

## Betrayed A New Beginning

*I wonder if those idiots knew that would be the result?* Harry thought as he lay quietly in his bed at Number 4 Privet Drive. He was quiet because moving too much hurt after the beating that Vernon Dursley had given him.

There had been points in the past where he or Petunia had struck Harry, but only once in his past anything ever been broken, and that had been caused by Dudley. He had never mentioned it to Madam Pomfrey, but he was glad for that idiot Lockheart vanishing his right arm bone, because the arm had never set perfectly.

Vernon had stormed home and proceeded to beat Harry severely right after that chewing out by Order members, and had informed him that if any message other than an 'I'm fine, write later' type of note went out, he'd never survive to return to school.

Hedwig was apparently being held prisoner at the school's owlery, based on the message that Dumbledore had sent him:

---

*Harry,*

*I regret informing you that I must leave you at the Dursley home for the entire summer. The protections are weakening more than I would have expected, and to ensure your safety, we must leave you there.*

*Since the danger from Death Eaters is so strong, I fear that I must keep Hedwig here at the school for her safety, as well. She is a strikingly beautiful owl, but unfortunately startlingly recognisable. Even an incompetent Death Eater could follow her and get a good idea of your whereabouts, and while the protections are important, if they get too close, the wards would not hold up against a full scale assault.*

*You are smart enough to also realise what this means for mail this summer. If possible, I will collect mail from your friends and have an Order member drop it off in bundles occasionally.*

*Albus Dumbledore*

---

*Vernon's going to kill me before this summer is out,* Harry thought. *And with that prophecy about me, I need to stay alive.*

He thought for a while before gingerly getting to his feet and looking out the window. He pulled it up and leaned out it, looking around as if bored. His actual purpose, however, was to see if he could solve who was watching him this night.

To his annoyance, it was not Mundungus, but rather some woman he didn't know. *I can wait a few days until Dung is on duty, or I can make a concerted effort to get out of here tonight, before Vernon can kill me.* He thought for several minutes and then carefully removed his book bag from his trunk and removed all the things he felt he could stand to lose. It wasn't really much, just his photo album, since his Firebolt was at the school still, and his invisibility cloak had too many uses for him to want to leave it behind. He packed a change of clothing and his Hogwarts robes into his book bag, along with his cloak, and carefully put the album under the floorboard. The rest was packed back in his trunk and placed in the corner, as out of the way as possible.

He looked at his clock and saw that it was now around eleven at night. It wasn't too much longer that he'd have to wait for Vernon to start snoring, at which point he would be able to leave his room and head downstairs.

As if that had been a cue for the man, the wall began to shake slightly as the nominal head of the Dursley household dealt with one of the side effects of being grossly overweight - he snored, in this case sounding like a herd of rutting walruses. Harry could only assume that Petunia used earplugs, because there was no way that an unprotected pair of ears could sleep through that if the faint rumbling he could hear was any indication.

Backpack over his shoulder, with the cloak on the top, he gently opened his door and stuck his head into the hallway. *Good. No one up here.* He carefully made his way down the stairs, avoiding the trick step, and made his way to the back, where the sliding door to the back garden lay.

*Here's where I discover whether or not there's a guard in the back as well.* He slid the door open and stepped into the back garden, setting his bag down as he did. He closed the door and pulled out his invisibility cloak. He flipped it on, picked up his bag, and started to walk toward the front of the house.

He moved carefully past the guard, who was looking bored. He wondered a bit why she was standing in plain sight, but chalked it up to the perversity and weirdness of wizards in Britain. He ghosted down the street in the opposite direction from Mrs Figg's home before he finally called for the Knight Bus.

He pre-empted Stan's spiel and told him that he needed to get to Diagon Alley as fast as possible, and dropped five Galleons into the fellow's hand. He was barely able to get seated before the bus exploded into motion.

It seemed only moments later that the bus came to a stop in front of The Leaky Cauldron. He jumped from the vehicle and listened to the crack as it disappeared again before he turned to enter the building.

He sped through the raucous atmosphere and into the opening behind the pub, where the familiar brick wall stood. A few moments later, he was in the Alley and walking to Gringott's.

He'd been right - while the Muggle world had something called banker's hours, the goblins looked at every moment of every day as being banker's hours. The bank was still wide open and waiting for another chance to make money. Given the hour, Harry had no wait for a teller.

"Key please," the goblin demanded.

"I do not have it. It was given to Molly Weasley to get money from my vault for me. Is there a possibility of getting a replacement or a duplicate key, after proving that I am Harry Potter?"

"Potter," the goblin said. "Just a moment." With that, the goblin's head disappeared and he heard scurrying. About a minute later, several more goblins arrived with the original teller.

"You claim to be Harry Potter," one of the goblins stated.

"Yes I do. Is there a method of proving this claim that doesn't require my key?" he asked a little nervously.

"Yes, but it could be painful, or even fatal if you are not who you claim to be."

"Well, since I am Harry Potter, I'm willing to undergo this process. Assuming, of course, that it's not expensive. Right now I have very little money on me, which is why I needed to get to the vault."

"Understood. Come with us to the ritual room."

He followed them into the room in question, where they turned and smiled at him, a more than slightly disconcerting thing. "You humans are truly stupid, are you aware of that? You blindly follow us into a room where we could kill you and no one would be the wiser."

"Wouldn't be all that good for business, now would it?" Harry asked hotly. "All I want is access to my vault."

"Well, that could be a problem, since you have no key, and we need the permission of your wizarding guardian to grant you a new one. Your wizarding guardian has not and will not authorise such a situation."

"How do you know?" Harry asked.

"Because we have instructions for just such an occasion from him. Albus Dumbledore has told us to ensure that you do not receive another key, and that we are to inform him if you arrive to retrieve a new key."

"Thank you, gentlemen," came the familiar voice of the Headmaster of Hogwarts from behind him. "Time to return you to your home, Harry." A moment later, Harry was unconscious.

---

He awoke to discover that his bag was gone and with it the cloak. He was also in his bedroom in Number 4 Privet Drive.

*Do not leave Privet Drive again.*

*Albus Dumbledore*

He snarled as he saw the note and knew that if he tried to leave again today, he'd be seen and Stunned again. He'd have to wait at least a week or so to try again.

Vernon acted smug and happy for the next few days, which actually pleased Harry. When he was happy, the beatings didn't happen. Therefore, Harry acted as subservient as he could manage, and explored carefully during those errands for Petunia that took him away from the property. One of the businesses he walked past made his eyebrows rise, and a plan began to form.

Four days after his attempted escape, letters arrived, having been forwarded from Hogwarts. The first he opened was in Ron's scrawl.

*Harry,*

*You've got 'em in an uproar here. That stunt you pulled of going to Gringott's has 'em scared that you're gonna try it again.*

*Given the way they talked to me, I'd expect that they'll go spare if you try it again.*

*Please don't. If you do, they'll likely prevent you from coming to the Burrow this summer, and I'd like to play Quidditch with you at least once before school starts.*

*Speaking of Quidditch, the Cannons have started their new season and are doing their best. This could be their year!*

*Ah, Mum needs me to de-gnome the garden. (Another reason I wish you were here - you could help.)*

*I'll send another letter later.*

*Ron*

He raised an eyebrow at the letter. Something was off about it, but he couldn't tell what. Maybe it was Ron asking him not to break the rules, he thought with a small laugh.

He moved to the next one.

*What were you thinking, Harry?*

*The Death Eaters are out and about, going after families, and you're gallivanting around Diagon Alley, hoping to get more money for the upcoming school year? They're trying to find you to kill you!*

*Grow up and realise that the adults have your best interests in mind.*

*Ooo, I'm too angry right now to write a coherent letter. I'll write another one when I calm down. But don't be childish and leave again!*

*Hermione*

He raised an angry eyebrow at the letter. There were ink splatters across it, as if she'd been writing at high speed. *Who is she to tell me how to live my life?* he growled. *See if I'm willing to tell her anything else this year.*

The last letter startled him when he touched it. It suddenly turned red and leapt from his desk, splitting open into the standard Howler format.

**HARRY JAMES POTTER!**

**WHAT KIND OF HARE-BRAINED STUNT DID YOU THINK YOU WERE PULLING BY LEAVING LIKE THAT? PEOPLE ARE GUARDING YOU, AND YOU GO GALLIVANTING AROUND DIAGON ALLEY? I KNOW THAT YOU CAN BE SELF-CENTRED SOMETIMES, BUT THAT TAKES THE CAKE! HOW MANY MORE PEOPLE ARE GOING TO HAVE TO DIE TRYING TO KEEP YOU SAFE?**

It ended with a huff, a uniquely Ginny sound. Considering it was Ginny's voice that had delivered the message, it only made sense.

Vernon slammed the door open. "What are you doing up here, you freak? What's all the screaming?" he punctuated his question with a closed fist blow to the side of Harry's head.

"Ginny Weasley sent me a letter. I didn't know it was going to turn into a Howler!" he replied, shaking his head. "I didn't even think that was possible! I thought it was an all or nothing deal!"

"I told you about you and your unnatural ways!" Petunia shrieked from the doorway. "Teach him a lesson, Vernon!"

Harry knew that this was going to be a bad one when he saw the belt coming out of Vernon's trousers.

---

He awoke some indeterminate time later in his bed. A painful tearing sensation tore at him when he tried to sit up, and when he had finally managed it, he looked at the bed and saw why. He had been dropped in the bed, bleeding, and the wounds had scabbed over with the bed linens attached. Getting up had reopened several of the wounds.

*Okay, he thought. When I leave the house this time, I do not go anywhere that wizards congregate regularly. I might have to disappear to France or something, and disappear from there. I am not going to survive this if I stay here.*

He looked and realised that it was late at night, but he had no idea how long he'd been out. He stood and headed to the door and then to the water closet. He cleaned himself up as best he could at the sink, and performed his standard ablutions, then pulled new linens from the cupboard and made his bed.

A quick check out the window showed another guard, right where the previous one had been. He couldn't understand why they insisted on standing in plain sight. He narrowed his eyes as he glared at this guard and suddenly realised that he could see something shimmering around them. *Is that an aura? Let me go check.*

After putting on some trousers - but leaving his back uncovered - he headed downstairs carefully and out the back door, as he had before. "I've just got to get some air," he murmured as he walked around front. "I won't leave the property, 'cause I'm sure the old fart has guards on the place to make sure I don't leave again, but I just had to get outdoors for a while." He stopped near the guard, who he noticed in his peripheral vision was looking at him as he looked into the night sky.

He narrowed his eyes as he looked skyward and saw the aura fade in again. It didn't seem to be covering the guard as a spell, but rather like a cloak would. "Bastards. I hate being locked into this place. Vernon beats me, and I have to put up with it." He lowered his face to look as if he were looking next door, and then turned in the direction of the guard. He focused on his guard, and it took the guard a moment to realise that Harry could

see him. Harry used that moment of shock to drive an open palm into the nose of the guard, which managed to knock the man out. As he fell, the man's cloak shimmered, and Harry grinned. *Don't know why I can see through them, but I'm not complaining.* He covered the man up by dragging him into the bushes, and then he ran back to the house. In just two minutes he had a shirt and his money pouch with him, and he was escaping from the Dursley home once more.

He had ground to cover and he knew it. He hit the road with the cloak over his body and began the trek to Great Whinging. The Knight Bus was out of the picture, because he was fairly certain that Dumbledore and company had informed them that he was not to be picked up, or if he was picked up, that he was to be delivered either to him, or back to Number 4 Privet Drive.

Great Whinging was actually a smaller town than Little Whinging, but it had one thing that Little Whinging didn't - people with no knowledge of his supposed status as a criminal. He was pleased that the temperature that night wasn't overly hot or cold, because it made his travels go better. He was at the outskirts of the town by the time the sun started to rise in the East.

Once in the town, he walked the town and learned something of its layout. On its High Street, he saw just what he would need in a while. The one thing that might work against him was his clothing, but he hoped that it would not count too badly against him.

He found a spot where he could reach into his money pouch, and he pulled out two Galleons and five Sickles. *This should get me enough money to get somewhere else for a while. Maybe I'll do this in a couple more towns, even.* He began to craft a story about where these had come from.

At about nine that morning, the shop he was waiting for opened. He waited another ten minutes and finally walked through its door. "Good morning, young sir. How can I help you?"

"Well," Harry began, jumping into his story, "I'm hoping you can help me. I was going through an old trunk rescued from my attic, and found a pouch at the bottom. It had these in it, and I was wondering if they're made of what I think they are."

The gentleman looked at the seven coins and raised an eyebrow. "Coins, obviously," the man murmured, "but none I've ever seen before." He looked into Harry's eyes. "Do you know where the trunk came from?"

"My great-uncle, I was told. It's all that's really left of my family, from what I can tell. Most of the stuff is old cloth that seems like its falling apart - even the pouch these were in was falling to pieces." He laughed a little. "To be honest, given the condition of everything else in there, I was surprised to find these in a good condition. The fire didn't help any, either." He motioned at his clothes as if by explanation.

The man nodded sympathetically and then scraped a tiny amount off the edge of a Galleon. He put it in a dish, and then put a drop of some liquid onto the scrapings. The reaction made the man smile. "Well, if you thought the two golden coins were gold, you were right." He put them on a small scale and weighed them out.

"Well," he finally said, "I've got two options for you. I can give you what the gold in them is worth, or I can try to sell the coins themselves on consignment. I'm pretty sure that I'll get a good deal more for them doing it that way, since I've never seen this kind of coin before in my life, and some crazy numismatist will decide that he simply has to own something unique."

Harry bit his lower lips as if thinking deeply. "Honestly, as much as I like the idea of the extra money from the consignment, I need the immediate money more." He motioned at his clothes again. "I've got a couple more of the gold coins, and probably another ten of the silvery ones, so I might come back once I'm more settled and have a more permanent address."

