I'm me to your satisfaction?”

Charlie spoke up. “What's my daughter's name?”

“Which one? The six year old, or the Quidditch hottie?” Harry's grin was impudent.

“You've done more for that girl's ego, you know that Harry? She never got a date until you started calling her that.”

“Well, she carried herself differently is all. She's an attractive girl, Charlie. Don't worry, I have no intention of adding her to my harem.”

“You know if she sets her mind to it, you probably won't have a say in the matter,” Charlie laughed.

“She's gotta get through the others first. I should be safe from her.”

Eyes twinkling, Charlie asked, “Do you want to be safe from her?”

Harry laughed outright. “I refuse to answer that on the grounds that whether my answer is positive or negative, I am likely to phrase it in such a way as to learn firsthand just how interesting Department Question Mark's new curses are.”

“Good answer, Harry. Good answer. Glad to see that even an Avada can't keep you down. Let me go out and let everyone know, okay?”

“We need to be going as well,” Amelia said. “We're going to need to do a *lot* of clean up on this one. Dark Lord for Minister – won't *that* go over well with the public?”

“Don't get me going on that,” Harry grumbled. “They're part of the fault for this.”

“Understood,” she replied with a smile. “We'll say goodbye now.” Kingsley clapped him gently on the shoulder, and then they were gone. Moody popped his head in to say that he was glad to see Harry was doing all right, and then took off with Kingsley and Amelia.

The rest of the crowd slid slowly into and out of the room until it was just Harry and the girls. “I

forget, ladies,” he said softly, “have I told you recently that I love you four more than my own life?”

Ginny sniffed. “Yes, a little while ago.” She beat his chest gently with her fists. “You didn’t have to prove it though, you prat!”

He winced with each blow, but let her continue until she felt spent. “How can I apologize for something I’d do again? You four mean everything to me, and I wasn’t about to let Albus steal our baby’s life as well.” He pulled her close. “I want as many babies with you as you’re willing to have, my beloved Ginevra. That goes for all of you. And if one is too many, I’ll accept that.”

“If you think you’re getting out of fathering my children,” Tonks said, “you’ve got another think coming!”

“That’s true,” Harry mused. “I’m about your only option. Sirius is your cousin, Ron’s out of the running, and I’d imagine the same goes for Remus.”

“Not true,” Moira murmured. “At least when I was in the room. His eyes were on me, and he was certainly reacting as if he liked what he saw.” Her eyes twinkled.

“Hey, Ron was watching you walk upstairs once,” Hermione said. “I don’t think he’s quite as gay as he thinks.” She looked to Harry. “I saved my virginity for you, Harry. You’re fathering my first child. Deal with it.”

“Yes ma’am!” he said cheekily, saluting. “Wear that Librarian outfit again, and I can guarantee prompt service, too!”

“I think we ought to see about getting you out of here and into a loving environment,” Tonks said. “What do you say to invading the Burrow?” At his surprised eyebrow rise, she said, “We’ve pretty well buried the hatchet. Molly admits she was wrong, I admit that I was wrong to get so shirty with her, and we’re going to work on the rest. Arthur agrees, now that he knows the whole story. I’m permitted on the grounds again.”

“Good. We’re all staying together, though. I love you, and I’ve grown rather fond of that pile of bodies on the bed. I’m not bending on that. In the eyes of the gods, the willingness I showed by throwing myself in front of that A-K was enough for them to consider us married, since I’d have done that for any of the seven of you. Yeah – the gods consider me married to all seven of you.”

“You spoke to them?” Hermione gasped.

“No, but I got word from those that I did speak to. Mum and Dad are proud of me, you see. They told me so before they kicked me out of ... wherever it was, and put me back in my body.”

“Let’s continue this at the Burrow,” Ginny said quietly. “There’s a lot of ground to cover, I think.”

“Great. Somebody go tell the Healer types that I’m leaving, and somebody else help me find where they hid my trousers, will you?”

#####

An hour later, Harry was sitting on the couch in the family room at the Burrow, explaining things. “Well, first off, I knew that with my quarterstaff being a big-arsed version of my wand, right down to the phoenix feather, we’d have that same reaction we had last time,” he said, recounting the fight with Voldemort. “I was counting on it. I also knew that I’d have a damned sight better ability to control it if I could hold it two handed, psychologically speaking.” Fred and George were snickering off to the side.

“Cool it, guys,” Ginny said quietly. “Besides, the thing you’re giggling about, he needs at least three hands to hold it properly.” She placed her hand on her belly and smiled happily. “How do you think I ended up like this?”

“Please, Ginny, try to keep your family’s heads from exploding right now. Please?” Harry smiled. “Back to what I was saying. Between a greater ability to hold the wand and greater control, not to mention the feelings that these four women have for me and that I return, I was able to return fire, so to speak, until his wand exploded. The fact that I had him whimpering from my broadcasting some particularly enjoyable memories to him didn’t hurt me at all. I then invoked the power that he knew not, if only because he didn’t give a damn to learn about it. Muggle science. Yeah, love was all well and good, in that it allowed me to want to survive the battle with him, but it was Muggle science that destroyed him. All I’ll say for those that pay attention to that sort of thing is that any seventh year student at Hogwarts could conjure what I conjured, but in the amounts that they’d create, the devastation would be far more horrific.” He looked to Hermione. “Ask Paul Dirac what I’m talking about.”

Her eyes widened, and she slapped her hand to her mouth in horror. “Were you out of your fucking mind?” she screeched a moment later.

“Nope. I’d been practicing making hideously tiny amounts of things for two years, once I figured out how to defeat him. I used a picogram to do what I did. That’s the equivalent of almost 86 pounds of dynamite going off in his brain, which is why they found meaty chunks of him everywhere. I used the blood connection between us to slip right past his shields, and trusted that the combination of his skull and his shields would be enough to contain the explosion. That was the only guesswork in the thing, and I’m glad I guessed right. He’s dead, we’re not, and that’s that. I’m just sorry I won’t be able to do anything as impressive for anyone else’s birthday. Ginny gets the destruction of Voldemort on hers. What do I do for Hermione’s? Or Tonks’s? Or Moira’s?”

“We’ll settle for birthday cakes with candles on, like normal people,” said Hermione. “Okay, that solves the mystery of how you did in Voldemort. What about surviving Dumbledore’s Killing Curse? What was that gold flash?”

“I didn’t see any gold flash from my point of view, so I don’t know about that. It may have been the result of intersecting magics. What happened, basically, was that the Curse killed me, but there were other magics working against it. I swore to be here for Ginny and the baby, so the link between my spirit and the physical world wasn’t completely severed. My mother’s blood magic, it turns out, was like a reservoir protecting me, and since I hadn’t used it up by staying with the

Dursleys the last few years, it was still there to be used. And the way I died, sacrificing myself to save my wife and child, was close enough to the way she died that the oath was able to direct the protective magic to start up my body again. I think if I hadn't had that, the Oath would have bound me to stay as a ghost to watch over you all," he said soberly. "That wouldn't have been a bad fate, I guess, but I'd much prefer to be in the flesh while doing it."

"So your mother's magic is now...?"

"All gone. I used up the last of it, so I won't be coming back if I get hit by an A-K a third time. But that's all right, I plan on leaving the heroing biz to others now. No more jumping in front of curses for me. I'm just going to set up my workshop and get my Mastery and give Ollivander a run for his money. And see if this gang can produce enough Potter-Granger-Weasley-Tonks-Black-Cybelle-Lupin kids to make Snape resign from Hogwarts in horror."

The group laughed, but eventually Harry became serious again. "What worries me now is how soon everything is going to revert back to the way it was, and make it easy for another Riddle to rise to power. How in hell do we stop it? I've got some ideas, but who's going to listen to me?"

"They'd listen to you as Minister for Magic," Arthur Weasley said.

"Yeah. Harry Potter, Minister for Magic. I'm twenty years old, sir, I have every intention of abusing my fame in a short time to make my marriage to all seven of these people legally binding, and I am hideously, painfully sane, in large part because of these seven people. Do you really think I'm actually crazy enough to take the job?"