The shop owner nodded and looked at the Sickles, then tested them as well. "Yep. Silver. Let's see, current price on gold this morning was £245 per ounce, and silver is at £3,24. They're an ounce apiece, so I can give you . . ." The man tapped away on a desk calculator for a moment before finishing. "I can sell these at considerably more, I will admit, so I'm going to give you £500 for the two gold coins and another £16,25 for the five silver coins, for a total of £516,25." He punctuated the statement by giving exactly that amount to Harry.

"Thank you, sir. I expect it won't be too long before you see me in here with the rest of them for consignment. I've no use for an old coin, since I can't exactly spend those, so I might as well get some real use out of them."

"Makes sense. Not really a keepsake sort of fellow?"

"Didn't even know the great-uncle. He died before I was born. Maybe they'd have been a keepsake for someone else, but I ended up with the trunk, so -" He shrugged, leaving the rest unsaid.

"Understood. I look forward to seeing you again, sir," the owner said.

Harry tipped a non-existent hat as he exited the store, and headed down the street further, stepping into a convenience store to find the nearest station that could get him to London, and found that there was a bus that could get him to the Guildford station due shortly.

---

While Harry was in Great Whinging looking for the bus, the search for him was now in full swing. It had begun at half five in the morning, when Nymphadora Tonks came on her Harry watching duty.

"Dickens, where are you?" she whispered. "If I find you've done a Fletcher and fallen asleep or walked off, then I'm going to flay you." She explored the lawn, getting angrier as she looked, until she heard a soft moan under one of the bushes between Number four and Number six. Moments later, she was field healing his broken nose and was waking him up. "What the hell happened?"

"Dunno," he said groggily. "I was doing the usual boring crap you get overnight when the little punk came out to enjoy the night, I thought. He walks around a little, talking to himself, and stops near me, looking up at the sky. He was whinging about the fact that Dumbledore wants him to stay here,

and moaning that the Muggles beat him. He was bleeding, I'll give him that, but nothing serious. He finally looks down and turns as if to walk into the house, and then looks right at me. In the second that it took me to realise that he could see me somehow, his hand shot out and caught me in the nose, open palm. Little prick stole my fucking cloak, too."

"How'd he see you, Dickens? I know you're too good with the cloak to get caught that way."

"Don't know. He owns one himself, so he might be used to the smell of one, if they've got a smell. Could be that he was so close that he saw a shimmer. Could have been luck for all I know. But he made me, and took me out, damn it."

"Well, we'll catch him. You go to St. Mungos and get that nose looked at better than my field healing can do, and I'll contact the old man."

A few minutes later, Albus Dumbledore stood on the lawn of Number four Privet Drive. "So what precisely happened?"

"You'll want to talk to Dickens, but as he explained it to me, the little bastard got lucky and saw him. He'd been walking the lawn boo-hooing about how Fatso in there hits him. Apparently hit him yesterday in fact, probably after that Weasley Howler. Well, the kid walks outside on the lawn for a while, happens to stop by where Dickens is, and just before turning to go back in, makes him and flat palms Dickens' nose. The blow knocked Dickens out, and Potter stole the cloak and left."

"Thank you, Nymphadora. I'll check the usual places. If you could stay the day in Godric's Hollow, it would be appreciated. If I happen to have missed him at Gringott's or the Cauldron, then he is likely to head to Hogsmeade, Grimmauld Place, or Godric's Hollow. He might go to the Burrow, but a simply conversation with the Weasleys will ensure a quick call to me."

"One nice thing about keeping him stupid," Tonks laughed. "It lowers the number of places we need to check."

"Very true," he replied with a small smile.

Four hours later had left Dumbledore in a much different mood. Stan Shunpike had not seen Harry this time, and he had verified that with Legilimency. Tom had not seen him either, and the goblins commented on just how stupid Harry would have to be to show up after the last time he had been to their doors.

Lupin had seen no sign of him, and promised to contact Albus the moment that Harry arrived. Tonks had not yet seen any sign of him at the remains of the home in Godric's Hollow, and the Weasleys were now beside themselves wondering where Harry might be.

He nearly stomped up the walkway to the Granger home. Hermione opened the door before he had the chance to ring the bell. "Headmaster!" she exclaimed. "What's wrong?"

"I need your help. Harry has gone missing once more, and has not gone to any of the expected places. Where might he be?"

She scowled. "May I ask a few questions to make sure all the bases are covered?" He nodded. "You've checked the Knight Bus and the Leaky Cauldron?" He nodded. "Have you checked the Muggle sources? Taxis and buses? He might be going to Godric's Hollow the Muggle way, which would involve a rail trip that could take hours. Assuming he could get to King's Cross station by nine this morning, or even about now, at noon, he could be on a train that could easily take eight to twelve hours to get to the Tintagel area, sir. And sending an owl is useless because they're trained not to deliver into largely Muggle areas, so he certainly couldn't get an owl on the train." Her scowl deepened. "I can only think to tell you that I'll find a way to notify you if he comes here, and tell you that you'll likely need people at the stations. King's Cross would be a good one, and wherever it is that is closest to Godric's Hollow. I know it's near Tintagel, but beyond that, I don't know the closest station. Also, there may be a station where he'll have to change trains, so you might want to drop someone there as well."

"Miss Granger," he said angrily, "if he comes here, please hurt him badly. I don't want him running off, and I will clear the offence with the Improper Use of Magic office. Bludgeon his legs or something, but *do not let him escape you*. Is that understood?"

She blinked at him twice and then said, "Yes," she said slowly. "If he shows up, you want me to take him down hard."

"Excellent. I shall return shortly with a small jar of specialised Floo powder. It was formulated to be used in emergencies at *any* fireplace. Throw it in and call for me through the bright purple flames." She nodded her understanding, and he left her home.

---

Unknown to Hermione, Harry had not chosen to go to where she had expected him to. By noon, he was at King's Cross station, purchasing a ticket to Brussels, Belgium, where he would catch another train to Amsterdam. By the time that Dumbledore got people to King's Cross station in positions to see Harry entering the station, he was already waiting aboard the train that would take him to the continent.

It was early evening by the time that Harry reached Amsterdam, and he set about converting two hundred Pounds Sterling into guilders. *Okay, he thought, now to find a place to stay. Maybe get some new clothes, and a pack to carry everything in, and be very careful with the cash I've got to hand.*

He was pointed quickly in the direction of a youth hostel, and on his way there passed a department store, where he slid inside and purchased a pack and some clothes. His wallet lighter for the purchases, he was better off than ever before.

---

The next morning came, bringing some serious annoyance to a number of people. "There's been no sign of him, Dumbledore!" Tonks growled. "Do you have any idea how cold and creepy that damned house is now that it's got no roof?"

"There has been no sign of Harry on any of the trains. It is possible that he is walking, which means that your presence is not needed there for some

time, Nymphadora. I appreciate your putting up with the discomfort overnight."

"It's nothing compared to the discomfort he's going to feel when I'm done with him. He's staying still when I find him, and Pomfrey can reattach his fucking legs later. I'm getting a hot cuppa and some sleep, in that order. I'll be available again by early afternoon." With that, the fireplace went back to normal.

*He is not helping his cause any by running, Dumbledore thought. He is but a pawn in this game of fools, and I will have him play his proper part. The Potter money is paying for the war effort, and should be properly under my control by the time he turns seventeen.*

He sat back in his chair. *The world gawks at him right now, but they need a better hero. A new Merlin, as it were. One who understands the need for controlling the newblood that enters this world every year. Yes, we need the newblood, but they will not destroy our traditions, as they try so hard to do.*

Reports from everywhere showed that Harry was nowhere to be seen amongst the various searchers. He had not gone to any of the places that so obviously he had to head. *I guess the only thing left is to send the child an owl with a Portkey.*

---

Harry had just climbed off the bus on his way to the Anne Frank House when the owl swooped out of the sky at him. He took the message from the bird and looked at the handwriting as the owl flew away. "Dumbledore," he growled.

He borrowed a lighter from a man just lighting a cigarette and proceeded to set the unopened letter aflame on the ground, carefully watching the letter turn to ashes, and preventing any embers from escaping. He was intrigued to see the thing spit and spark for a moment when the flames were at their strongest, and wondered if he'd just watched an enchantment go away. When it was done, he carefully spread the ashes to make them cool quicker, and then scooped them into a bag and deposited them in the trash.

"Must not like the sender," a woman said from near him. "I don't think I've ever seen anyone take a letter from a delivery owl and set fire to the letter." The voice was accented - obviously a native of the area - but spoke English.

"I know what the sender is saying, and I don't want to hear it. And I wouldn't put it past the sender to try to force me to listen to it if I open it." He turned to the speaker as he spoke. With a small chuckle he added, "And there's no reason to take it out on the owl, either."

"I've always wondered if there was more legend than truth to the story of Albus Dumbledore," she said.

"Hard to say. I know so little of the wizarding world, and it's his fault."

"How so?" the woman - not too much older than him - asked him.

"I don't know what my parents' wills read, but I was supposed to be given to Sirius Black. When Dumbledore insisted that I be given to himself instead, Sirius went off after Pettigrew, who was the real traitor. Pettigrew killed all those people and framed Sirius for it."

"Are you sure?" she asked, unsure that he might not be a little bit insane.

"I've met them both. Pettigrew is alive and reasonably well. Sirius is now dead, after fighting his cousin Bellatrix Lestrange at the British Ministry for Magic in June. Pettigrew, the little bastard, is of course still alive."

She shook her head. "Look, if you distrust Dumbledore, then you need to do a few things. First is get to the bank and see about your money. After that, you need to see about wand privileges in the civilised world."

He snorted. "When I went to Gringotts, the goblins called Dumbledore and I woke up back in my old bedroom. I don't know if they're simply following the law directly or not, but to be immediately called stupid when I walk through the door is not a sign that they're willing to work with me as a customer."

"I know you probably get a lot of this in England, but would you be willing to come with me? I'd like to learn more about this, and I think you need to speak to the gnomes." He raised an eyebrow at that, and she laughed. "Only the British call those little garden pests gnomes. The ones I refer to are in charge of money for the majority of Europe. Are you free to go to Zurich and talk to them?"

"Until the old bastard finds me again, I'm free to do anything." He started. "I'm sorry. I should not be swearing in front of a lady, no matter how angry I am."

She laughed. "Anger makes us all do things that we normally wouldn't. So, how about it? I can get you a good meal, and we can talk a little more."

"I'm low on cash, but I should pay for my own meals. It's just good manners."

"And I think it's good manners to help someone low on cash. So, which one of us will win the war of wills?"

"I can throw off an Imperius," he said with a small chuckle.

Her eyebrows rose, but she quivered her lower lip and said, "I can cry at you, though." To prove it, a tear leaked from her left eye.

He blinked and then laughed. "You win. That's fighting dirty."

She grinned brightly. "Yup! Fighting dirty is my middle name, I think the Americans say."

"That must make for a long name," he replied with his own smile. "Ending up with a name like Anna Fighting Dirty Johnson must have gotten you some weird looks in school, too."

She laughed loudly. "I like you. My name is actually Kaatje Houghtailing - no middle name - and I'm treating you to lunch." She held out her hand.

He shook it once, and then, on a whim, turned it palm down and kissed the back of her hand. "Harry Potter, and I am pleased to make your acquaintance."

"You, sir, are a gentleman," she said with a smile that made Harry happy that he had done the right thing. She crooked her arm, and he took it, letting her lead the way.

---

Angelina and Derek Granger returned home from their early day at the office to find their daughter stomping around the house. Derek took his life into his hands with his first words.

"Pookie-pie, what's wrong?"

"Daddy!" his daughter screamed, but her next reaction startled both of her parents. She burst into tears, threw herself at him, and sobbed uncontrollably.

He patted her back in worry until she was able to calm herself somewhat. "Now, can you tell me exactly what's wrong, honey?"

"Everything! The situation with Harry is getting out of hand!"

"What's happened now?" Angelina asked.

"Dumbledore came over to talk to me because Harry left the Dursley home again." She stopped and shook her head. "He wanted to know where Harry might have gone. I told him, and he . . ." She stopped and took a deep breath. "I didn't realise until he told me what to do if Harry showed up here that he's been using the Imperius on me!"

"That's that mind control spell, right?" Derek asked.

"Yes. I was taught to fight it off at school, but one of the drawbacks to fighting it is that you have to want to. The original order he gave was to help him keep Harry safe. I *want* to keep my . . . uh, Harry safe. It was when he told me to hurt him if he showed up here, in order to keep him until Dumbledore could arrive, that I started to fight it and broke free. I want Harry safe, but I don't want him hurt!"

"Can you act well enough to convince him that you're still under, if he shows up again?" Angelina asked.

"I think so. Basically, I'd just need to tell him that I haven't seen him. If he asks why Harry did something, I can honestly say that I don't know."

"What will you do from here, though? How will you warn Harry?" Derek asked.

"I don't know if I can. My last letter was berating him for being childish and leaving. he might have had a good reason, and would see that letter as a betrayal." She sniffed. "Dumbledore might have lost me my best friend."

## **Betrayed Friends along the way**

"Now that we've gotten a good meal into you," Kaatje said, "we should likely go talk to the gnomes. We'll hit a local branch, and I have the feeling that you'll be making a trip to Zurich very soon."

"What name should I be looking for with the gnomes? Goblins have Gringott's, but I don't know of any others."

"Who do you think runs Deutsche Bank?" she asked with a smile. "Not to mention lesser banks such as your own Barclays and even the Royal Scottish Bank. If it does business with the non-magical, then it's likely got a gnome somewhere in the upper management, whether they know it or not."

"Hmm. Gringott's likes to make everyone think that they run all banking for the wizarding world. Now that I really think about it, that doesn't make sense. Why would a Finnish wizard or witch want to travel to London just to take a ride down to a vault just to get some money?"

"Exactly. Now, shall we?" she once again crooked her arm and led him through the town.

He was startled at how quickly he was whisked through the line, in comparison to being at Gringott's. He was quickly brought into an office, where a man sat with an intrigued look on his face. "I understand that you may need our help?"

He looked to Kaatje. "The man is a wizard, so you can speak freely."

After nodding, he said, "Well, as I'd imagine my voice tells you, I'm British. I appear to be having some trouble with Gringott's, and I've no idea if it's legal and above-board, or if they're working with Headmaster Dumbledore to cheat me. I simply don't know anymore."

"Albus Dumbledore? Interesting. The one thing I need to know, however, is your name." The bank officer had a small smile on his face.

Harry shook his head in embarrassment. "Harry Potter. I -"

He didn't get any further, because the man held up a hand to stop him. "I need to bring my management in on this one. Yours is a very recognisable name, and if there is any chance that you are being cheated in any way, I want the very highest levels involved."

"At least that way, if something goes wrong, they can't blame you," Harry said with a laugh.

The man chuckled as well. "There is that bonus, I must admit. Let us contact my superiors."

Half an hour later, Harry found himself in Zurich, seated in front of a large desk. Behind it was a man about half again the size of Professor Flitwick at Hogwarts. He wore a stylish red wizard's hat that stood straight up. "So, Mr Potter, I understand that you seem to have had a small problem with the goblins?"

"Yes, Mr Hogunson. I went in to them to get some money from my vault. They asked for my key and I informed them that the Weasley family had it, and asked if I could get a new one. I was taken into an office where they insulted me and apparently called Albus Dumbledore, who stunned me and returned me back to the people he'd placed me with. For all intents and purposes, I've no access to any money unless Dumbledore allows it, through those that he recommends." He scowled. "In all honesty, there may be good reasons why they did it, but I just didn't appreciate being left with four Galleons and twelve Sickles."

"And yet you made it to The Netherlands," the man said.

Harry had the good grace to blush. "I, uh, I sold a couple Galleons and five of the Sickles for English money. They're made with silver and gold, so I sold them for the metal."

"And now you know how the goblins have such a stranglehold on the British wizarding economy. They can keep a set rate on Galleons to pounds because the worth of a Galleon in metal is considerably higher than what they offer as an exchange rate."

Harry thought for a moment. "That's highway robbery!" he said. "I was given £250 per Galleon, and the guy admitted that he was giving me more than the daily price because he could sell them for considerably more than that to collectors. Even if the price was £200 an ounce, the goblins are making £195 per Galleon!"

"Precisely. Now, forbidding you any access to your accounts is considered legal on paper, but since there are a large number of methods available to verify your identity, such as a drop of your blood, the likelihood that your accounts have been compromised is actually fairly high, since you say that they never even offered you the option."

"If you've got some magical method of ensuring my truthfulness, I'll use it to make my statement about what happened."



"You are a little young for Veritaserum. Would you be willing to use the Affidavit Quill?" At Harry's confused look, the man said, "Unless you are skilled in a talent such as Occlumency, the quill will make you write the truth."

"What does it use to write with?" he asked warily.

"Ink. What else would you expect?" Harry's answer was to hold out his hand, which clearly bore the words *I must not tell lies* in white lines of scarring. "Who made you write lines with a Contract Quill?" the man asked in horror.

"A Ministry representative sent to help the Ministry take over the school. She didn't like that I was saying that Voldemort was back, so she felt that torturing me until I recanted was the best route to take." He snorted. "I was stupid and refused to knuckle under."

"That is not necessarily stupidity. If you feel the statement is important enough to endure torture, then it will tend to convince the very people you wish to make aware of your statements."

He nodded. "So, where's this quill, and what do you need to know?"

The man grinned and placed a quill on the table next to him, as well as a stack of parchment. "It is a self-inking quill," he explained when Harry looked for an ink-pot. Harry nodded and began to write.

It took him roughly thirty minutes to describe everything from the point when he left Privet Drive to waking up there again. When he was finished, the man picked up the parchment and began to read. "Oh yes," he said with a somewhat disconcerting grin. "I believe that you have just given us enough to gain control of your finances from the goblins. Would you be agreeable to a ten percent fee for retrieving the contents of your vaults? I refer only to the monies contained therein, not any of the items that may be contained within the vaults."

"What if there's only ten Galleons, for example?" he asked. "You'd have gone to a lot of trouble for nothing, basically."

"Yes, but we believe that such is not the case. The Potters were a very wealthy family, and your own father had not destroyed the family fortunes, so I feel safe in assuming that it will be a very lucrative mission for us."

Harry nodded, deep in thought from what the man had told him. "This will help you break the stranglehold that the goblins have on the wizards and witches in Britain, right? That business will be lucrative as well?" The man behind the desk nodded, obviously interested in where Harry was going with this train of thought. "Well, how about this? You take your ten percent of my vault or vaults, and since I seem to have opened up a doorway into the wizarding world for the gnomes, I get a single percent of the money that comes from all the business that will come your way."

The man behind the desk sat back in surprise for a moment, and then laughed heartily. "You, Mr Potter, are a treasure. I find myself wondering if you are part gnome."

"Beats me. Dad was supposed to be a pureblood, but I've been told that it's really just semantics on how you define pureblood. Why do you wonder?" The man pulled the hat from his head, displaying the same unruly hair that Harry had.

"It's the reason we all wear hats. It keeps the hair out of our eyes." His eyes sparkled with mirth.

"So you're a gnome?"

"Yes. Only British wizards think that a gnome is a mobile potato."

"Probably told that by the goblins, if you guys are their economic enemies," Harry said softly.

"Quite likely." He looked at Harry for a long moment. "I agree. We shall take ten percent of the monies that we retrieve from your vaults, and in return, you shall receive one percent of all British wizarding business that comes our way from breaking the goblin monopoly. By the time this is done, you will likely be the wealthiest wizard in the United Kingdom."

"I'm more worried about right now," Harry said after a moment, with an embarrassed laugh. "I've still got two Galleons, seven Sickles, a bunch of Knuts, and a load of Mug . . . non-wizarding money."

"After we sign the contracts, Mr Potter, I will tell the bank to allow you a line of credit that will be paid back from your vaults. There will be no interest assessed, as a bonus from the bank, since you have done us the very great favour of helping us to crack open the British banking system."

"Thank you." He left the bank a short while later a much happier person, especially when he found that Kaatje had waited around for him.

"Get everything worked out?"

"I think so. I may someday be a rich man from what I think I just did in there."

"Then you can buy us dinner!" she said with a laugh.

---

He was surprised the next morning to run into Kaatje again. "I'm buying breakfast," she said. "I didn't actually expect you to buy dinner last night. I know that your money is tight."

"Not as much anymore. The gnomes think that they have an excellent chance of retrieving my money from the goblins, so they extended me an interest-free line of credit."

Her eyes were wide. "Do you have the Holy Grail in your vault or something? They never do that!"

"I think it's more that my problem has opened up the strong possibility of British wizarding banking to them. The goblins are warehousing gold, from what I can tell. They give the wizards £5 for every Galleon, which is an ounce of gold, and can sell it for £200 easily in today's market. The Sickles are silver and run around 300 pence or so, or £3. The goblins, however, say that it takes 17 of them to make a Galleon. I can't do maths in my head like Herm-" He scowled as he referred to her. "Sorry. I think it's pretty obvious, though, that they're giving us less than the silver is worth. They're making a killing on metal speculation."

"I take it this Herman was a friend of yours before this all started?" she asked him.

"Hermione. Yeah. But to chew me out without getting all the facts? I can't really forgive that."

"Maybe it was fear?"

He closed his eyes for a moment and thought. *"What were you thinking, Harry?"*

*The Death Eaters are out and about, going after families, and you're gallivanting around Diagon Alley, hoping to get more money for the upcoming school year? They're trying to find you to kill you!*

*Grow up and realise that the adults have your best interests in mind.*

*Ooo, I'm too angry right now to write a coherent letter. I'll write another one when I calm down. But don't be childish and leave again!* That's what she said to me. No attempt to try to find out why I might have left. Just automatically assume that it was for the worst reasons."

"Hurts when a girlfriend or boyfriend turns out to be less than you thought, doesn't it?"

"She wasn't my girlfriend, but she was one of my best friends." His scowl deepened. "Emphasis on 'was', apparently, from the way that seemed to read." He shook his head. "Can you take me back to the bank today? I don't remember exactly where it was, and I need to pick up a few things."

She smiled and nodded, and then sat down to breakfast.

---

They were standing outside the bank when an owl swooped down in front of Harry. He scowled. "The idiot won't let me go, will he? And in a public place, too? I mean, how often do owls swoop down in the middle of a city?"

Kaatje shook her head in amusement. "Let me get that thing for you," she said, reaching out to disconnect the letter from the owl's leg. "I can look at it in case -"

That was as far as she got, because as soon as the letter was free of the bird's leg and in her hand, she disappeared. Harry's eyes narrowed for just a second, and then he exploded into the bank. "I need to speak to someone in your 'Special Needs' department," he said, repeating the words that Kaatje had used just yesterday.

He was quickly speaking with a member of the bank's wizarding staff. "I need to contact the bosses in Zurich. There's been a kidnapping of my companion, and I think that we'll need their wherewithal to get her back."

"Immediately, Mr Potter!" the man replied. A minute later, Harry was once again in Zurich, speaking with the gnome in charge.

"I have been led to understand that your companion was just kidnapped?" he asked.

"Yeah. We were about to enter the Amsterdam branch when an owl swooped down at me. I scowled at it, and she removed the letter. As soon as it was free of the owl, she disappeared. Considering what I told you in that affidavit yesterday, I suspect it to be Dumbledore. I also suspect that she will return with no memory of the abduction and a strong desire to convince me to return to England."

"He seems to be digging a hole deeper and deeper for himself."

"The problem is, I can't hide myself from owls, because there could be things you people need to tell me. So I have to run the risk of him sending me new owls, and finding a way to make me pick it up so that he can Portkey me back to Jolly Old, and keep me under his thumb."

"I think that we can come up with a method to contact you that will not involve birds of any sort," the gnome said with a small laugh. He tapped a button on his intercom and barked out some commands in a language Harry assumed was German, from the sound of it. A few moments later, a messenger ran into the room with a small box.

"This is designed to look like the device they call a beeper in the non-magical world. It will vibrate when we have a message for you, and then you can contact us. In England, you can contact us through most any bank system - it's understood that someone dressed slightly oddly asking for 'special needs' banking is looking for the wizarding side. There are other tests to verify, of course. But this way you will know that any owl attempting to reach you has nothing to do with your banking needs."

"Thank you. If you have contacts in the British wizarding system, you might want to put out feelers for Kaatje Houghtailing. If Dumbledore knows that people are looking for her, he might release her faster. As it is, I think he's hoping to set off my 'saving people thing', as Granger so delightfully put it."

"We shall. I believe that I shall contact my connection in the Unspeakables."

"Thank you." Harry huffed, as if he wanted to laugh but found nothing actually funny. "To think that so much of this was caused by a stupid prophecy that he kept from me for five years."

"There was a prophecy? Did you retrieve it from the Department of Mysteries at your Ministry?"

"No, it shattered, and the prophecy ball was lost, but Dumbledore had heard it, so he told me about an hour after my godfather had died."

The gnome scowled. "Let me talk to my contact in the Unspeakables. Perhaps he can bring the backup globe here for you to hear. If the man who told you is the same one controlling your life, then you might well wish to think twice about trusting that he told you the correct one. If possible, he might create one that would have made you more pliable to his decisions. Or perhaps make you rebel, so that he could be justified in clamping down on you, and controlling your every move."

He reached into his desk again, pulling out a business card. Show this in whatever branch you go into. They will contact me, and we will get you here to talk."

"Thank you. I suppose that I should return to Amsterdam sometime soon, but I really don't want to have to hurt Kaatje. I fully expect Dumbledore to attempt to get her to slap a Portkey on me. But I also want to ensure that she is in good condition."

"As you head back, I will contact the police in Amsterdam, and they will likely keep an eye on you. With luck, we can keep you from your Headmaster's hands until the last possible moment."

"Thank you."

---

He stuck around The Netherlands for two days before Harry saw Kaatje again, on a feeling that she would reappear. She was less than happy, to say the least about her demeanour. "I swear, if I ever see that greasy haired jerk again in my lifetime, I have every intention -" She calmed and took several deep breaths.

"What did Snape say to you?" He held up a hand as soon as he asked. "Wait, let me guess. He referred to me as a spoiled brat, and made several comments about you performing sexual favours for me. He likely referred to you as a - pardon the word - whore, and a kind looking man with a long white beard chided him gently but did nothing more to chastise him. The kind looking man then tried to convince you that it was in your best interests to tell him where I was, all in the name of the greater good. I do not have a proper grasp of how the world works, and he might even have hinted that I had run for childish reasons."

She shook her head. "You definitely know these people. There were a few others there. A balding redheaded man and his wife, some scary fellow with a weird eye, and a girl with blue hair. I think they were all playing 'Bad Cop' to your Dumbledore's 'Good Cop'." At Harry's slightly confused look, she clarified. "It's an Americanism I picked up from a year spent there."

"I'm used to abuse from Snape, so that's normal, as is the unspoken abuse from Dumbledore. He allows the abuse from Snivellus, so he therefore condones it. I'd thought that Tonks and Moody might be on my side, but no surprise that they're not. I will say that the Weasleys surprise me."

"They were angry about money, if I understood it right."

"Y'know, I just don't care about them anymore. I'd best get moving, though. I'm sure that Dumbledore met your eyes at one point and started twinkling, so he's getting a team together to come retrieve me. I expect I'll be thrown back with the Dursleys, so that they can beat the hell out of me."

"Excuse me? The guardians that he placed you with beat you?"

"Yes. I've got some wonderful scars healing on my back from just a few days ago, when I left for the second time in about a week." He waved his hand. "Unimportant, though. I'm taking off, and I want to thank you for being there as a friend when I needed one."

"It was the right thing to do. You're sort of like the little brother I wish I'd had."

"I can live with that. Mind if I call you Sis, then?" he asked with a chuckle.