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Harry Potter and the Paradigm Shift

Chapter 16

The crowd assembled for the award ceremony was huge, so huge there was only one place big enough to fit them all. The old World Cup Quidditch stadium. Anybody who was anybody fought for seats on the field itself, close enough to the podium to see the actual presentation, and the stands were packed with everyone else. Percy Weasley, as the surviving Assistant to the Minister and organizer of the ceremony, was the presenter, and he stood proudly at the podium in his finest dress robes. Listening to Percy drone on and on about the details of a battle he hadn't been at, Harry found himself wondering if he could get away with just one A-K – a little one – and claim it was justified in the interests of protecting the collective sanity of the audience. Finally Percy got on to the main event. “Today we are here to honour someone who has done the unthinkable – he single-handedly defeated one of the greatest threats to wizard-kind. Thanks to Harry Potter, we are much safer now. It is my extreme pleasure to present to him the Order of Merlin, First Class.”

Harry stood and walked over to the podium, where Percy lifted up the gold medal on the purple ribbon that was intended to go around his neck. “I see a bit of a problem, Percy,” he said, stopping him from putting the ribbon over his head. “There appears to be only one medal here, and there's no way in Hell I'm going to stand here and accept an award for something that relied on me accepting help from a slew of other people. How about Neville Longbottom, for killing the man who tried to rise up in Voldemort's place?”

Seeing Percy's shiver, he scowled. “He's a deader, for Merlin's sake, Percy! I spread him over an acre of ground when I killed him! Riddle is not going to suddenly jump out from behind a shrub and shout ‘Ni!’ just because I mention his name!” He looked out into the audience, and found himself standing behind the podium as if he'd always intended to be there. Percy backed away and stood there trying to figure out just how he'd lost control of the whole thing.

“That's part of the problem, you know. By doing that with his nom de Dark Lord, you gave him more power. Dumbledore knew that as well, even if he was an evil son of a blasted-end skrewt. Voldemort started life as a man, and ended it as fertilizer. He wasn't worth fearing, folks.” He paused a moment to collect his thoughts. “Ginevra Weasley. Ronald Weasley. Nymphadora Tonks. Sirius Black. Remus Lupin. Hermione Granger. Moira Cybelle. Without them, I never would have had the strength to defeat Riddle. Where are their medals? Amelia Bones. Kingsley Shacklebolt. Everyone else named Weasley, except Percy, that is. Severus Snape. Where are their Orders of Merlin, First Class? I may have defeated Voldemort, but while we were still licking our wounds from that fight, we suddenly found ourselves fighting the man who had elected himself Voldemort's successor, the one man most people could never imagine as Dark Lord – Albus Dumbledore. I pieced it together only days ago, and that's why this battle happened. But while I was sitting in St. Mungo's relaxing, those others I mentioned were fighting for their lives against Dumbledore. Shacklebolt. Bones. Tonks. Longbottom. Moody. Granger. Lupin. Black. Cybelle. Arthur Weasley. Molly Weasley. William Weasley. Charles Weasley. Fred Weasley. George Weasley. Ronald Weasley. Ginevra Weasley. Severus Snape. Please note that while this list includes some of our finest Aurors, it also includes people who are scorned and mistrusted by the

rest of our community. Werewolf. Shapeshifter. Muggle-born. Death Eater. Convict. That list even includes an American. This was not her fight, but she was right in the thick of it. I didn't ask them to fight. They just did, because someone had to."

"Without these people, we'd be looking at another Dark Lord in charge. Albus Dumbledore was, if anything, more dangerous than Voldemort, because he could make you believe he had your best interests at heart, all the while controlling and manipulating you to follow his aims and goals, not your own. He could tell you what you wanted to hear and keep you smiling all the time he was isolating you and limiting everything you did. Under his rule there would have been no random deaths, no Dark Marks, but a level of control and draconian law unprecedented in Britain, all for the good of the people, of course. I'm sorry. I realize that this," and he gestured at the medal Percy still clutched, "is the highest honour that can be given in our world, and I really appreciate it, but my conscience simply will not permit me to accept it unless I'm accepting it with the people who really did the job. I only fought someone we all knew was evil. I had no choice. Destiny ordered it, and I was just along for the ride. But these people ... they chose to be part of this battle. They could have been elsewhere that day. But they chose this fight. Some of them were fighting it before I was ever born. After Voldemort was down, they kept fighting. And they did something harder than fighting an obvious villain. They fought someone they've trusted their entire lives. If I deserve the Order at all, it should be Second Class, compared to those people."

He looked out over the audience. "I know you were hoping to see an award given today, but I can't take credit for something that everyone else worked on. Those people I named are the true heroes of this day." He shrugged sadly and headed back for his seat. He stopped as he heard a single person begin to applaud, and he spun in time to be extremely surprised by who it was. Pansy Parkinson was alone in the crowd, on her feet, applauding. She met his eyes and nodded with a smile, and he nodded in return as he continued his way off the stage. The ovation continued as more people joined Pansy, and soon the entire crowd was on its feet, the thunderous applause staggering Percy Weasley, who was still standing there gaping like a gaffed fish.

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Many more Orders of Merlin were awarded.

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"I won't accept the nomination," Amelia Bones said to the Wizengamot. "I don't want the job, first because it would take me away from my preferred position, and second because I'm too set in the old ways. We need to change. It'll be my niece and her generation, and their children who will turn this world on its ear. They look up to Harry. Let's give him a chance to run the wizarding world for a while."

#####

"I've been nominated for *what?!?*" he asked in shock.

"Well, there were only three candidates suggested, and Amelia Bones doesn't want the job,"

Tonks said. “So that leaves it to you and the boy who *still* has never apologised to his family.”

“You mean that if I choose not to run, Stick-up-his-arse Percy runs the Ministry?” Harry closed his eyes as she nodded. “Gah. I have to run, then. We’ll be worse off if Percy wins.”

#####

Harry’s first official act as Minister was to have Dolores Umbridge arrested for using a Blood Quill on him and several other students during his fifth year. She was sent off to Azkaban for a nice five-year visit and Harry promptly forgot about her. A mistake, as it happened.

Harry’s second official act was to lift the lifetime ban on his playing Quidditch that was still in place, not because of any actual desire to play professional Quidditch, but because of the principal of the thing.

Official nepotism had always been an accepted part of Wizarding politics, so nobody was surprised when Harry started placing friends and family members in influential positions. If some were surprised by how well they did their jobs, well, they just didn’t know the people involved well enough. All of Harry’s friends and family members who were given positions of authority within the Ministry were instructed to tell him whenever he was being an arse, publicly if need be. This led to some highly entertaining rows during Cabinet meetings.

Ginny enjoyed telling Percy that her job title was Chief Concubine, and that her position was usually bent over a desk.

Tonks was vastly surprised to find out that her resignation letter had somehow “disappeared” and never been processed, and that she had therefore been collecting her Auror’s salary, including a raise for a promotion, for four years. She also received a commendation and bonus for “independent action while on an extended undercover assignment.” Some might have complained about her appointment to the Minister for Magic’s security team, but, she argued, how better to protect him than from his own bed? Even the nay-sayers had to admit she had a point. (And the three children she bore him over the years proved that she was very serious about the job.)

Arthur Weasley became the head of the newly formed Muggle Relations Department, and was happier than a kneazle in a catnip patch.

Percy was demoted to a field agent in the Misuse of Muggle Artefacts office. “Maybe when you understand what it’s like out there, you can be of greater use to the Ministry,” Harry told him. “But for now, I don’t need yes men. I have ideas, but I need people to tell me when they won’t work, not to eternally agree with me. You need to learn to admit when you’re wrong. You were wrong about me back in my fifth year, and basically cut off ties with your family because of it. They’ll accept you back, but you’ll have to prove yourself to them.”

Sirius applied for (and got) one of the few Ministry jobs Harry’s approval wasn’t enough to get him – he became an Unspeakable, an agent for the Department of Mysteries. He would neither confirm nor deny the rumour that every so often he’d go down into the Death Chamber and spit

through the Veil.

Harry made sure that Rubeus Hagrid received an acquittal for the crime Tom Riddle had framed him for all those years ago, personally bought a new wand for him, and arranged for him to get tutoring where he needed it to make up for his interrupted education.

Ron had pretty much decided that he was *not* going to become an Auror after all, so he tried out for and got a slot as reserve Keeper for the Chudley Cannons. He was never quite sure if he got it on his own merit, or because he was The Best Friend of The Boy Who Lived, and finally began to understand what Harry had been trying to tell him all those years.

Bill broke up with Fleur over her unreasonable jealousy of him, and returned to Egypt and the curse-breaking work he had been happiest with. Charlie went back to Romania and his beloved dragons. Fred and George continued making money hand over fist.

Harry set up a lot of commissions to improve life for the various magical races that coexisted with humanity. He set up proper goblin representation, to the chagrin of many in the pureblood community. He created a commission to properly deal with werewolves, setting Remus Lupin in charge of that, and staffing it almost entirely with werewolves, with enough humans to curb the tendency toward vindictiveness that he knew would undoubtedly arise.

He didn't act for total liberalization of non-human relations, however. He ordered a study of house elves, and learned some of the reason for their enslavement. Hermione went white when he gave her the study results to read, and immediately destroyed all her S.P.E.W. badges and information. She had not been prepared to learn of the massacre of wizards at the hands of the elves, who had once been an off-shoot of the goblins. The elves had actually attempted a genocide of humankind, Muggle and wizard alike, and it was only the enslavement spell that had kept wizards alive. The elves were the reason that the wizarding community was so low in population throughout Europe. Attempts to free singular elves had caused them to revert to their ancient warlike ways. Elves such as Dobby were mutants within the house elf community. This was not to say that Harry was willing to allow them to be treated as dirt – he wanted to see how much freedom that they could be given without completely freeing them from the enslavement spells.

The centaurs spent ten years watching what Harry was doing before opening proper relations with the wizarding world, based on his efforts to do real good for the non-human races. Finally, the Centaur Liaison Office was more than a joke and dead-end job.

#####

It wasn't all business, of course.

As it turned out, there had never actually been an official Ministry ruling on what constituted a marriage. The Wizarding community had more or less just gone along with the prevailing Muggle attitudes (although they had retained the custom of legal concubinage far longer). So Harry didn't have to abuse his power by pushing through a law on group marriages. He just did it, cheerfully and publicly starting the Potter Family, doing what he felt like and daring anybody to say anything

about it. The precedent set, Fred, George, Alicia, Angelina and Katie promptly took advantage of it.

The establishment of the Potter and Weasley Families seemed to be the trigger for a massive upswing in the number of marriages among the young wizards and witches who had spent virtually their entire lives in terror of Voldemort. The number of marriages caused a predictable increase in the number of babies born shortly thereafter, and Hogwarts was soon renovating abandoned classrooms and increasing the teaching staff.

Hannah Abbott and Luna Lovegood set the precedent for witches marrying each other, Hannah's practicality offsetting Luna's more unusual view of the universe. Then the two of them pounced on Neville Longbottom and dragged him kicking and screaming (but not very hard) to the altar.

The union of Minerva McGonagall, Headmistress of Hogwarts, and the Quidditch coach, Xiomara Hooch, was a nine days' wonder; the revelation that Madame Pomfrey and Filius Flitwick had already been married for twenty years didn't even get nine minutes' discussion. Rumour had it that Sybil Trelawney accosted Severus Snape in the halls and announced that the stars said she would marry someone "tall, dark, and gruesome". Rumour further had it that Snape had fled in terror at the prospect.

Surprisingly, Crabbe and Goyle surfaced just long enough to get married, as well. Neither one of them, it seemed, was as stupid as they seemed in school, and they had "vanished" into the Muggle world as soon as possible after leaving Hogwarts. They ran a bed and breakfast in Brighton and were very happy together.

#####

Harry was deep in negotiations with the American Secretary of Magic, attempting to undo the damage that a generation of isolationism and arrogance had done in international relations, when the call came into his office that Ginny and Moira had gone into labour within half an hour of each other. He'd made hasty apologies and Flooed home, with the approval of the Secretary, who was glad to see he had his priorities straight.

There he'd spent the next six hours trying to calm down Arthur, Sirius, and Remus, all of whom were nervously pacing the floors, walls, and ceilings (due to something Fred and George had slipped into their drinks), and avoiding being punched by Ron, who had a somewhat belated attack of brotherly concern about what Harry had done to his baby sister about the time the first yell came echoing down the stairs.

"Harry," said Hermione on one of her periodic trips through the parlour where the men had gathered, "You are taking all of this far too calmly. I thought fathers-to-be were supposed to panic or something. It's in the handbook, I'm sure."

He grinned. "You know I never read the books, Hermione," he said. "That's why I have you. And the rest of these clowns are doing more than enough panicking. In any event, there's nothing I can do unless something decides to attack. Then I'll kill it. The rest of it is up to you ladies. Just let

me know when it's time for me to go in there and have Ginny threaten my life if I ever come near her again, all right?"

But for all his aplomb, Harry's knees went weak when he was introduced to Liliane Elspeth Potter and James Orion Potter, the latter with hair quite as red as his mother's and sticking out in as many directions as his father's.

#####

The Ministry was completely modernized, as Harry pulled all the offices except the Department of Mysteries out of the ground and put it into a high-rise. "The Ministry has been hiding underground like the ostrich buries its head in the sand," he told the Wizengamot while campaigning for the funding necessary. "We need to be able to see the world that we're affecting, damn it!" He'd had a long talk with Hermione afterwards about the misuse of the ostrich in his comments, since the bird didn't actually do that, she'd told him, but he won when that same speech caused an overwhelming vote to follow through on his plan. His apology for being right led to their daughter Melissa.

#####

Percy unbent enough to apologize to his family after being in the field dealing with killer teapots and enchanted pennywhistles for a year or so, married Penelope Clearwater and started his own family. All of his sons turned out like Fred and George, much to his disgust.

#####

At some point, Harry realized that what Tonks had told him all those years ago was true, that if you had hands and a tongue, anything else was gravy. He discovered this when he looked down during one of the regular Potter family 'parties' and discovered that the redhead doing marvellous things to him was not Ginny. He gave in to the inevitable as gracefully as possible. For his part, Ron discovered that he could indeed function with women under some circumstances, and Hermione made sure that her second child was his.

#####

As a favour to the Norton Institute, Harry agreed to make an appearance at a general assembly and also do presentations as a "Guest Lecturer" in several classes. Moira came with him and was set to do several Guest Lecturer slots herself. The Institute hadn't changed much in the years Harry and Moira had been gone. The halls still connected oddly. Students still dressed in an amazingly eclectic conglomeration of styles (and, Harry thought resignedly, "ugly" was still in fashion). And Aloysius Davis was still the Defence teacher.

One thing had changed, however. Harry had never really understood the lack of ghostly personnel at the school, although Moira said there were theoretical reasons for it. Spiritual theory had never been Harry's strong point, so he just accepted it. Shortly after their arrival, while they were visiting with Lissa Raines before the assembly, a tall, thin, spectral man in Victorian formal dress

walked through the closed door. He stood in front of Harry and looked him over closely, then lifted his top hat and gave a formal bow. Harry stood and bowed in return. The man smiled slightly, nodded graciously at the ladies present, and turned to go out through the door again.

Harry looked at Lissa quizzically. “Well, Harry, I think you have just gained the approval of the Emperor. He rarely shows that much respect for anyone,” she said.

“Emperor ... Norton? What’s he doing here? I thought you didn’t have ghosts.”

“We do now. They started showing up a little while after you left. Apparently the rift that was opened to rescue Sirius never sealed completely, and a few ghosts decided to join us. The Emperor was the first. He never says anything, just pops in to, I guess, supervise classes from time to time. We also have a Miss Victoria Beamish, who died during the Quake of ’06 and is now teaching Department for Young Ladies, Don Francisco Santoya Ruiz, who dates from the Spanish colonial period, and a young man in a motorcycle jacket who haunts the girls’ locker rooms and won’t give us his name.”

“No little Chinese man who says ‘Dorf’?”