"Works for me." She reached into her purse and pulled out a business card. "This is my card. I'm an artist, and I work from my home. This gives my cell and home number."

"You give your home number to everyone?" he asked.

She grinned. "No. I gave you the card I give to people I like and would like to see or hear from again in a non-business manner. My regular card just gives my cellular phone number. I'd tell you not to go, but you know these folks better than I do."

"If you happen to hear from the Deutsche Bank people again, feel free to tell them that I'm on the move again, and why. I'm not giving you any idea where I'm heading from here, because Dumbles or Snape will probably try to rip it from your head."

"You stay safe, little brother," she said with a smile, just before hugging him.

"I'll try, big sis," he replied. "I hope to talk to you again soon." With that he turned and walked in the basic direction of the train station.

---

He was met en route by some of the Dutch police force. "We'll keep an eye on her, sir," one of them said quietly. "We'll also make sure you make it

to the train without being molested by the ones after you."

"Thank you," he replied simply. "I'm just sorry that you've got to do this at all."

"So are we. Albus Dumbledore was a respected man - still is, really - and if he's abducting what he would consider foreign nationals, then he's building an international incident that he will not wish his name applied to."

"Well, he'll use his pull as the Grand Mugwump of the International Confederation - or whatever the title is - to get out from under it. Even if he deserves prison, he'll never see a day behind bars." He sighed. "I'm used to it. Now I just have to figure out where to go to next. I don't speak any other language than English."

"May we take you to a shop before we get you to the train?" the first one asked. "We can get you a translation medallion. It should help you."

"I'd appreciate that a lot. Thank you." A short time later he was in possession of a small necklace he could wear under his shirt.

"So, what do you think?" the first man asked.

"I don't notice any difference." He saw the grins on the men's faces. "What?"

"You heard us in your native language, but we were speaking ours. You responded in ours as well. That's the function of the medallion."

"Impressive! How can I thank you guys?"

"Just stay safe. That's all we ask."

"Thank you." They led him to the train station and kept an eye on him until it was time for his train. "If you see Kaatje again, let her know that I'm okay." He laughed softly. "It's kinda nice having a big sister."

"We will. Good luck, Mr Potter."

---

"I don't like this, Molly," Arthur said. "The longer we're part of this, the worse its going to be when it unravels. Harry Potter wasn't supposed to be able to escape, but he's done so multiple times now. And now Albus is running the risk of international problems, if that Houghtailing girl decides to push. Why they didn't Oblivate her is beyond me."

"I know, Arthur," she replied, "but if she's got family in Holland that noticed her missing? They might notice the Obliviation, and then we're *guaranteed* an international incident. This way, she can complain, but since it's Harry Potter we're looking for, and Death Eaters are also looking for him, we can use that as an excuse that the international courts will likely accept, and that's what Albus is thinking, I'll bet. We just need to trust him."

"And if this fails, he's going to take everything and everyone down with him, in an attempt to mitigate the damage. You know that. Hell, even Severus is hedging his bets. I caught him making detailed notes at one point, of a particularly damning meeting. He might be able to out-Slytherin this old Gryffindor, but I can out-pureblood him. He won't talk for a while."

"It won't fail. Potter will defeat Riddle and die in the process, and we'll profit. Especially when he mentions to Harry at the end of this school year that he's got until his seventeen birthday to become betrothed to a pureblood. He knows Ginny and likes her, so when we suggest her, there can be a whirlwind courtship and marriage, and then he dies against Voldemort, leaving all money to her." She scowled. "The one problem is that takes the Black money into account, but the Potter money may not go to her."

"Why not?" Ginny demanded from the doorway.

"It's an oddity of the Black contract. It's specifically stated such to allow the head of the Black family, if he is already married, to legally take another wife, specifically to take on the Black family name for the children. If the head is unmarried, however, the Black family wife is *only* for the Black family, so to get the Potter money, we'd have to make a deal with someone else. Hermione, for example."

"She might help us, especially if we can convince her - or get Dumbledore to - that it's going to be for the best. That his money won't end up going to Death Eaters in the Ministry. I'll bet she'd marry him in a heartbeat then."

"That's my girl," Molly said proudly. "We'll talk with Dumbledore about it and see what can be done. Does that work for you, Arthur?"

"I guess so. I'm just a little worried about in case this all falls apart. That's my job as head of the family, though."

"And we appreciate it, Daddy," Ginny said, kissing her father on the cheek.

---

Harry got off the train in Munich, happy to finally get free of the cramped conditions. Almost immediately an owl swooped on him, carrying a letter that seemed to glow as if lit from within. He rolled his eyes and said, "I refuse delivery. Return to sender. But take a break and get a meal first." The owl rolled its eyes - or did the owlish equivalent - and flew off.

"I see that they were correct," a woman said as she approached him. Before he could say anything, she had flipped open a badge case.

He nodded. "Did the police in Amsterdam tell you, or did my friends in Zurich give the hint?"

"Zurich," she replied. "They have a small tracer in that beeper that they gave you, so they knew which train you were on. Only they know the way to

perform the trace, so there are no worries about Albus Dumbledore finding you that way."

He nodded. "I likely won't be here for long, but if you've any suggestions about things to do during a day or two, I'm willing to listen."

"Well, it's getting into the evening. After you find a hotel, there are nightclubs and such. Young fellow like you should enjoy dancing."

"Given how I dance, I'd be more likely nursing a soda and watching the others dance," he answered her, chuckling.

"I understand. My son describes his dancing as looking as if someone had dropped a live crab into his boxers."

"Doing that might *improve* my dancing."

She laughed, and helped him locate a hotel. "We'll keep an eye on you, but try to stay out of your hair."

"Thank you, by the way," Harry said. "I don't know if you're on duty or off, but it means a lot that you're doing this."

"I was told something of the situation you were under in Britain. Why are you permitting us to watch you, yet you bristled under their watching?"

"Because you're letting me do things. In England, they were placed as my jailers. I couldn't leave the house for too long or else they'd return me to it. Going to a hotel? Not likely. A nightclub, where no self-respecting Death Eater would go? In your dreams."

"I understand. And we do it because it is right. Thanks are not necessary."

"But they are still offered. If they were necessary, it would lessen their meaning." Harry blinked. "My God that sounded adult - I need to do something stupid immediately!"

She laughed. "I'll leave you to get settled. Enjoy your time in Munich."

He took a room for the night, paying from the money he had gotten from selling his Galleons. After that, he took a little time to eat, and then found a local nightclub and joined the crowd waiting to get in.

He tried not to gawk at some of the outfits that were being worn - one girl was in a jumpsuit that he was certain was actually paint, and there was a black-haired girl who looked strikingly like a cross between the best features of both Hermione Granger and Cho Chang, wearing a dress so short that Harry knew she couldn't bend over. She seemed to sparkle, so he narrowed his eyes and looked past her slightly. *Huh! She's a witch! That dress has so many charms on it that it's not funny.* He paused. *Okay, maybe she can bend over.*

"Hi," she said, startling him. "See something you like?" She had a very playful look in her eyes.

His mouth was dry, and the view was amazing, but he actually managed to speak. "I'd try to be suave, but I'd just sound like a jerk, so I'll just say that you look amazing."

"Thank you. You're pretty yummy looking yourself."

"Ah, insane," he answered her with a grin. "That explains a lot."

She was obviously fighting hard not to laugh, and Harry enjoyed the vibrations the fight was causing. "Just for that, good sir, I shall insist that you buy me a drink to make up for telling everyone about my biggest failing."

"I like you," he said bluntly. "You're better at the give and take than I am. I've pretty much exhausted my witty . . . what's the word . . . repartee."

"I don't believe that," she said, breezing to the front of the line, his arm securely seized by her hands. "Hi, Marcus," she said to the bouncer at the front.

"Heidi," he said with a nod, letting them slip inside, much to the chagrin of the others waiting outside.

"I take it you know the guy," Harry said with a laugh.

"You think?" she shot back. "Seriously, they know me here, and - I don't mean to sound vain - they like hot girls. I know the reactions I get when I wear this dress. You're trying hard not to stare and see if I'm wearing a bra or panties, since you could tell either if you looked hard enough."

*If I look that hard, I'll be that hard,* he thought, a small smile creeping onto his face as he ordered them two beers.

"If you dance a few dances with me, I just might let you find out," she finished, waiting until he had started to drink.

He was actually able to keep from spraying the bartender, or even firing any from his nose, but his coughing was a marvel to those around. A few people surrounded him, pounding his back and laughing. "Heidi got another one!" someone yelled.

"You make a habit of trying to kill people?" he finally managed to gasp out to her. He tried to sound stern, but the camaraderie couldn't help but make him smile. The group slid away from the two of them, giving them room to flirt.

"Only the cute guys," she said, curtseying. He eyed the hem of that dress a little warily as she did. "Don't worry. I'm better than that. Nobody sees anything I don't want them to."

"I'd expect nothing less of such a *charming* girl," he ventured. "One might even say *bewitching*."

Her eyes sparkled with mirth. "One wonders if you're as much a *wizard* on the floor as you are with words?"

"Ah, no. I fear that my feet are *curse*d to do damage to the feet of whatever partner I happen to dance with." He grinned widely at that.

She looked around quickly and then spoke softly. "We don't get many wizards or witches in here. I think I'm the only one, other than you."

He narrowed his eyes slightly and looked around the room. "I think you're right. You're the only person in here who sparkles."

"That's a good thing, right?" she asked with a smile.

"Well, since it makes me tend to want to look at you, then you could probably consider it good."

"Then it's a good thing," she replied. She threw an pose reminiscent of a supermodel, but quite obviously done for comedic effect. "You're looking at me - this is obviously the dream of every man."

"And some women," added a girl with a leer as comedic as Heidi's pose.

"I'm just too much woman for anyone," she said, throwing her hand to her forehead dramatically.

"Need volunteers to help you prove that?" Harry asked, finally getting a little understanding of this girl's psychology. She was out to have fun, but not take herself too seriously, and she seemed to like the people who could keep up with her.

"Think you can keep up?" she purred.

"Probably not, but if I can't, I'll be behind you, and that's a hell of a great place to be." He tried to do a seductive leer, but knew that he was doing it wrong, which actually worked for his purposes.

She laughed and hugged him. "I told you that you hadn't spent out there on the line!" she said in his ear. He couldn't help his reaction, given that he had a very attractive woman in his arms who was likely wearing the dress, her shoes, and a purse, and nothing more. "Later!" she giggled. "Let's dance!" she said in a louder voice after disengaging from hugging him.

His dancing was nothing that would ever get him a name as one of the world's greatest, but he held his own as he danced with Heidi. He found that once he stopped paying attention to his feet, he was in good shape, just moving to the music. He had an excellent time, discovered fairly quickly that his dance partner was sans brassiere, and during a rather interesting dance move, she also proved that his early suspicion was correct. Once she had proved that, she decided that she needed to hide his reaction by dancing pressed again him.

"Can I assume that your dress is charmed to let only certain people see under it?" he groaned at one point when she was grinding against him in time to the music.

"Only the people I trust, or plan to sleep with," she replied. He managed to turn the misstep that revelation caused into a rather interesting move that twirled her around once before she was against him again. "Nice save," she purred.

Finally, after his second (and last) beer, and after quite some time dancing, he decided that he simply had enough. He staggered back to the bar and found two seats there, which he and Heidi took. "No more dancing," he said. "I love dancing with you, but my feet are about to fall off."

"Wimp," she laughed, breathing heavily from her own exertions. After a few more pleasant-to-watch breaths, she said, "Honestly, I'm beat as well. I don't usually dance this much in this club."

"I've *never* danced this much," he admitted. "And those dances were mostly waltzes, and all slow. At least I didn't look too much like someone had dropped a live crab in my shorts."

Her response to that comment was to do what she had attempted to do to him earlier - a small amount of beer shot from her mouth in a fine spray before she began to cough, laughing the entire time. "You," she finally coughed, "are going to pay for that, mister." She grabbed his arm and steered him toward the door of the club. A number of people bid them both good night.

"They expect that I'm dragging you back to my place, or your hotel. We can, if you want. But I needed to leave, or else I'd have them all over me. I like the attention, but sometimes it gets a bit much for me."

"Tell me about it," he grumbled. "I get sick of it sometimes."

"You are pretty hot," she said with an impressed look at him. "I'd imagine you do get some attention."

He turned to face her. They were in the light of a street lamp, so he raised the hair covering his scar. Her eyes widened, and then she nodded. "Damn," was all she said. "I wish you hadn't shown me that yet."

"Why?" he asked.

"Because I now have to try to convince you that I'd like to sleep with you because you make me horny, and not because I'd be able to say that I'd slept with Harry Potter."

He sighed. "Let's get a cup of coffee or two. I shouldn't have been drinking at all, being only fifteen, although I'm sixteen in just a few days, but maybe the coffee will help."

She looked at him with more than a little curiosity, but led him to what he assumed was her favourite coffee shop. Once they had their cups, they sat down across from each other. "You've heard one thing that should help you with your decision," he said with a small laugh.

"What? So what if you're fifteen? You make me laugh, you're sexy, and I still find the idea of looking at your hotel room ceiling to be a good one, as long as you're on top of me at the time."

He shook his head and tried to ignore the part of his body that was screaming 'Listen to her, you fool!' After another sigh, he said, "There's a few reasons why we shouldn't. In no particular order, they are: my age; Voldemort; I'm only here for a few days at most; Death Eaters; not much money at the moment; and did I mention Voldemort and his henchmen?"

"Okay," she said with a small chuckle. "I'll take them on, also not necessarily in order, and even try to be serious. Your age. In England it might be sixteen or eighteen, but here in Germany, as long as you consent, I can take you back to my apartment or your hotel room and have my way with you for as long as you can perform. I'm eighteen, and I can joyfully screw your brains out legally.

"Voldemort? Not much I can do, but I'll be packed off to a convent before I let him decide my life - sex life or otherwise. Death Eaters? Same thing. They might kill me some day, but I'd like to think that I'm canny enough to take at least one of them down, and I will not let fear of them stop me from enjoying myself.