“No, we haven’t seen a trace of him. And we’ve been watching. We have seen a number of other spirits passing through, although they don’t stay. Some of them have taken up residence in the area, so soon we may develop as much of a reputation as, say, Savannah, Georgia, for our ghostly population.”

“Well, if you do see the Chinese fellow, thank him for us, will you? We owe him a tremendous debt.”

“Of course I will. In the meantime, we’ve arranged a staff luncheon before your afternoon presentation. Many of our teachers are looking forward to meeting you for the first time.”

“You didn’t tell them?”

“That would ruin the surprise,” she said, her lips quirking upwards. “Remember, you were wearing a glamour through all the time you were here – subtle, but enough that they don’t recognize the British Minister as the boy who graduated seven years ago.”

Harry smiled slowly as he thought it through. “That means Davis ...”

“Right. He’s been in seventh heaven since we announced you were coming, though. Going on and on about how wonderful it will be to finally meet his hero, the Defence genius, so forth and so on. I think he had some ideas on how to prevent Dark Lords from happening in the first place he wanted to discuss with you. Something about validation of children’s feelings and self-actualization. Or was it self-empowerment? I stopped listening a short way in.”

“Self-empowerment? Davis? He’s the last person I’d expect to be talking about anybody’s empowerment except his own,” said Harry. “Well, let’s go and get this over with. We’ll spring

your little surprise and then hopefully I'll never have to deal with the man again."

Lissa escorted them to the staff lounge, which had been done up for a formal luncheon, with snowy linens covering the scuffed old tables. The senior members of the staff had gathered to await their illustrious guest. Most of them had the grace not to rush Harry as soon as he came in the door, but not Davis. The Defence teacher practically jumped to greet him, grabbing his hand and shaking it hard. "Minister Potter, I can't tell you how pleased I am ... we all are ... to be meeting you at last!"

"Ah, thank you," said Harry, faintly. "And you are?"

"Aloysius Davis, Defence Master for the Norton Institute, at your service."

"At my service? Then would you mind releasing my hand, Mr. Davis? Thank you very much. Yes, now I remember you clearly. You've changed some since the last time I was here."

"The last time ... surely not, I'd recall ..."

"Oh, well, that was before the Final Battle and all, you see. I was travelling incognito. A good disguise being part of Defence, you know."

"Oh, yes, obviously. It must have been an excellent disguise indeed if I didn't see through it. A total change from your true appearance, I dare say."

"Actually, no. Sometimes the more minor changes are the most effective. I used some Mundane makeup to cover this," he said, touching the now-faded scar on his forehead, "and then just lightened my hair from black to brown, so," and his hair obligingly changed color, "changed my eyes from green to blue," and his eyes shifted to a clear blue, "and a few changes to my jawline, and voila!" Daniel Radcliffe stood before them, grinning merrily at Davis, whose normally florid skin was turning rather pasty-looking.

The luncheon passed more cheerfully than such things usually did, now that the teachers knew that the nice young British boy they'd taught years before was really Harry Potter. Some of them even slipped and called him "Dan" during the luncheon. Davis sat as far as he could from Harry and remained resolutely silent, a welcome change from his normal behaviour. Harry's speech and question and answer period went over well, the students being as enthusiastic, intelligent and irreverent as Harry remembered. But the best part, the absolute best part, was that he had been scheduled for a "mock duel" with Davis. When that part of the program arrived, the older man stalked out on the stage clad in a formal duelling robe similar to the one Snape had worn all those years before at Hogwarts.

"Minister Potter has graciously consented to a display of basic combat techniques in the form of a duel," he announced, his voice cold. In the period between luncheon and now, his humiliation had been replaced with anger. In his mind, "Dan Radcliffe" was an arrogant little twerp who needed to be put in his place, but Harry Potter was the greatest Defence Master living. If the two were one, one of those images had to go. Somehow Davis had chosen the wrong one. He obviously intended

to show that Potter wasn't as good as everyone (including himself up to a few hours before) said he was.

"As you are all aware, of course," Harry said, "a true fight is very different from the ritualized format of a duel. The first rule of fighting is to win, using whatever advantages you have to end the fight quickly. In this case, however, I'll be giving up my staff," and he tossed it to Moira, "because it is an unfair advantage in a duel, given that I can fire spells out of both ends of it, it has a much greater power amplification effect than a wand, and it extends my reach by six feet. It also doubles as a Mundane weapon, and there's no wizard so powerful that a good whack on the head won't seriously inconvenience him." *My predecessor in office being a case in point*, he thought grimly as he drew his wand from its pocket in his sleeve and then removed his outer robe. He would have much more freedom of movement in trousers and shirt. "Shall we, Mr. Davis?"

They performed the bow and salute, and faced off. There was a moment of absolute stillness as each waited for the other to make a move. This was possibly the most important phase of the duel, as the wizards fought for the psychological advantage. Davis cracked first, shouting "*Expelliarmus!*" and whipping his wand through the air in the classical disarming move. But by the time the spell hit, Harry had simply shifted his wand to his other hand. The spell missed. Davis spat out the incantation for a full body bind, and Harry shielded against it. Davis tossed spell after spell, and Harry effortlessly countered them all, although he had yet to throw an offensive spell of his own. Instead, he continued his lecture, pausing only to block, counter, and duck Davis' attacks.

"As you may have noticed," *duck* "I'm not actually doing any attacking here." *block* "All I'm doing is defending. I could keep this up all day," *counter* "but it wouldn't get me anywhere. That's why the emphasis" *counter* "in most Defence classes is on protection, but we also learn" *counter* *block* *counter* "to be as offensive as possible. I won't go that far," *block* *block* *block* "because my maximum offence could bring this whole building down around our ears."

"Braggart!" yelled Davis.

"Simple truth," replied Harry. "So instead I'll take advantage of my opponent's weakness, but first I have to find it. Sooo... *Accio Boggart!*" snapped Harry, and a white ball of light popped into existence between the two men. Almost immediately, it shifted form into a great black serpent, baring its fangs at Davis.

The American Defence Master gasped and shifted his attack from Harry to the serpent, although all his spells did was to cause the snake to split into two serpents, then three, then five, then ... whey-faced, he backed away from the reptiles as they slithered towards him with sinister malice. "Potter ... call them off!" he shouted.

"There's only one creature there, Davis. A simple boggart. Surely you know how to deal with a boggart, Mr. Davis?"

But it appeared that Davis did not know how to deal with a boggart. Instead he let off a blasting spell that shattered the floor beneath the snakes, dropping them into a crawl space beneath. Down

in the darkness, the snakes apparently recombined, for the head of a giant serpent thrust its way up out of the hole, still focused on Davis. "Do you yield, Mr. Davis?" Harry asked, and the panicked man nodded frantically. Harry lazily pointed his wand at the back of the snake's head. "*Riddikulus!*" he called out, and the snake spun to face him. Then it turned into a balloon snake which flew around the room as it deflated. The boggart turned back into its ball of light form and then vanished with a pop. Harry repaired the shattered floor and crossed to Davis, holding out his hand. Davis grudgingly shook it, but as Harry turned away, sheer hatred contorted his face.

"You little *son of a – Nux vomica!*" Davis unleashed the curse at Harry's back.

"*Protego!*" Moira's wand whipped through the sign for the protective shield between Davis and Harry. Harry whirled to catch the staff that was already flying toward him, tossed by his enraged wife. The holly wood shaft slapped into his hand, and in two steps he was on Davis, the end of the staff poking painfully into the man's throat.

"You do surprise me after all, Davis. I wouldn't have thought you knew anything out of the *vomica* series. Cursing a man when his back is turned, *that* I'd expect of you." He abruptly reversed the staff and used the other end to sweep Davis' legs out from under him. "Now I'll strongly suggest that you get off this stage, out of this room, and out of this school, at least as long as I'm here."

Davis got. And union or no, this time the school administration was able to make his dismissal stick – attacking a visiting dignitary trumped tenure, big time.

#####

Liliane and James were not quite nine, and Harry was beginning his second term, when Harry opened the door one day to discover Charlie Watson's eldest daughter on the doorstep. She had grown from the cute and somewhat sexy 'Quidditch hottie' into an astonishing woman, and the other ladies ushered her into the house while Harry stood with his jaw on the ground. He finally followed and discovered that Tara had arrived to petition the ladies for a chance to become one of Harry's wives, thereby causing his jaw to drop again. He made a rapid trip to San Francisco almost immediately.

"Harry! Good to see you again! You're right on time," Charlie said with a grin.

"What do you mean 'right on time'?" Harry asked suspiciously.

"Tara called us from outside your home. I figured it would be no more than half an hour before you arrived to find out if I knew about what her plans are."

"My wives make any decisions like that. What's *your* take on this, Charlie? If this is going to cost me your friendship, then even if my wives tell me it's happening, it won't happen."

Charlie's hand clapped onto Harry shoulder as he looked over to his wife. "Gina, this is exactly why I have no problems with Tara's decision." He looked back to Harry. "We talked about it, and

Gina was honestly a little worried – hell, I'm a little weirded on the concept, but it seems to work for you guys – but we decided that Tara's an adult now, so she's free to make her own life decisions. And if there's anyone in this world we can trust not to hurt her intentionally, it's you. I'd be proud to call you my son-in-law." He laughed. "I like you so much I'll even forego the standard threats that a father is supposed to make when meeting his daughter's intended."

"I appreciate that, especially since I know you could follow through on them. I really don't know what to do though, Charlie. When I was here and calling her a Quidditch hottie, I wasn't paying attention to her ... uh, charms. Now she's at my house petitioning my wives to allow her to join the family." He put his head into his hands. "Part of me still sees the thirteen year old girl trying to dress sexy for the 'older man', and part of me sees the woman doing it successfully now that she's twenty-three."

"Can you see yourself getting into an argument and kissing and making up afterwards?" Gina Watson said suddenly. "Can you see yourself sitting in the kitchen and talking over the fact that she thinks you spend too much time bowling, or working in the workshop, or whatever? Can you see yourself simply sitting there and holding her with nothing sexual happening?"

Harry closed his eyes for a moment and let his mind go back to the thirteen year old he'd known. "I couldn't think of her romantically then, but she was my closest friend here." He opened his eyes. "And when the day is done, that's the important part. They were all my friends before I was informed that they loved me." He met their eyes. "I'll not intentionally hurt Tara, you know that."

"I know. Now go home and get to know your new wife," Gina laughed.

He reappeared in the entry hall of 12 Grimmauld Place to be met with several amused faces. Tara stepped forward. "So, did Mom and Dad give their blessing?"

"Considering I was told to get to know my new wife?" he laughed. "Good God, Tara – you were cute and getting sexy those few years ago, but wow! I assume you've gotten good with a Quidditch bat?"

She laughed and grinned at him. "Too much time to get a good swing. I just fondle and then make a fist."

Harry couldn't help but laugh at Sirius's muffled "Urk!"

#####

Severus Snape saw the oncoming wave of “Potter spawn”, as he put it, and decided that perhaps teaching Potions was not a long-term plan for him after all. It was hard to say which terrified him more, the Potter offspring, the ever-burgeoning Weasley clan, or the prospect of having to teach Longbottom’s three children. He retired to do research and live off the profits from his proprietary potions (no one had been aware that he held the patents on Skele-Gro and a number of other medicinal potions, which made him wealthy enough to do just about anything he wanted). Over the years, he was able to relax and was actually reported to smile every so often.

#####

As the years passed, Moira took over as Divination teacher at Hogwarts, and aired out the tower. Divination became a much less “woolly” discipline and attracted fewer air-headed girls, but the number of male students in the class doubled. Sybil Trelawney retired to operate a 1-800 psychic hot line in New York. She became quite wealthy and appeared on numerous talk shows.

#####

It was, perhaps, no surprise to anybody except Severus when Harry gave him an invitation to one of the monthly Potter Family orgies. It was no surprise to anybody except Sirius when Severus accepted. It was no surprise when Sirius picked a fight with Severus immediately upon his arrival at Pottersfield. It was a vast surprise to everybody when Remus dragged both Sirius and Severus off into a private room, explained to Sirius how Severus had kept him from killing himself after Sirius went through the Veil, how they had kept up a relationship through the four years that followed, and how Severus had backed off without comment when Sirius returned. Remus demanded that Sirius and Severus “work through” their differences. It was several hours before the three men emerged from the room, looking thoroughly shagged. A year after that, Severus bowed to the inevitable and changed his name to Potter, just like the rest of them.

#####

Harry did not experience a single assassination attempt until he had been in office for fifteen years. He was actually able to save the life of the would-be assassin, which had been difficult, considering that his family was rather ... spirited in stating their displeasure. When the assassin had finally regained consciousness in St. Mungo's, he kept murmuring that he should have believed his friends who tried to prevent him from taking the commission. “Now I can believe that he survived the A-K twice...” was all he said for more than a day. His mission had finally been traced to the last of the Nott family, which had been financially ruined when Voldemort died.

#####

The second assassination attempt came a year or so later.

Platform 9 $\frac{3}{4}$ was filled with the usual crowd of parents waiting to welcome the Hogwarts Express bearing their children back from school. The adults of the Potter Family were there en masse to collect the seven children they had in the first through third years (Liliane and James in third year, Deirdre Maureen and Peter David in the second year, and Melissa Anne, Julian Patrick, and Geoffrey Dorian in first). The Minister stood where the first car would pull up, distinctive in his habitual white cloak and carrying his holly staff, idly scratching an itchy spot on the back of his right hand while trying not to look as proud and excited as any other parent welcoming the children back after a long year at school. Huffing and hissing, the great steam locomotive pulled up against the platform. Melissa barely waited for the passenger car doors to open before she launched herself at her father, squealing with delight and attempting to explain all about her entire first year in ten seconds or less. Liliane rolled her eyes with all the disdain a thirteen-year-old could muster for a younger sister, and waited for the stairs to be lowered so that she and the rest of

the clan could descend with a bit more decorum. All along the platform, parents waved to attract children's attention and children jostled each other as they each tried to be first out of their cars.

Suddenly the steam whistle on the old locomotive let loose a piercing blast, then another. The engineer stuck his head out of the window and yelled, "Clear the platform now! Engine's cutting loose! I'll hold her as long as I can!" A gout of steam erupted from a splitting seam in the engine's iron skin. Harry handed off a screaming Melissa to the nearest adult and slapped a binding on it, but felt the strain as whatever was inside the engine demanded to be let out.

He threw a quick *sonorus* spell on himself. "Everyone that can Apparate, grab as many children as you can and go to the Ministry! Doesn't matter if they're your own kids, just grab and get! I'm opening the lobby for emergency access. If you can't Apparate, grab as many children as you can and get to the Muggle platform and get the hell out of the station. Leave the luggage, it's not important! Go, people, go, go, go!" There was screaming as children and parents fought to find each other, but many groups did just as Harry said, grabbing the first available children and getting off the platform whatever way was possible. The engine was rocking back and forth ferociously by now, and Harry had it wrapped in a web of pure magic. From somewhere inside the cab, he could hear the engineer rattling off a string of spells. "Get out of there while you can, man!" Harry screamed.

"Take your own advice!" yelled Tonks. "You have to get out! The Aurors are coming to handle this!"

"I can't – I'm holding the thing stable. Get the children out. I'll scam and let it go when the platform's clear!"

A burst of steam shot out through the cab. *Probably the door to the firebox went*, Harry realized. The wizard in the cab was no longer chanting spells.

"Harry, your hand!"

Harry looked. On the back of his right hand were the words, I WILL NOT TELL LIES, clearly etched in blood red lettering. "Umbridge," he growled. "Letting me know this is her work. Tonks, get the fuck out of here before – oh *shit!*" He gathered her up in his arms and dived over a luggage trolley, rolling behind a brick pillar. The exploding engine tore loose of the webs he had bound it with, and gouts of steam filled the air. Over the sound of rending metal, Harry heard a distinctive hissing scream, a sound no human throat ever made.