"Money. Who gives a damn about the money? I'm not even sure why it came up, and the only one that comes to mind immediately could be taken as insulting. Actually no, I just thought of another one. You don't need to pay for my enjoyment, Harry. I had more fun just dancing in that club." She smirked. "Neither of us paid the charge to get in, either, and neither of us used magic to get away with that.

"As for your not being here all that long? Well, that could lead to some problems, if you fall in love easily. But if you can sleep with a girl and not need her in your life all the time, every second of every day, then I can get behind a little naked fun."

He shook his head at the mental images of her naked. She was showing a pronounced interest in him, if the state of her dress was any indicator - the material seemed to be getting very slightly transparent immediately around her nipples. "Well," he said, and then fell silent. "Um, there's a couple things, Heidi. First off, I'm a virgin," he nearly whispered, blushing furiously. "Second? Well, I don't know, but you strike me as the type of woman that I would . . . well, if I . . . well, I respect you too much to use you, even if you're willing to let me do that. That's the sort of thing my disgusting cousin would do." His blush got much more pronounced. "It doesn't help that you look very much like two girls from my school that I find attractive." He scowled. "If I listen to my body, then we'll end up at the closer of your apartment or my hotel, naked and sweaty. And don't think that it doesn't sound like a good idea to me, okay?"

She grinned at him. "But you're going to listen to your moral code, aren't you?"

He looked at her for a long moment, drinking in her features. "Yes," he finally said.

He was startled to see her expression brighten. "I'll admit that fucking you senseless is a good idea, but I've never met a man who liked me so much that he *wouldn't* sleep with me. I'm not loose, but I'm also not a nun." She stood and picked up her coffee. "Come back to my apartment with me, and we'll talk more. Maybe we'll sleep together, but sleeping is *all* we'll do. You respect me, and I respect a man who has convictions like yours."

## Betrayed Wherein the Truth is Learned

He awoke the next morning to a somewhat insistent pressure, but it wasn't from his bladder. Heidi was cuddled against him, and he'd had his usual morning erection - right against her shapely bum. He tried to move away from her carefully.

"Going somewhere?" she asked with a voice filled with humour.

"Um," was all he could say.

"I'm not angry. Actually, I'm rather flattered by it. Especially since it seems to have clawed its way free of your boxers." He inhaled and she laughed, pressing back against him. "Don't apologise. You were asleep. Besides, I'm wearing more underwear than I was under that dress." She gave a throaty chuckle as he twitched against her. "I'm not trying to be a tease, but that does my ego no end of good to have you react like that,"

"I told you last night - my body was screaming to accept your offer, but my morals protested."

"And your body was screaming 'You idiot!', right?" she asked as she climbed from the bed and padded into the kitchen of her apartment. She was in a light blue camisole top that hugged her figure and stopped before it reached her navel and a pair of matching light blue thong panties.

"Merlin," he whispered in frustration, unable to tear his eyes away from her shapely rear until she had entered the kitchen. He climbed from the bed and carried his clothes with him into the bathroom, where he quickly washed up and got dressed.

"Pity," she said with a smile as he stepped out. "I was enjoying the view."

"I still am, which is why I needed to get your view of me safely hidden away." He sighed. "Heidi, you are really testing my willpower sorely, and that may have a more literal meaning in a while - sore, that is," he said with a very small laugh. "We talked a lot, and you're someone I could probably fall for if I was going to be in town for a long time. But if we do what you're tempting me to do, I'm never going to want to leave, and I *have* to leave sometime soon." He thought for a moment. "Good lord, could I be more obvious that I'm a teenager?" he asked with a laugh. He copied her melodramatic hand to the forehead of the night before. "Oh woe is me!" he cried. "I have things to do, and I must leave the girl that might be my true love! I shall now write an overly depressing and extremely bad song about it!"

She was giggling madly as he finished. "You certainly have the angsty teen bit down, but you're not supposed to ridicule it!" she finally managed to gasp out. "You're supposed to be a tortured soul, yelling at everyone and brooding horribly."

"Oh. Well, I got that out of the way during this school year that just passed. Or did I miss the O.W.L. on that and have to keep going until I pass it?"

"I like you, Harry." She paused for a bit, during which time he enjoyed the way she looked as she stood at her stove scrambling some eggs. "Mind anything in your eggs?" she asked absently.

"As long as they're edible, feel free to add what you find tasty. Ham, bacon, cheese, cilantro, whatever."

She added some ham and white cheese to the eggs and cooked a while longer, obviously still thinking. As she brought them to the table, she said, "A warning - the cheese I used is a cheddar so sharp you can cut yourself."

"Ooo, sounds good!" he said. "Now, what were you thinking about so heavily? I can't believe that fixing scrambled eggs was using all your brain-power."

"I had an idea, but didn't know how you'd take it. I've been working the pros and cons in my head."

"Okay, shoot." He took a bite of his eggs, and smiled. "I love them," he said. "A good sharp cheese is excellent."

She smiled only momentarily. "I was wondering if you'd complain about me inviting myself along on your travels." She looked worried.

He stared at her for a long time before answering. "Hmm. I take it that you've thought about the fact that I've got two different sides chasing me to do what they want to me? One side wants to control me, and the other side wants to kill me, and will likely kill anyone with me?"

"No one can ever be completely prepared for that, I admit, but I've got to do something more with my life than sitting around here and nightclubbing. I've made myself wealthy by admittedly abusing the British banking system, and I've nothing to do that really interests me. I'm a skilled witch who can do what I want, and all I've been doing is hitting clubs and occasionally having sex with an interested partner."

"I think any man with a pulse is likely to be interested in you," he replied with a smile.

"Some of the women, too," she said simply. "And that means what you think it means."



He paused for a moment, then shrugged. It made no real difference to him. "Okay, so you're looking for something to do with your life, so you've decided that watching my back is that something?"

"It's a bit more than that," she answered him. "You intrigue me. Yes, you make me horny as well, but there are more guys than you that can get me wet. But you've got this sense of nobility, this attitude of - I honestly don't have a valid word for it - you make me realise that I can be better than I currently am, and I want to be better. If I stay here and do nothing, then I'll probably slip back into clubbing and fucking meaninglessly, but if I come with you, then maybe I can learn to be the better person I want to be."

"Okay," he said. "When does your lease run out, or do you own this place?"

She grinned. "I own the entire building. Got a landlord I trust to run the place. Comes back to that little bit of legal larceny I pulled in Britain. Converted a trust fund into Galleons and then sold them through a reputable dealer. Forty thousand Galleons brings a *lot* of real money in when sold."

He whistled. "Easy maths like that I can do. At the prices I got, I would have gotten ten million pounds, which I think comes out to about fifteen million US dollars."

"Roughly. I bought the building and had a lot left over. Hired a good administrator for the building, and keep money coming in through rents. Needless to say, I have the best apartment in the building."

"Penthouses are like that," he said with an amused shake of his head. "Whole floor?" She nodded.

"So what's your answer?" she asked him. "May I accompany you?" Her eyes sparkled. "I was going to ask if I can come with you, but that's for later in the relationship."

He snorted. "Wench," he said with a laugh. "I already answered you, though. It's why I asked about the apartment. If you're in no danger of losing the place, then I see no reason to prevent you from coming along."

---

She showed him around the city after they went to his hotel room and retrieved his few belongings.

They were walking around Munich on his third day when an owl began swooping down to him. "Don't touch the letter," he cautioned. "It's likely Dumbledore trying to contact me and Portkey me back to England against my will." He squinted. "There's either no magic on that letter, or he's gotten good about masking."

"You made a comment about me sparkling. You can see the aura around magical items?"

"Yes. The more powerful the spell or spells, the brighter the glow, it seems. I noticed it when I was looking right through invisibility cloaks."

"You can see through cloaks?" Her eyes sparkled. "Can you see through clothing?"

"Only if it's see-through," he responded as the owl landed in front of him. He looked at the handwriting and squinted at it again. "Hmm. I wonder how Hermione is chastising me now?"

---

*Harry,*

*I don't know what to tell you. I take full responsibility for my angry letter to you. I begin to understand now why you left, though.*

*I know that you might think this is an attempt to ask forgiveness, but it isn't. What I have written you is a letter to warn you that Dumbledore appears to be willing to throw around the Imperius to get his way. This is not to say that I am asking for forgiveness. Yes, I was under the Imperius, but an Imperius works much better if you are ordered to do something you want to anyway, and my order was to help protect you. In this case, by making sure that I was willing to tell you to stay at the Dursley home. Between that and my nearly slavish attention to the rules and to authority figures, it was easy to control me.*

*The fact that you've made no effort to contact me since leaving tends to point toward you no longer trusting me. KEEP THINKING THIS. I do not know when Dumbledore will realise that I've broken his hold. (Broken when he ordered me to nearly cripple you if you showed up to speak to me.)*

*While I would appreciate a response, you owe me nothing. In fact, I owe you a life debt, and will state that after what I have done to you, I will repay this debt, even to the cost of my own life, if necessary.*

*Please, no matter what, stay safe.*

*Hermione Granger*

---

"Interesting," was all he said. "It explains a lot, though." He handed it to her. "I know that you don't know her, but maybe you can give me the female point of view, in case I missed something."

Hmm?" she asked, looking up from the letter. "Why didn't you tell me you had a girlfriend?"

"What?" he asked, startled. "What are you talking about?"

"Oh my," she said with a small laugh. "This girl is heartbroken that you think she's untrustworthy. I may be reading this wrong, but I think she's in love with you."

He blinked several times. "Oh boy," he finally said. "I learn this after getting intrigued by you. Wonderful."

"I share," she said softly. "I hope she does too."

He shook his head, thinking that too much more in this vein might make said head explode, as well as the one below his waist. It was as he was contemplating this that his 'beeper' began to vibrate on his belt. "How do you feel about Zurich?" he asked.

"It's a nice city. I could stand to stay there for a while. I assume we're heading there, then? Or are you hoping to give me whiplash from a high speed change of conversation direction."

"Leaving. Unless they're contacting me about an emergency meeting, I'm going to take the train. It will give me some time to think about how this changes things."

"I think you should give her a chance. Look carefully at this paper. She did her best to wipe them away, but I think she cried while writing this."

"I'll think about it. For now, let's get me to the Deutsche Bank."

Half an hour later, he was in Zurich with his gnome friend, Heidi, and an Unspeakable. "We've begun proceedings against the goblins, but that will go slowly. I note that you haven't touched the line of credit yet."

"Haven't needed it yet. I'll end up touching it eventually, but not right now."

"A smart man. Now to the reason that we asked you here. This is Unspeakable Morrison."

"Mr Potter. You and your team made a lot of work for us, and helped show the holes in our security. The Prophecy department isn't entirely happy with you, though." He laughed. "But that's why I'm here. Copies were made of the originals that were broken, and I have brought the copy with your name on it." He floated a small ball out of his bag. "No one but the people directly involved can touch one of these." It floated toward Harry. "It will start to play as soon as it touches your hand. I know what it says, since I have some serious connections within the department, as opposed to Rookwood. If you don't want them hearing it, we can use a small room outside."

"Let them hear it," Harry said.

"I think you'll like it," Morrison said. "The first half, at least, is good news for you."

The prophecy globe dropped the two inches it needed to fall into his hands, and the glass immediately began to mist away. Sybill Trelawney once more stood before Harry, but this time, she had much different words:

*. . . the Dark Lord shall fall to the Marked One . . . beware, though, lest greater evil rise in his stead . . . the Dark Lord shall fall to the Marked One . . .*

Harry looked at his hands for several seconds after the mist had faded. "That son of a bitch," he growled. "You'd swear that this is real - that *this* was in the globe that broke?" At Morrison's nod, he said, "Would you like to hear the one that Dumbledore fed to me, right after the battle at the Ministry?" The Unspeakable nodded.

*. . . 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 . . ."*

Morrison actually started to laugh. "You've not been paying attention in History of Magic, have you?"

"You must be Ravenclaw, since you're obviously not Hermione. Only Ravenclaws and Hermione can stay awake for Binns. Why?"

"Ever hear of the story of Beowulf? He was marked by the Dark Lady Wyetta, mother of the Dark Lord Grendel. That was the prophecy given to Beowulf."

Harry sat back and thought for a long moment. "I'm guaranteed to win, that's what the real prophecy reads to me. But the worry we have is that I might rise to be the new Dark Lord."

"Actually, given your moral code, that won't happen," Heidi said. "I wonder if the warning is to make sure that you do everything you can to stay alive, in order to keep Dumbledore from rising to take over."

Morrison cocked his head. "Believable. He likes to think that he's doing everything in the best interest of 'the greater good', but I can see him deciding that taking over is in the best interests of the wizarding world."

"Considering he's doing the Imperius on people to get them to get me back or keep me under control?" At Morrison's look, he said, "Hermione Granger states that he cast it on her to make her even more willing to help him."

"Can you get in touch with her?"

He thought for a moment. "How about this?" He looked to his gnome benefactor. "Can you send mail without using owls, Mr Hogunson? Muggle . . . non-magically? And make sure that it arrives before anything sent by an owl?"

"Easily."

"I'll write three letters on two sheets. One in lemon juice, which I expect them to read before she can, or over her shoulder. One that is the obvious message on that same sheet, and the third is to be sent to her and contains the real message."

"Write that one last."