He risked a look around the edge of the pillar. Barely visible through the steam was the shape of a six-legged, lizard-like creature rising up out of the shattered engine. It seemed to be made of solid flame, with orange and yellow and blue flickering over its skin. It slithered out of the twisted metal and landed on the platform, and to Harry's astonishment, the concrete pavement began to burn where its clawed feet touched. "What is it?" Tonks asked, since he was keeping her behind the pillar and she couldn't see.

"Salamander. Biggest one I've ever seen. Somebody must have put it in the firebox and then cast

an enlargement on it. There's more than enough fuel around here for it to keep itself alive. Oh, hell."

The salamander was heading for the wall that lead to the Muggle part of King's Cross Station. When it hit the permeable brickwork, the wall exploded outwards into the thronged concourse, and the fiery beast flowed through the hole, leaving the tumbled stones partly melted and fused together. There were more screams and shrieks as Muggles and Wizards alike fled for their lives. Harry and Tonks followed the creature, scrambling over the hot stones, heedless of the fact that the soles of their shoes were smouldering. Harry saw spells shooting out of the crowd, trying to hold the beast back, and thought he saw Ron and Hermione in the mob. He cast his net spell again, covering it in magical webbing. "Family!" he shouted, his voice rising above the screams and babble since the *sonorus* was still in effect. "Add strength to the webbing. Help me hold it down! Tonks, do you have your PDA? Set quantum tunnel, coordinates for Mt. Erebus. Tie it into the web, now!"

Tonks worked frantically at her PDA, and suddenly the salamander disappeared from sight. "That's that," said Tonks with grim satisfaction. "Now the cleanup. About a million Memory Modifications to start with."

"No, we start with finding Umbridge. She has to be here, she would have wanted to see this." He scanned the crowd rapidly, and saw a place where people, still fleeing the place where the salamander had been, were being pushed out of the way by an otherwise invisible being. "There! *Aperio!*" The toad-like form of Dolores Umbridge appeared as his spell stripped away her Concealment Charm.

"POTTER!" Umbridge shrieked. "I'm going to *kill* you!" She brandished her wand in the first move of the Killing Curse.

"I don't *think* so!" he yelled, and dove at her in a flying tackle, staff and all. They both hit the ground and vanished with a CRACK!

They reappeared on a slope of black stone and grit, fell and rolled apart from each other. Harry regained his feet first, winding up some distance upslope of the outraged witch. He glanced around for a second to get his bearings. The air was bitter cold but laced with the smell of sulphur. The sky was dark overhead. What light there was came from starlight and a red glare from the bottom of the slope, where something burned fitfully.

"You and your *whole family!*" screamed Umbridge, apparently locked on the one concept, her words blown away in the icy wind. "AVADA –"

"*Surujnoc,*" whispered Harry, using his special spell on another being for a second time. Then he dove to the ground. With a resounding BOOM! Dolores Umbridge exploded, spraying everything around her with bits of red and pink. The explosion set off an avalanche on the unstable slope, and the gory scree began to slide down hill, followed by the portion of the slope to which Harry was clinging. Shaken by the explosion and unable to get to his feet in the mass of moving stone, Harry fought to keep his grip on his staff and hoped the rockslide would stop before it got too far down.

When it did stop, he found himself surrounded by even thicker clouds of sulphurous gases. He tried to draw a breath and choked on the stench. His eyes, nose and lungs burned. He crawled upwards as far as he could, but the lack of oxygen kept him from getting very far, and he could hear the hissing of an angry salamander, coming to investigate the disturbance. Not good. Very, very not good. He had no strength, he couldn't breathe, he was going to pass out and be roasted and eaten by a salamander ...

It wasn't clawed lizard feet that appeared in his fading vision, but human feet in trousers and boots. Hands grabbed his arms and dragged him upslope a short way, and then there was the CRACK! of Apparation and the crater of Mt. Erebus was left to the salamander.

His vision blurry, Harry looked up at his rescuers as they let him down on the cool floor of the Station. "The children?" he croaked.

"We're trying to get everyone together," said Tonks, and Sirius held him down when he tried to get up. "Don't move, you're hurt worse than you know. Just rest." Tonks hit him with a first-aid tranquilizing spell, and the last thing Harry heard before he spiralled down into darkness was the sound of approaching sirens.

#####

He woke blind and bound, and his sense of smell was gone. His throat was raw and it hurt to breathe. Frantically, he tugged at the bindings holding his wrists. A cool hand touched him across the forehead. "Hush, love, hush," came Hermione's unmistakeable voice. "You're all right. The mediwitches had to tie your hands because you were thrashing for a bit. Do you understand? Don't talk, just nod." Harry nodded. Given the condition of his throat, he didn't think it would be possible to talk. The hand left his forehead and he felt tugging at one wrist, then another, as the bonds were undone. Hermione kept murmuring reassuring babble while she did it, and Harry was soothed by the sound of her voice. Background noise told him he was at St. Mungo's.

"You're going to be all right," Hermione repeated. "You were exposed to a lot of sulphur gas which converted to acid in your eyes, nose, mouth and lungs. That's why it hurts and your eyes are bandaged. You've already been treated and the mediwitches tell me you'll recover fully. Also the burns on your hands and legs. Now I suppose you want to know about the children?" Harry nodded again. "We got everybody out except James. He got separated from the rest of us. He ... instead of getting off the train right away, *your fool son* decided to go through the next few cars to make sure the firsties got off safely – you know how they congregate at the head end of the train. So he made them all move to the back of the train to get off, but didn't follow his own advice, and got to the platform just as the engine blew."

Harry gasped, and he mouthed, 'Dead?' He didn't want to know the answer, but he *had* to know. James was his special child, the child of his Oath.

"No, at least ... he was still alive when they brought him through triage a little while ago, and they whisked him off to Critical Care. Ginny's with him, and she'll let me know as soon as she knows anything. As for the rest of us, we all made it through all right. Tonks and Sirius are having

treatment for their lungs, too – where *did* you go to, by the way? – I suppose we should just be glad that blind Apparation you did followed the quantum tunnel before it collapsed. Ginny and Severus and I are here, Remus and Ron took the children home, and of course Tara was there with the babies already. Moira's still at the Station working with the victims.”

Harry heard Hermione sigh heavily. “This one's a mess, Harry. We've got families scattered all over London, wounded wizards at Muggle hospitals and Muggles here at St. Mungo's. It was the only place to treat them for salamander fire burns. Molly and Arthur are at the Ministry, she's working on getting the families reunited and Arthur's working with Muggle Emergency Services and Scotland Yard to coordinate the cover-up. We're sure we can find some terrorist group or other to pin this on. Maybe one will even volunteer. The Unspeakables are going crazy trying to rebuild the warding on Platform 9 ¾ - at the moment anyone can just look through that hole in the wall. We don't know how many killed and injured there were, either wizard or Muggle. All that will take a while to sort out, I'm afraid.”

It did, indeed, take a while to sort out. James lost his left eye, but they put in a prosthetic that he could make spin around in a really cool fashion like Mad-Eye Moody. Ginny insisted that he not have any of the stranger functions, like being able to see through things, until he was seventeen, much to his disgust. Harry recovered with his usual rapidity, and the potions they used on his eyes also corrected his vision, so that he finally discarded his glasses, though not without a touch of regret.

Harry ordered the creation of a new badge to be added to the Order of Merlin, called the Starburst for Extreme Heroism, which he privately called the Starburst for Suicidal Stupidity. The Order First Class, with Starburst, was awarded posthumously to the engineer who had given his life trying to hold the salamander back. Harry then had to explain to James why getting the first-years off the train safely entitled him to a commendation ribbon, but losing his eye did not qualify him for a Starburst, given that he was not doing something heroic, but something bloody stupid at the time. James pouted but was happy enough with his ribbon in the long run.

Harry himself refused to accept any commendation, award or Order for his actions, on the grounds that he already had one. His family understood his guilt for not being able to save everyone, and every life lost that day weighed on his spirit. Since he was, after all, the highest authority in the wizarding world, there was no appealing his decision. He was not, however, the highest authority in the Muggle world, and Arthur Weasley was perfectly positioned to go around him.