---

*Hermione,*

*I need time to think about things. My life has been a real LEMON so far, but this change to get away has left me JUICED. I think we've all got our own SECRETS to keep. I promise that I'll talk to you at some point before school starts.*

*Harry*

---

*Hermione,*

*Wizards tend to ignore logic, as you pointed out in our first year. Even with me stressing the words, I'm betting that no one figured out that I wrote a second message in lemon juice.*

*I hate to tell you this, but in order to get away from Dumbledore et al (see, I can use interesting phrases too!), I'll be heading to the Americas. To be honest, with everyone expecting me to fight Riddle, I've decided that I'm going to hold it off.*

*To let you understand why I'm running, though, let me tell you what was in that damned globe that broke. Dumbles heard it and showed it to me minutes after Sirius had died.*

*. . . 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 . . .*

*Think about that. I have some unknown power, and I'm Moldie's equal. I need to find this power and learn howto harness it. (Dumbles thinks it's love. Somehow I doubt I'm going to shag him to death. Ew)*

*I'll try to stay in contact.*

*Harry*

---

*Hermione,*

*I'm sending you this letter via the gnomes of Zurich. Can you and your folks come to either Paris or Brussels? There will be another that follows with a different message. React to it, but don't believe it. I expect that even they'll recognise the code in it and read the letter underneath.*

*The truth will be found in Brussels or Paris - your choice. (The Euro Tunnel can get you to either in a couple hours, so it's not like it's a huge problem - make it a day trip, or a weekend with the folks.)*

*YOUR owls I will accept. Dumbledore's get sent right back without a reading.*

*Harry*

---

"If I see an owl coming to me with her handwriting but with magic flowing off it, then it means that she's working with them, most likely, or is badly compromised. If not, then we're good. The other letter is for getting Dumbledore looking in a different direction."

He laughed suddenly. "Trust me, they *still* might not find the message in the one they're intended to find," he said with a laugh. "But they likely will find it and start looking at all the ways I can get to the United States, and likely spread their already useless team thin by sending some to New York and Washington, D.C. to stop me and send me back."

"I'll help you in any way I can, Mr Potter," Morrison said.

"Thank you. Thank you both for your help."

"It's quite worth it," Hogunson said. "We'll be wealthier than ever before, and you'll be living pleasantly yourself. When we finally get your vaults under

your control, we'll have to decide how to properly liquidate the gold in them."

"Don't worry," Morrison said as he saw Harry look sideways at him. "I'm married to Triella Einarsdottar. Your friend is my father-in-law."

"If Hermione checks out as trustworthy, I'm going to tell her about this little manoeuvre. Get her folks to give her large sums to play with. Hell, to be honest, just a hundred Pounds converted that way would become five thousand in the course of a few days."

"Precisely. Turn back on the goblins the very methods that they use to make themselves rich."

"Is there much to be done right now?" Harry asked. "The process of getting my money free of the goblins and Dumbledore is not going to be finished soon, I know that."

"No, Mr Potter," Einar Hogunson told him. "You and your lady-friend are free for the time being."

"Thank you for all your help, sir."

"It's just good business sense," the gnome told him with a smile.

"Well then, thank you for doing business with me," Harry said with a small laugh.

"Trust me - it's our pleasure."

---

He spent the next few days in Zurich with Heidi. He was fast becoming aware that falling in love with this girl would likely be very easy. She was a good listener, and heard things from him that he had not yet told his friends at Hogwarts about his time with the Dursleys. She continued with her flirting, but toned it down considerably. She made it clear that he was welcome in her bed with or without clothes, but made no effort to get him unclothed herself.

It was on the fourth day that an owl made its way to them. Harry saw no magic on its letter, and the handwriting was Hermione's.

---

*Harry,*

*Received the Zurich letter, as well as the other one/two. They did read it. I took some heat from the conversation. Apparently, they didn't like you saying anything against the Headmaster. I'd suggest Brussels, to be honest, on the 29th, at the Atomium. Paris is too obvious.*

*Hermione*

---

He looked at the letter for a long moment. Something was wrong about it. Then he noticed her comment about 'taking heat' over his letter to her. He created a bluebell flame and held the letter up to it carefully.

---

*I THINK THEY'RE READING ALL MY OWL MAIL. PARIS, ON YOUR BIRTHDAY. EIFFEL.*

---

"I thought so. So do we do both?" Heidi asked.

"I think so. I can have you meet her. There are a couple phrases that I doubt others could finish, or would mean anything to anyone not Hermione. I wouldn't put it past them to try to pass someone off as her on the 29th. Probably Tonks."

---

The two of them continued their tour of Europe. From Zurich they headed to Italy, where they visited Milan for a few days, enjoying the beautiful architecture. Harry had to admit that he was preferring her architecture to the granite and marble stuff, and knew that this was going to be a problem. He was definitely falling for her. He still had feelings for Cho Chang, and there was a strong part of him that really wanted to find out that Hermione was not stringing him along.

Turin came next, and they visited the church where the famous Shroud had been for so many years. From there they headed to Genoa and then to Monaco, where Heidi decided that torturing Harry was the order of the days that they were there on the beach, given that nudity and going topless were quite common. From Monaco they headed to Nice and then Lyon, slowly making their way toward Belgium. They made it to Brussels on the 27th, and enjoyed a beautiful day on the 28th exploring, buying walkie-talkies to allow them to be a good distance apart, to make sure that they couldn't be easily traced.

On the 29th, Harry and Heidi made it to the Atomium. "If someone shows up that I say looks like Hermione, I want you to approach her. You can hold the walkie-talkie out to her so that I can ask her a couple questions. If she answers them to my satisfaction, then I'll come out." He was in quality clothes that no one from the Order would ever expect to see him in, and he wore a comfortable fedora on his head, placed somewhat jauntily, which helped to hide the scar on his forehead. She wore a simple blouse and skirt combination.

He tapped her shoulder about an hour into their wait, and pointed to the bushy-haired girl walking along the fence on the outside. She was not looking in their direction, so they separated, Harry heading around the circle a distance, where he would not easily be seen by either lady.

Hermione Granger?" he heard over the walkie-talkie.

"Who are you? Where's Harry?" was the response. It sounded like Hermione, but Polyjuice and Tonks could both manage that trick.

Heidi held up the walkie-talkie and said, "I'm letting go of the button, Harry. You can speak now."

He waited for just a moment before saying, "I have a question for you, Hermione. You once said that, and I quote, 'You could be killed! Or worse . . .' What was the worse that you said?"

"When did I say that to you?" she asked. "I don't remember."

"I was going off to fight Draco Malfoy."

"I don't remember," she said.

"Okay, that's possible. Try this one on for size. You made a comment in first year in regards to yourself, and referring to me. 'Book! And cleverness! There are more important things, like . . .' Guess what? You get to answer that. The real Hermione knows, and the lady in front of you right now doesn't, so Legilimency won't work."

There was a long silence. "When did you get so canny, Potter?" the voice on the other end growled. It no longer sounded so much like Hermione.

"When the Order and Dumbledore decided that my being beaten was just fine with them. Tonks, I presume?"

"Yeah, it's me. You can't run forever, you know. You've got to return to Hogwarts to finish your education, and don't think that the year will be easy for you after this summer." She sounded happy at the thought of the kind of revenge Dumbledore might take at Harry's summer jaunt.

"Well, unless he's willing to intentionally go against the international police departments, he'll want to be careful. I believe that we're all being watched even now. I've friends in some interesting places - including a few of your bosses - and I think you'll find kidnapping me like I'm sure you planned will not go over terribly well."

"The nice thing is, you can't break the code that Hermione and I used. Do you really think that we'd go to either destination when we were sure you read the letters? I came here to let you know that we're a step ahead of you. Hermione is already at the place we're really going to meet. I'll give you a hint, though. Think Archimedes and where he's famous for."

"What's to keep me from grabbing the girl with the walkie-talkie and forcing you to come out?"

"Go ahead. Of course, you'll lose your badge when you return to the United Kingdom, because of those Belgian Aurors I mentioned. You might even be extradited to Belgium to stand trial. Yeah, I've got a 'saving people thing', but I'm also acting more Slytherin than I used to, thanks to Dumbledore. So, gonna kidnap and cause *another* international incident? How's Dumbles doing after grabbing Kaatje, anyway?" His only answer was a growl, and then a loud crack of Apparation.

"Well, that was interesting," Heidi finally said. "I wonder where she's gone to."

"Don't know. Thanks for doing this for me, by the way. If you want to get back to your boyfriend, you can. You can drop the walkie-talkie at our prearranged drop."

"It was fun," she replied as she walked toward him. "I've always wanted to be a spy." She shut it off and finished the walk to Harry.

"Now the question is to see if they bought my little ruse about where we're meeting."

"Sending them to Greece?" Heidi asking with amusement.

"Sicily, actually. Syracuse. He was involved in holding the Roman's off for quite some time. The Sicilians of the day lost because they got cocky and thought that they could all go off and party." He chuckled. "With luck, they'll decipher my message that I gave Tonks and go haring off to Italy and Greece for a few days." He snorted. "She got no time limit on it, either. She doesn't know when we're meeting. I'd imagine that they're firing people off to get there *right now*. They're probably worrying that I've got a Portkey or two, which is why I could be here."

"That now leaves us plenty of time to get where we want to go. Would you like to get there a day early?"

He chuckled. "I'd ask if you were planning to have your way with me in the City of Lights, but I already know the answer, considering how we met."

"I resent that!" she replied with an answering grin. "You make it sound like leaving you with a smile on your face that will need to be sand-blasted off is my only purpose for hanging out with you!" After a pause she added, "It's a good one, mind you. Just not my *only* purpose."

---

"I request permission to cripple the little bastard when we catch him, Albus," Severus Snape growled as the Order prepared to head off on their search for Harry Potter.

"I'll help," Tonks added with her own growl. "Little prick has us running all over Hell's half acre trying to find him. Archimedes, my ass. Where in Greece do we go?"

"Do you learn nothing in your schooling?" Severus asked. "We obviously should head to Sicily. Archimedes was famous for his extended defence of the city of Syracuse."

"Tonks is likely right, Severus," Remus said. "Harry is great in Defence Against the Dark Arts, but History of Magic - and history in general - is not his strong point. I'd lay money that he was thinking of Greece, and by extension, likely someplace like Athens." He got a sly look on his face. "Or are you saying that he's as smart as you are, Severus?"

"That child? Intelligent? As much as I hate to admit it, your comment has merit. I still believe that someone should check out Sicily, if only to have all the bases covered, since he referred to a code with Granger, but I find myself agreeing with you, Lupin. Athens it is."

Albus shook his head as everyone prepared to leave via Portkey. His accidental abduction of Ms Houghtailing had led to some repercussions in the international circles that were going to play out for some time, and had made his attempts to gather Harry back into the fold much more difficult.

*He needs to understand that he is at a very dangerous time in his life. I told him the Beowulf prophecy to take advantage of his tendencies. Were he to have heard the proper prophecy, then he would most certainly have run off and made an attempt on Tom that would eventually bring him down, but Harry would certainly have died in the process, and left us with an angrier than usual Tom Riddle. I need to ensure that he is skilled enough to kill Tom, but not skilled enough to protect himself completely, lest he rise as the next dark lord. I do not believe that I would live long enough to properly fight him were that to be the case.*

He shook his head. *I wish that he could have a long and happy life, but such was not destined to be. I mourn the necessity of his death.*

---

The 31st of July found Heidi and Harry walking around the base of the Eiffel Tower together, waiting for Hermione to arrive. "I'm going to risk it this time," he told her. "I'm pretty sure that I've got a chunk of the Order running around like headless chickens right now, and her letter seemed like she was pretty torn up over what she'd done."

This was obviously the universe's cue to bring Hermione Granger on-screen. "I didn't comment when it was that other one, but your Hermione is a bit of a hottie," Heidi murmured. "I think I'd enjoy trying to see if she freckles or not."

"I've never really looked at her that way," he said in response before turning around to look in the direction Heidi was looking. "Holy shit," he breathed. "She's never looked that good at school!"

"I'll bet your school never allowed sheer sundresses either," she answered with a laugh.

The girl in question saw them and looked right past them, continuing to look for Harry. He was confused by this, so he started walking in her direction. She finally registered that someone was approaching her, so she stopped and waited for them to get close. "May I help you?" she asked.

"I hope so, Hermione," Harry answered. "I'm here to meet you, after all."

"Harry!" she exclaimed happily, and nearly threw her arms around him to hug him, but she stopped herself. "I'm sorry. I lost that right this summer."

He drew her into a hug, startled by how she was shivering. "I could really use a hug from my best friend, though."

"But I betrayed you!" she sobbed into his shoulder. "The Imperius doesn't excuse my actions."

"You accept the responsibility, though. You don't expect me to forgive you your trespasses against me. Malfoy, on the other hand, used it as a way of saying 'I'm really not a child-raping bastard, I was forced into it by someone else!' He took no responsibility for his actions."

"But -"

"Are you really going to argue with me forgiving you?" he asked with a smile. "Do you really want to insist that I hate you or something?"

She blushed. "You should, after I reported everything to Dumbledore. 'It's for the greater good'," she mocked. "'And just to make sure - Imperius! Making me do something I was inclined to do anyway doesn't forgive me.'"

"Why were you inclined to look after this gorgeous hunk of man?" Heidi asked, making Hermione jump. "Heidi Koenig, by the way."

"Hermione Granger," she replied, holding out her hand. A look of anger shot across her face, followed immediately by resignation. "If Harry's trusting you, I will too."

"Thank you. Now, what was your reasoning?"

"To be honest, it's because he gets in so much danger during the school year, and last year it started even before the *school year* started. I worry for him. I want him safe."

"Why?"

"He's my friend. Isn't that enough?"

"Usually, but I read body language too. There's more than friendship at the heart of this."

"Doesn't matter anyway now," Hermione said sadly.

"Uh, can I ask what's going on here?" Harry asked.

"Girl talk," Heidi said with a chuckle. "First, I'm trying to get this pretty thing to admit that she'd like to do with you what I couldn't get you to do to me in Munich - or anywhere else, for that matter - and then find out if she's interested in - A) the opposite sex and - B) sharing."

Hermione's jaw had dropped, but Harry was intrigued to note that her breathing had sped up considerably, and that she was also showing him that she wasn't wearing a strapless bra under her dress.

"You've got a strong-willed boyfriend here, girl," Heidi said. "He was cuddled against me many a night, and all I ever got was a gentle poke in the rear end, and I don't mean that the way you might think. From the way he seemed to talk about you, I suspect that you would have a much easier time getting him naked than I've had with the same effort on my part."

Harry was blushing furiously and refusing to look at Hermione at this point, mainly because he was now imagining exactly what Heidi had just described. "She's blunt," he strangled out.

"I noticed," was Hermione's squeaky answer.

"So, you haven't answered any of my questions. The most important is how you feel about him. The other two are just wishful thinking on my part."

Hermione looked at Harry and said, "I know that I've really hurt my chances this summer, but I have to admit that I've had dreams about waking up and feeling what she was describing, only with no clothes in the way. I've wanted to look across the breakfast table and look into your eyes."

"- and then get him to screw you on the table -" Heidi interjected with a chuckle.

"You have a one track mind, Heidi," Harry said, shaking his head.

"I'm sexually frustrated," she said with a shrug. "I'm sleeping with a man who has admitted that he'd like to fuck me, but won't. Whether or not I now understand what he's been holding out for, I'm still horny."

"What do you mean that you understand why he's been holding out? You can't mean me," Hermione said. "I'd kill to be half as sexy as you are!" She clamped her hands over her mouth when she realised what she'd said.

Heidi's eyebrows rose in amusement. "Was that a generic 'I can see why people think you're sexy, even though I don't feel that way myself' sort of feeling, or the way I feel looking at you and Harry, which is a 'let me go home and wring out my panties' sort of way?" Whether or not they were horribly embarrassed by her turn of phrase, neither Harry nor Hermione was able to keep from laughing at that. Heidi simply stood there grinning.

"Look," Harry said, still chuckling madly, "whether or not we can get Heidi laid in the next couple minutes, we're really here to talk about what's going on in England. Why don't we get your parents over here, and the five of us can go to lunch together. Besides, you guys might want to know a little something about the goblins, and a way to get proper value for your money."

Hermione perked up, but then looked around. "I'm surprised that the Order isn't obvious around here. None of them are really good at hiding."

Harry squinted and looked around, seeing no tell-tale sparkles. "No cloaks or spells, so they must have bought my cock-and-bull story about you and me meeting elsewhere."

"Where'd you send them?" she asked in curiosity.

"Well, if they understood, then Syracuse. If they didn't, then they likely chose Athens. I mentioned that Archimedes was famous for the place."

Hermione blinked at him for a moment, and Heidi ended up giggling. "I think you'll want to be careful about that, sexy. I think intelligence turns her on."

He looked at Hermione, who was apparently trying to find out if it was possible to blush to death, and said, "E equals emm cee squared?" He put his hands behind his back and crossed his fingers as he spoke.

Her eyes widened, and suddenly she threw her arms around him and cried softly in his ear. "I love you too, Harry!" she finally managed to whisper.

He relaxed. "We all need to talk, and it's best to get your folks involved. Where are they?"

"Over there on the benches. Let's go join them."

---

"So you're suggesting that we give Hermione a thousand Pounds or so, have her convert them to Galleons, and then sell them for the gold?" Derek Granger asked.

"Probably best to melt them down first, I'd say. Perhaps I can find out from Mr Hogunson at Deutsche Bank." From the look on Hermione's face, he was actually surprised that her eyes didn't simply fall out of her head and land on the table. "I take it you recognise the name?"

"I didn't know that he worked at Deutsche Bank, but . . . Harry, Einar Hogunson is to the gnomes - the real ones, not those stupid potatoes with legs - he's to the gnomes what Queen Elizabeth is to us. You've been in contact with the head of the Gnome Confederacy!"

"He likes Harry," Heidi said. "I think he'd ask Harry to call him Einar, but I doubt Harry would do that."

"The thing is, you can expect a return of something like five thousand percent, if I remember how that works properly," Harry said, ignoring the byplay. "You give her a thousand, and when you're done selling the gold, you'll have about fifty thousand in cash. The goblins know this, and that's

why they're so much in charge of wizard banking - they can afford to buy out the wizards, if necessary. A galleon is worth a lot more than they offer." He paused for a moment. "Actually, I think it's forty-nine hundred percent. You're getting that original thousand back, plus another forty-nine thousand with it. It's one or the other, but you know what I mean."

"What do you expect from us in return?" Angelina asked him.

"If you're thinking I want a cut, you're wrong. Hermione is my friend, and proved that to me, even with the problem this summer. She was willing to allow me to cut all ties with her, despite the fact that it would break her heart to do so. I've discovered that I'm kinda in love with her, and I think she's kinda in love with me, and if I didn't know that she'd kill me for suggesting it, I'd make the payment for telling you this keeping her as safe as possible."

"Harry James Potter," Hermione growled.

"Case in point," he said with a laugh. "Scatter my remains to the four winds, please." He turned to face her. "Hermione, I know that you want to be with me, at my back, but can you understand that I want my friends to be safe?"

"Can you understand how I'd kick myself if you died and I wasn't there to try to prevent it?"

"Well, I won't die until after Voldie is defeated, I know that much." When Hermione gave him an odd look, he quoted, ". . . *the Dark Lord shall fall to the Marked One . . . beware, though, lest greater evil rise in his stead . . . the Dark Lord shall fall to the Marked One . . .*" He sighed. "That's the real prophecy. He quoted the damned Beowulf prophecy at me, knowing that I don't do well in History of Magic."

"Why is the Headmaster doing this?" Derek asked. "What benefit is he getting out of it?"

"I don't honestly know," Harry said. "He could be secretly evil, or he could honestly believe that everything he's done is for the best. *Whose* best interests is the question, though. My personal thought is that he sees himself as incorruptible, and therefore I am the one destined to become a Dark Lord. I'll take the title if the only evil I have to do is making my children laugh themselves silly and eat their vegetables. Beyond that? Who wants to rule the world? Does anyone who goes for it actually ever think of all that's involved? If you're running everything, then you've got meetings left and right about prices of tea in Tangiers and peaches in Patagonia, not to mention dealing with all the petty squabbles. If you're a Voldie type ruler, then you are going to be constantly worried about the upstarts coming to depose you, since you obviously care for none of your proper duties as ruler."

Hermione blinked at him a few times, and was giving visual evidence that Heidi was right - smart people made Hermione horny. "Harry," she moaned, and then blushed. Clearing her throat, she tried again. "Harry," she started once more in a far more normal voice, "where has this intellect been in our previous five years?"

"Well, the Dursleys didn't like me showing up their Duddy-dinkums, so that was one reason I hid it, and one of my first friends my own age is an extraordinary slacker. I wanted him to keep liking me, so -"

"What about when we return to school?" she asked.

"If you return to school," Angelina interrupted.

"When we return to school," Hermione shot back.

"She's right. Even knowing that Dumbledore is likely to try everything he can next year, I can't just leave Europe and not fight Voldie. I want to win and have a life after that." He turned back to Hermione. "Because I want to survive and hopefully marry and father those children - if I am exceptionally lucky, it might be with a certain British beauty I have known for years - I will need to let my real intellect out. No more slacking." He sighed. "Besides, in order for me to change schools, to something like the Suisse Institute of Magic, I need the signature of my wizarding guardian. If I haven't mentioned it to you before, then I'll give you three guesses who my guardian is listed as in the wizarding world."

"Should we move Hermione?" Derek asked.

Harry held up his hand and silenced Hermione. "Please. They needed to ask. You'd run the risk of losing her, I think. She becomes old enough to make her own decisions in the wizarding world on the nineteenth of September, and at that point, she'd come right back to Hogwarts, because I'm there, and she's one of the only people I'll trust at my back. Her and Neville."

"I'm glad you didn't mention the Weasleys," Hermione said. "I've been disturbed by some of the letters I've been getting from Ginny and Ron. Ron is horribly confused right now, and I think that it's because of those brains. Ginny's letters hint that there has been sort of a Weasley plot in regards to you. She seems to think that she'll have access to your vaults in just a couple years. Ron's been part of the plot, but I think that it may have been a control issue, and the brains started to break that control, so we can't tell whose side that Ron is on at the moment. Ginny seems to be turning into a money-grubbing little bitch, and that bothers me, because I thought that she was my friend."

"So I shouldn't trust the Weasleys for now?"

"Hard to say. The twins seem solidly in your corner, we know that Percy disagrees with you because you don't kowtow to the Ministry line, and we've no idea at all about Bill and Charlie. I've doubts that Percy is secretly an agent for The Good Guys, tee em, so until word comes down otherwise, I refuse to trust the sanctimonious git."

Harry's eyebrows were nearly to his hairline, and he was smiling, partially in disbelief. "'The Good Guys, tee em'? 'Sanctimonious git'? Where has this little firebrand been hiding?"



Behind her worry that her best friends might not like her if she acted the way she wanted to."

He shook his head. "Well, be yourself. I like you as you are." He turned back to her parents. "Your daughter means a lot to me. If I didn't think she'd cripple me for suggesting it, I tell you to go to Australia or New Zealand or Fiji or somewhere as far away from me as possible." He noticed the wincing from her parents as he finished. "What? Did I say something wrong?"

"That was what broke my Imperius," Hermione said. "Dumbledore was angry and told me to hurt you badly if you showed up to talk to me. Basically, since most everything that doesn't remove a limb is repairable, he wanted me to cripple you until he could arrive."

"Arrogant, wasn't he, to assume that you'd stay under his control? Well, that's too bad." He was going to say more, but his 'beeper' began to vibrate. "Hmm, I wonder what Mr Hogunson needs to see me about?"

"He gave you a beeper?" Hermione asked in a breathy tone.

"Well, of a sort. He beeps me when something major is happening with me or my accounts. He seems to think that this case will open the doors for the gnomes to begin banking in wizarding England. Tell you what - come along with me and I'll introduce you. He can explain the process I'm talking about better than I can. With luck, being my friend will help you make a good impression, since he seems to like me."

"Okay," Hermione squeaked.

## Betrayed Additions

"I am pleased to make your acquaintance," Einar Hogunson said. "Let us not stand on ceremony, Miss Granger. You look as if you are about to faint."

"I just . . . I don't wish to offend, and I haven't had a chance to study gnomish customs," she said in a voice less sure than her usual one.

"The fact that you would wish to study them speaks volumes for you, dear lady, and all of it good. Let us simply speak as friends, and assume that any insult that happens is accidental, as can happen amongst friends." He turned to Harry. "That means that I expect you to start calling me Einar, Harry."

"Doesn't feel right to me, but . . . well, you asked me to, so I'll try. Einar," he added as an afterthought, obviously a bit uncomfortable with it.

"Don't worry. It becomes easier as you do it more often."

"They say that about sex, too," Heidi murmured.

"They're right, too," Derek said. "Fun practising, though." Heidi turned a brilliant red, making it quite clear that she had not intended anyone to overhear her comment. Einar was chuckling madly.

"Now that we have this out of the way, I have some news about your accounts. I have managed to get the wills of both of your parents and Sirius Black, through my connections within your Ministry. The goblins have copies and would not release them to us, despite the laws requiring such disclosure if requested by another banking institution. This was enough to make us more than a little curious, and I begin to understand why, having had a chance to look at the wills.

"There are multiple things that you need to know. One is that your parents, while being intelligent in making statements in their wills about your disposition, made the mistake of not letting others know of their wishes. The wills state that you were to be placed with anyone but the Dursley family. You need to marry by your twenty-first birthday - or at least be betrothed - in order to carry on the family name. There is a handwritten comment from Lily Potter about this requirement, and it is less than complimentary to the older laws, shall we say? They also named Minerva McGonagall as your wizarding guardian if Sirius Black was unable to fulfil that function for whatever reason."

Harry was doing his by now quite familiar scowl as he listened. "Were the wills at the Ministry sealed away from others, by chance? Perhaps by the Chief Warlock of the Wizengamot?"

"However did you jump to that amazingly correct conclusion?" Einar asked with a wry smile.

"I've taken three years of Divination," he replied loftily. "Obviously, it was my 'Inner Eye' opening and deducing the truth of the situation." He chuckled for only a moment, before adding darkly, "Or maybe it's just getting to know how the old bastard thinks."

"Well, we're not finished. Basically, all the Potter wealth goes to you. The Black wealth, while also yours, carries an interesting price. You must also marry to retain that wealth, but it is specifically written such that you *must* have a separate wife for the Black name, and she must be a pureblood of at least five generations. If you do not, it falls on the next closest individual, who the records state would be a Draco Malfoy."

"And if I kill Voldie and all his cronies - hopefully including the aforementioned little ponce - what happens then, if I choose not to fulfil that part of the contract?"

"The money stays in trust until a male child is born in the line, at which point he becomes subject to it."

"Do I know anyone that is pureblood to those specifications?" he asked Hermione, looking a little worried.

She thought for a minute before her eyes shot open wide. "You know several, and I think I know exactly who is expecting to be that bride."

"My Inner Eye, tee em, tells me that you are about to announce that Ginevra Weasley *just happens* to be a pureblood of at least five generations, right?"

"Yes, and now I know why she was talking the way she was. I'm betting that Dumbledore is trying to aim you in that direction."

"Pity you're not a pureblood of five generations," he murmured, lost in thought as he spoke.

There was silence in the room as he finished, and he looked up into a variety of reactions. Einar was openly amused, as was Heidi, although there was something extra in Heidi's look, but Hermione and her parents looked stunned. Hermione's eyes were so wide that Harry was afraid once again that they might drop from her skull. "Did you mean that the way it sounded?" she finally asked him in a very shaky voice.

"Hmm?" he asked. He thought for a moment as to what might have brought that reaction, and then started. "Well," he said, rubbing the back of his neck, "I, uh, well, I have to admit that -" He stopped, and then finally looked up and said in a rush, "Look, I know that we're still really young, and that you probably don't feel that way for me yet - ready for marriage, I mean - but I really wouldn't mind waking up and looking in your eyes every morning for the next hundred years and maybe someday you could feel the same way about mmpf!" He was forced to stop by Hermione performing the simple expedient manoeuvre of kissing him senseless.