Thus it was that one Harry James Potter, Baron Black, for outstanding and unspecified services to the Crown, found himself further elevated to Viscount Potter, and inducted as a Knight of the Order of the Garter on the Queen's next Christmas Honours List. His family grinned smugly as he bowed to the inevitable.

#####

Vernon Dursley always perused the lists of honours being presented, if only so he could make scathing comments about the artists and musicians and other pansies who undoubtedly bought their honours, and also make note of who to suck up to if he ever met them in person. So it was

that one morning, his eye lighted on the notice about Harry's elevation. *No. It couldn't be. Not that little freak!* But there was a picture, and it was definitely him, freak hair and all, with a gorgeous redhead on his arm. *He's a BARON? Was a Baron all this time? And now he was going to be a Viscount. and be Knighted by the Queen, and it was all for being a FREAK!?*

Vernon's blood pressure had never exactly been low, and now it shot into the spectacularly high range. Several overtaxed blood vessels in his brain gave up the contest and burst. With an eloquent cry of "Urgh!" he fell face forward into the marmalade, where Dudley (still living at home at the age of thirty-six) found him when he came down for breakfast shortly after noon.

#####

Dudley was none too pleased with Harry's sudden elevation to the ranks of the aristocracy either, but he was smart enough to realize that this probably meant Harry had somehow acquired some money. People just didn't become Knights or Barons if they were broke. And this, Dudley reasoned, meant that he could probably terrify the little shrimp into giving him some of it, since he, Dudley, had never bothered to learn a trade, but had assumed he'd be able to sponge off his parents for his entire life, and now needed to find someone else to sponge off.

Harry was rather surprised to receive a letter from his cousin. Its rather poorly-veiled threats left no doubt as to what he wanted. So he consulted his family and had his "secretary" (Tonks, enjoying herself immensely) call Dudley and set up a meeting. Dudley did have a bit of native shrewdness, and realized that perhaps having a private meeting with a known wizard was not the right way to go about things. Who know what Harry could turn him into? So he suggested a coffee shop he knew of in Little Whinging, where they could have a conversation in relative privacy and in some security that neither would be able to attack the other.

Dudley arrived early, ordered an extra-large coffee and half a dozen crumpets from the new guy behind the counter (tall skinny guy with a hawk nose and a hairnet holding back his dark hair, who seemed to be having far too much fun operating the coffee machines), and claimed a corner booth. While he waited for Harry, he spent the time idly checking out the legs on the secretary type at the centre table. The two men playing chess and the black woman with a sullen teenage daughter he ignored.

Shortly after the agreed-upon time, a shiny black limousine pulled into the car park. A chauffeur got out, opened the door for Harry, opened the door to the coffee shop for Harry, and went to get Harry's coffee while Harry himself slid into the booth across from Dudley. Dudley gave his cousin a thorough once-over. Harry had ditched the glasses somewhere, probably wore contacts, and that nasty red scar had finally faded. His hair still went every which way. But the last time he'd seen his cousin, he'd been an angry teenager. Now there was a very expensively dressed, very self-assured man sitting across from him.

Harry scornfully flicked a crumb from the table, wearing an expression he'd nicked from Draco Malfoy's repertoire, now that Malfoy wasn't using it any more. Dudley was just as big a loser as he had suspected; apparently his cousin had neglected his boxing regime and let the muscle he'd built go back to fat. His blond hair desperately needed a wash, and so did his clothes, and a shave

wouldn't be amiss, either. "Dudley, my dear cousin," he said, swiping Malfoy's drawl to go with the sneer. "What could possibly be so urgent that you'd ask me to come all the way down to Little Whinging? In the middle of a workday yet?"

"Don't try to pull all that plummy nob shit with me, Potter. I don't know what you did or who you fooled to get where you are, but I know who you are and where you came from. And what happened when you were there. So unless you want some very messy gossip to hit the papers, and maybe have the oh-so-colourful details passed along to your charming wife, you'll play along with me, same as you ever did."

"I will, hey?" Harry lost some of his assumed sophistication. "You expect me to just roll over for you, Dudders?"

"You did before," said Dudley, with more than a touch of smugness. "I'm sure you remember, you, me, Piers and the boys behind the hedgerow at the play park? We did have some good times, didn't we?"

"What do you want?" said Harry, bluntly.

"Well, I don't know if you read the obits, but the old man blew a gasket a little ways back. Sudden stroke. Left me nothing but Privet Drive, mortgaged to the hilt, and a car that needs work. Now, what made it interesting was that it was reading about your elevation to the gentry that gave him his invitation to the Great Beyond. I found the newspaper turned to that article, and he'd sprayed toast crumbs all over it."

"How charming," said Harry.

"Yeah, well, I figure it's all your fault, isn't it? You hadn't done whatever it was – 'unspecified service to the Crown,' was it? Who'd you have to pay off for that one? – my Dad would still be alive, still be working, and I'd still have my meal ticket. So I figure you owe me."

"Do I now? And how much do you figure I owe you? Enough to pay off the mortgage? Enough to get you out of the country? Enough to keep you the rest of your life?"

"Oh, that last sounds nice. Very nice. And from the looks of you, you wouldn't even miss it, now would you, Your Lordship, sir?"

"Probably not. Although it would go against the grain. Tell you what, I've got two, not one, but two counter-offers. You can take your pick. First is, I'll give you a job. Real work, for real pay, with reasonable room and board thrown in."

"A job? Yeah, right. Lock me in the attic, like as not."

"I'm not like you, Dudders, or hadn't you noticed that. Lord knows why I'm giving you even one more chance, but I am. You can take the job and get on your feet. Go to school. Learn something useful. Make a life for yourself that doesn't involve beating up kids and taking their lunch

money.”

“And your other offer?”

Harry drew his wand out of his sleeve and laid it on the table. Dudley blanched. “Remember the tail, Duddykins? I can always finish what Hagrid started. And then take it one step further and make ham sandwiches.”

“You wouldn’t dare! We’re in public, and your Ministry would-”

Harry chuckled. “Oh, I’m on quite good terms with the Ministry these days. I could do what I like, and nary an owl would I see. And besides-” he flicked the wand at the coffee shop’s windows and the light from outside dimmed, as if the glass itself had become smoky. “Nobody outside will notice a thing now. And as for our audience,” he gestured and Dudley suddenly became aware that every other person in the coffee shop, even the guy behind the counter, was paying close attention to their conversation. The bushy-haired secretary with the great legs had placed a wand on the table in front of her, the two chess players had theirs in their hands, lazily pointing to the floor, and the counterman was twirling his idly in his fingers. Even the teenager had one. “Everybody in this shop is a witch or wizard, Dudley, and a member of my Family. Think anybody’s going to say boo about anything I do in here? Time’s flying, and I have things to do. Important things. What do you say, Dudley? The job, or ... the other? I’m afraid paying you off is no longer on your list of options.”

Dudley took the job.

Harry produced a sheet of parchment with the terms he’d outlined. Harry was to provide a job, room and board, reasonable salary, would not threaten, harass, demean or insult Dudley, etc. etc. Dudley was to do the job to the best of his ability, was not to harass, threaten, insult, or offer violence to any member of Harry’s Family or any guest, was allowed to use the recreation facilities on the estate, and was free to leave at any time he wished, on the proviso that he would thereafter have no contact with Harry or his Family again ever. Harry had spent quite a bit of time on the contract, and it had virtually no unclear phrasing that could trip either of them up. Harry signed it with a flourish; Dudley with rather more uncertainty, especially since he wasn’t quite sure how to use a quill. But it was signed and Harry sealed it, and duplicated it with a little flash of magic. Dudley took his copy with shaking fingers.

“Your mother is going to be very happy with you, Dudley.”

“M-Mum? I haven’t seen her since ... since the divorce.”

“Well, we got in touch a while ago. We’ve been working together and cleared up a lot of our differences. She’s the one who said I ought to give you a chance instead of, well, instead of what I wanted to do. I didn’t think highly of you, Dudley, and I still don’t, but she says you’re capable of improvement. So if you’re willing to stick by the terms of what you signed, I’ll keep to my side.”

“Can I see my Mum? Can you tell me where she’s living?”

Harry chuckled. “Well, at the moment she and her new husband – and your half-brother – are living in the guest house on my estate, and I expect she’ll be wanting to see as much of you as you can handle.”

“Half-brother?” Dudley whispered.

“Yep, there’s more family now than just us. Lots more. You’ll see. For now, your Mum is waiting out in the limo. The car will take you by Privet Drive and you can pack the things you’ll need for a long stay. I can connect you with my solicitor if you want to rent the house out so you have some extra income. But that’s up to you. I have to get back to the office. I’ll see you later, Dudley.”

Sirius, in his chauffeur’s uniform, took Dudley’s arm and helped him to his feet. “You’re doing the right thing. Both of you,” he said, and lead Dudley out to the limo.

When they were gone, Hermione, Moira and Tonks, who now resumed her usual form, jumped up and hugged him. “We’re so proud of you, Harry!” Hermione whispered in his ear.

“That was so ugly. I just wanted to hex that smirk off his face. I was really considering the sandwich option.”

“But you didn’t, Harry. Instead you gave him the chance to redeem himself. It’s up to him if he takes it.”

“The saving-people thing strikes again, I suppose?” he said with a wry smile.

“If you ever lost it, you wouldn’t be you any more, Harry. Now, what do you have planned for the rest of the afternoon?” she purred.

“Alas, I wasn’t kidding when I said I had to get back to the office. Paperwork awaits. Although,” he said, looking at her consideringly, “I think you’d fit in the space under the desk as well as Ginny does ...”

“Ooh, let’s go find out!” said Hermione, smiling, and the two said their farewells to the others and Apparated out.

“My own desk is awash in paper, unfortunately,” said Tonks. “What are you going to do, Moira?”

“I cancelled classes for the rest of the afternoon so I could be there when Sirius gets back to the estate with Dudley. I’ll have to console him for making the effort to help Dudley pack, poor dear.”

“We’re just going to finish our game,” said Remus. “Although I can tell already Ron’s going to kick my tail as usual. Severus, how about another latte?”

“As you wish,” said the Potions Master. “I took the counter kid’s shift for the rest of the day, so I’m stuck here until four anyway. You know, these espresso machines are really quite nice. I’m wondering if they could be adapted for expressing the essences of potions ingredients?...”

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At the end of his third term as Minister, Harry informed the Wizengamot and the populace that he was not running again, and if nominated or elected would run away to San Francisco to seek asylum. Reluctantly, they took him at his word, and he retired to work on his wands and PDAs. By this time, Muggle electronics had caught up with his quantum tunnel work, at least on a small scale, and had gone a long way toward proving Clarke's Third Law. Harry sat back and prepared to live happily ever after. He'd earned it.

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Petunia Evans had married Everett Marchbanks, a Squib relation of the redoubtable Griselda Marchbanks. Although she had thought herself beyond child-bearing age, much to her surprise, she gave birth to a healthy baby boy a year later. Jubilation Marchbanks went on to become the greatest wizard of his age. But that's another story.

Harry Potter and the Paradigm Shift Out-take: Voldemort flubs his lines...

Outtake: Voldemort Flubs His Lines.

... At eleven-forty-five exactly, the loud cracks of Apparation sounded in the clearing, and a large number of Death Eaters appeared, with a tall creature in the centre, trying to appear majestic. Harry waited a few moments for the cracks to end before whispering “Now!” into the PDA. He felt the wards snap into existence.

The Death Eaters looked around. “I’ll kill the fool for setting me up like this!” Voldemort hissed, loud enough for all to hear.

“You won’t live long enough for that, Tommie,” Harry said, standing up from his hiding place. “Today’s the day you finally end your miserable half-life.”

“No, the time has come for you to finally die, Potter,” the high-pitched nasal voice exclaimed. “How stupid of you to come alone. But it will make things easier for me.”

Harry laughed and flicked his wand in the direction that the slight wind was blowing from, and a tumbleweed appeared and rolled between them, with the faint strains of the theme from “The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly“ floating in the air.

“What are you on about, Potter?” Voldemort asked, destroying the tumbleweed easily.

“Come now, Tommie boy ...”

“Stop calling me that, Potter,” Voldemort interrupted.

“Tom, I’ll call you what I want to. You know the prophecy – I know that you have to. I figured out a while back who your spy is, and I know that your spy knows the prophecy. So you know that you can send every stinking catamite in your army at me and they won’t be able to kill me. It has to be at your hands. Just like I’m the only one who can kill you. So I got sick of it, and decided to set up your spy. He told you there was an Order meeting taking place here at noon. I’ve been here for a while, Tommie-boy. Wouldn’t you like to know what I’ve done with the place while waiting for you?”

As he spoke, he began to move the quarterstaff in a counter-clockwise rotation before suddenly snapping one of the shod ends to point at Voldemort.

“You think your Muggle weapon can scare me, Potter?” the sneering response returned. “You can’t even ... can’t even ... BURMA!” he exclaimed.

“‘Burma’?” said Harry, dropping the end of the staff to the ground and leaning on it. “Why’d you say ‘Burma’?”

“I panicked,” said Voldemort.

“Cut, cut, cut!” yelled Kinsfire, striding out into the garden. “Come on, Tom, that’s the fourth take you’ve ruined! Can’t you remember your lines?”

“You try remembering your lines when you’re about to be blown up,” said the snake-faced man sullenly.

“For the umpteenth time, it’s called special effects. You remember that model of you we made last week? The one where you complained about having to breathe through straws in your nose so we could make a model of your face? We filled that with pink gelatine, and when we get to the right point in the script, I yell ‘cut’, you step out of the scene, we put the model in, I yell ‘action’ again, Harry blows up the model, and then we just delete the intervening paragraphs. Simple, right?”

“I think you’re just putting off the end of the fic,” put in Draco Malfoy, casually tossing his wand from hand to hand. “I’m about to get shot in the head, but you don’t see me complaining, do you? When the shot’s done, I get to go back to my trailer and relax.”

“Hmpf,” said Voldemort. “Easy enough for you to relax at the end of the run. You get to go have a lucrative modelling career. And that one,” he said, pointing at Harry, who was now buffing his nails on his shirt, “gets to play Bond when he grows up.”

“Er, no, actually, I think you’ve got me confused with the actor again,” said Harry. “I get to be Minister for Magic.”

“Whatever. The point is, you’re both young and pretty and have promising careers ahead of you. What kind of career options are there for somebody with no nose and pasty white skin?”

“Stunt double for Michael Jackson?” suggested Kinsfire.

Voldemort hissed. “Even I won’t stoop that low,” he said.

“Forget I mentioned it. Trust me, there will be plenty of other fics, so you’ll be employed for the foreseeable future. Not all of them are going to start with ‘Harry killed Voldemort last week, and ...’ Heck, some of ‘em you even get to win.”

“I know,” said Voldemort, a dreamy look in his eyes. “I do like working for Amanuensis, I really do ...”

“And the sooner you finish this shot, the sooner you can go back to Pornish Pixies and see what

she's working on now."

Harry made a gagging noise.

"Oh, all right," said Voldemort, fussily. "Where were we? Script girl!"

"I am not getting paid enough for this," Dorothy complained as she handed Voldemort his script and he reviewed his lines again.

"*Nobody's* getting paid for this," said Kinsfire. "Okay, Tom, you good with your lines now? We got another tumbleweed ready? Harry, back in the shrubbery."

"What's my motivation?" the young man grumbled good-naturedly, but he stepped back among the plants and hid behind the designated bush.

"Everybody on your marks? Death Eaters?"

"Yes."

"Yes."

"Whoops, wait a minute! Okay, I'm back on."

"Try to stay focused, Bella," said Kinsfire, closing his eyes and pinching the bridge of his nose in irritation. "I want to get this done before we lose the light. Order, we all set?"

Various noises of affirmation came from behind trees and bushes.

"Okay, then." Kinsfire stepped out of the shot.

Dorothy wielded her clap board with ruthless efficiency. "Unnamed Story, Chapter 14, Scene 6, Take 5! Action!"

At eleven-forty-five exactly, the loud cracks of Apparation sounded in the clearing, and a large number of Death Eaters appeared, with a tall creature in the centre, trying to appear majestic...