"Harry, my future husband, you can stop talking now. Mum once said to me that it's not enough to want to sleep with someone - and I'm going to shock Daddy by saying that I very much like that idea as far as you're concerned, Harry - but the important thing is that you want to wake up with them the next morning. Bad breath and bad hair and all. I've thought about that for a while, and all the kids in my dreams seem to have unruly black hair. The thought of waking up and seeing your eyes is one I can most definitely get behind."

"Then we should make a statement of some sort," Harry said. "A betrothal contract or something, something that we can drop on the Ministry. And is there any way of changing my wizarding guardian?"

"From Dumbledore?" Einar asked.

"From McGonagall. She's a solid Dumbledore supporter, and I really don't want to have him give it up knowing that he can simply demand that *she* do his bidding to stifle me."

"Well, since we know that the wills state that she should have been your guardian, the change from Dumbledore would be easy," Einar said. "We might have trouble getting it changed from Madam McGonagall, but given *your* age, I believe that we can probably get it filtered through the right people. Who would you wish it changed to?"

"As much as I'd prefer it to be Hermione, the fact that there will be a betrothal contract as well would work against us. I am betting that her parents are right out, even assuming that I knew them well enough. None of the Order are on the list. Right now, I can't come up with anyone other than Heidi over there, since I think you have a little too much on your plate right now, sir."

"You would actually ask a non-human to be your guardian?" Einar asked with interest.

"What defines humanity? A set of genes? A set of attitudes? Personally, I see your help in this to be invaluable, and if I thought you had the time, I'd ask you, because you've been doing for me exactly what I think a guardian should. Watching out for my best interests. The fact that it's because it's in your best interests as well is not something I've missed either."

"If you are serious, I will accept this duty. It's not terribly onerous a duty, either, since I will only have three hundred and sixty-five days until I am out that job due to your age. Might I wish you a happy birthday, by the way?"

"Thank you," Harry replied. "And it is, rather. A beautiful woman has told me that she'd like to wake up to this ugly mug for the next hundred years. I can't think of a better present."

"Except having *two* women offer," Hermione said with a smirk.

"Depends on the woman," he said seriously. "Would you be tempted to kill her for looking at me? Then I'm probably not going to have anything to do with her. Are you introducing her to me and saying that you want her to be part of our relationship? Then I'll likely get to know her." He smiled softly at the look of mortification on Hermione's face, but lost it when her parents began to laugh.

"She thought she was going to embarrass you, and you turned it around on her!" Angelina Granger howled.

"Hey, I'm a teenager! The idea of beautiful women throwing themselves at me is a standard fantasy. The intelligent part of me realises that it's not likely to happen."

"Don't be too sure about that," Derek said. "Ask her to tell you about Missy, the summer just before she started at Hogwarts."

Once again Hermione tried to drop her eyes out of her head. "You knew?" she asked in a small voice.

"She was a very pretty girl, and it was fairly obvious that she was not abusing you, or forcing you. We overheard the one conversation at the pool where she mentioned how you two had met. We knew. You were happy, and no force seemed to be involved, so we let it happen. Whether you're heterosexual, lesbian, or bisexual, you're our daughter, and we love you."

"And in case you think I was joking, Hermione - if you decide that you want a third person in our relationship, tell me."

"I think I'd like to get to know this Heidi you've been travelling with," she said quietly. "You trust her at your back -"

"And what a cute butt it is, too!" Heidi quipped. It seemed a little forced, though.

"Be at ease, Miss," Derek said. "We're not going to judge you badly just because you fell in love with the same guy our daughter did." Harry's head shot up in shock, and then he slapped his forehead and began muttering under his breath. "Are you all right, Mr Potter?"

"Just reminding myself just how blindingly stupid I can be sometimes."

"And why is that?" Heidi asked. "You're wrong, given what I've seen since I've known you, but I'd like to know what brought you to such a revelation."

"You met me, and were intrigued by me. Okay. I can see wanting some excitement in your life and following me. But we've been getting steadily

closer over these past three weeks, and I've only just realised that you've been falling in love with me, despite doing things like kissing me awake some mornings."

"Have you enjoyed them?" Hermione asked.

"Yes," he said in a very small voice.

"Well then, I hope that the two of us can get along, because I don't plan on giving you up, and I really don't see Heidi giving you up either."

"I won't break you two up. You're the reason I haven't been able to scratch a particular itch, if you get my drift. I'm pretty sure that's the case, at least, whether or not he's been conscious of it."

"Yes and no. I didn't know how long we'd be together, and -" He blushed furiously. "Hermione would think less of me if I became a 'love 'em and leave 'em' kind of guy." He shook his head. "We're taking up an important businessman's time talking touchy-feelie. Let's get back to the business at hand, okay?"

"I don't mind, Harry," Einar said. "But there *are* things we need to deal with. Do you want me to pursue this in the courts?"

"Actually, yes. Now that I know that the final confrontation with Tommie leaves him defeated once and for all, I'm less worried about what happens if Dumbledore is yanked from the limelight and brought to justice for what he's done. He'll likely never pay, unfortunately, for the mind rape of Hermione, but I think we can clobber him for what he's done to me and others."

"I believe that I can get the wizarding guardianship pushed through before Albus Dumbledore realises what is happening," Einar said. "If you don't mind, after that fact, I will hire a bodyguard that I will make my attorney-in-fact in regards to decisions on your behalf."

"Who would you hire?" Harry asked.

"I was hoping that perhaps Miss Koenig might contemplate the job. It would give her a legal reason to be at the school, and I do believe that having someone there to look out for your best interests would help stem the most egregious of his offences against you."

"I think I'd need to demand a separate room for him, one where I could be in a bedroom right next door," Heidi said before scowling. "Are we going to make your betrothal to Miss Granger public? If so, then we should demand a suite of rooms. Perhaps enough so that you can move your other betrothed in once you find someone that fits the bill." She shrugged. "I'm what you in England call a half-blood. My mother was non-magical."

"And now you see why she would be a good choice. Given the chance to think for only a moment, she has made suggestions that I myself would make." Einar smiled. "Give us an hour and we will have the paperwork to change your wizarding guardian. If you sign them under no coercion, then we can have them through your Ministry before school starts, and you can surprise your Headmaster with a *fait accompli*."

"Shall we wait in the side room, then?" Harry asked. "I need to talk to Hermione's parents for a bit anyway." Einar nodded, and the group left for the small board room next door.

"What do you need to talk to them about, Harry?" Hermione asked.

He smiled at her. "This is going to be a betrothal contract, Hermione. I need to work certain things out with them."

"Such as what?" Derek asked.

"Well, first off is your permission. Once that's done, we need to talk about bride price and dowry. The wizarding world is blindingly backwards in certain ways, but then I remember that most marriages created through this type of contract are definitely not love matches. I happen to love your daughter.

"This leads me to a problem. At this exact moment, I can be considered penniless, because the goblins refuse to release my accounts to me. Once I have my accounts back, I will be a fairly wealthy man, able to keep your daughter in books for the rest of her life."

"Mr Potter, I would prefer that my daughter not rip your clothes off in my presence," Angelina Granger said with a mischievous grin.

"MU-ther!" Hermione yelled. Harry didn't even have to look to know that her face was bright red.

"Dear," Angelina said, "What did you tell us was the hardest part of being paralysed after that basilisk got you?" She blinked. "I can't believe that I just said that seriously."

"Get used to weird comments like that," Harry chuckled. "As I recall, when Dumbledore cancelled the finals at the end of that year, the only person depressed by it was Hermione."

"Harry?" he heard in an over sweet voice.

"Yes, dear. I was wrong, dear. I'll go stand in the corner and beat myself with a fish, dear." He was smiling by the end of his comment. "Seriously, though, I hope to be able to access my money by the end of the summer, at which point I would be able to offer you a valid bride price."

"You do know that we don't do that anymore?" Derek asked with amusement.

"Yeah, but the traditions need to be followed, especially if I don't want Dumbledore to step in and declare it non-valid."

"Then let's do it this way," Derek said, "now that I understand the real reason you're insisting on this."

"I'm not sure that I do," Hermione said, her tone making her annoyance at the whole process clear.

"He's saying that he's willing to offend you in this because you mean enough to him that he won't let Dumbledore ruin things for you by getting the contract declared invalid." Angelina smiled indulgently at her daughter.

"Really?" she asked, looking at Harry.

"Be honest, Hermione. He seems to be willing to do anything in the name of whatever final idea he's got in mind. If he thinks that me being married to you will ruin those plans, he'd work first to break up the relationship. If we do anything wrong in this, such as no betrothal contract, he might well use his influence to prevent our marriage. Once it's official the old way, he'll have to step it up to different methods - ones more likely to get him caught." He got a hard look to his eyes. "And if he thinks I'm going to sit back and simply let you be injured or ruined in some way - well, he just might be the reason for the new dark lord."

"Harry James Potter, I forbid you to turn into a Dark Lord, no matter if you think that you might have the provocation!" Hermione said severely. "I will not have it!"

Everyone in the room blinked for several seconds at her outburst, and then Hermione herself broke the silence by making some noise that sounded suspiciously like a snort of amusement. This broke everyone else up, and a few moments later, they were all howling with laughter.

"I hear and obey, Dark Lady Granger," he finally managed to snicker.

"Does that make you a minion?" Angelina asked.

"I guess so. I just hope the perks are good."

Hermione wiggled her eyebrows at him. "Trust me - they're the best."

"Damn, it's good to be me!" he replied before turning back to her parents.

"I understand the necessity now," her mother said. "What do you think is a fair price for her?"

"I don't say this to be cute or anything, but to me, she honestly is beyond price. If you state an amount that you think is worthy of your daughter, I will swear on my life to get that amount to you as soon as possible in a legal manner."

"No you will not!" Hermione said. "No oaths that could cost you your life!"

"You mean that it's more than just a phrase in the wizarding world?" Derek asked.

"Yes," Heidi said. "And I can tell that he was serious, as well. He literally would swear an oath that could cost his life."

He reached into his pouch and pulled out his remaining two Galleons. "Three weeks ago, this netted me roughly £500. Will you accept this as a down-payment on the bride price?"

"You're serious? These two coins are worth that much money?" Angelina asked.

"Quite," Einar said as he entered the room. "And to answer a question that I suspect none of you knows the answer to, given your various upbringings, an average bride price would run between three and five thousand Galleons. When Harry has access to all his money and property, he will be able to pay that easily. And I do mean 'when', Harry. You might not have realised that making me your guardian also allows me to order the removal of all your money from the British wizarding economy."

Harry grinned. "Excellent! I hadn't thought of that as an outcome, but I'm not complaining." He turned to Derek and Angelina. "Mr and Mrs Granger, I would like to make an offer of seven thousand five hundred Galleons as bride price for your daughter. She is worth far more to me, but there is not enough money on the planet to pay what she is truly worth. Is this amount a satisfactory recompense for the loss of an angel from your immediate family?"

"We're not losing a daughter," Derek said. "We're gaining a son. Dependent on Angelina's agreement, I accept the amount as a fair amount."

"It's fine by me," Angelina said. "I know you both find 'buying a bride', as it were, to be distasteful, but I think you send an excellent message within the community. Welcome to the family, son." She pulled Harry into a hug. A moment later, she dragged both Hermione and Heidi into a group hug. "I suspect we're gaining another daughter in the process," she said softly. "If so, I approve if you're happy."

"We've only just met," Hermione said. "We'll honestly have to see. But Harry trusts her, which is a huge mark for her."

In short order, the contract changing wizarding guardians was signed, followed by a contract for Heidi, making her attorney-in-fact for Einar in regards to Harry's welfare. The betrothal contract was signed next, witnessed by Hermione's parents and Einar Hogunson. "Pity we couldn't be married before we get back to school," Hermione murmured.

"Actually, let's check the laws," Derek said. At Hermione's startled look, he said, "Look, it's obvious how you two feel about each other. I see no reason why we can't help you on this, rather than fight you and possibly lose you."

Einar smiled. "Sixteen, with the permission of the parents or guardians. It just so happens that my charge is sixteen today, and your daughter is

sixteen. Shall we start the fifteen day waiting period in regards to the license?" He smiled widely and slid some paperwork toward them. "I was going to suggest this and see if you were willing. If you agree, we can get this paperwork in process today. By the fifteenth of August, you should be able to stand before a British official and exchange rings and vows."

Harry's face made the decision for all concerned, and Hermione signed the paperwork immediately. He was shaking so much that he almost couldn't sign his name. "This is really going to happen?"

"Yeah," Hermione breathed. "How did we go from me betraying you at the start of summer to me marrying you at the end of it?"

"Your punishment?" he asked with a soft laugh. She slapped him softly on the arm.

"How are we working this, then?" Angelina asked.

"Small civil wedding in August, and a massive proper one as soon as Hermione decides is good," Harry said. "No children until *after* we're done with Hoggy Warty Hogwarts, unless there's an unknown magic that demands children as soon as a couple is married."

"If so, we deal with me waddling to tests," Hermione said. "Otherwise, he's right. Whether or not we've married, I'm not quite ready to make you grandparents."

Harry scowled. "Be aware that at some point soon, I'm going to have to find someone who qualifies as a pureblood to marry in the wizarding world, rather than let Riddle get his hands on the Black fortune. Hermione will be involved in the process of choosing her, since it needs to be someone she can deal with."

"If things work out with Heidi -" Derek said.

"My mother was like you two. Non-magical. I don't qualify." She blushed. "Otherwise I'd jump at the chance."

"Admit it," Angelina said. "You just want to jump *him*."

"I have since we met," she said quietly. "He affects me in ways that I don't understand, but they're all good."

"Then you should likely become part of the family in some way or another," Derek said. "Even if it ends up being 'the other woman'. As long as both are aware and don't mind, then it's not really cheating, is it?"

"Especially if it's a threesome," Angelina said.

Hermione narrowed her eyes. "Why do I suspect that you speak from experience?"

"Aunt Catherine," was all that Angelina said.

"Well, at least I know you won't hate me for it if it happens," Hermione replied, obviously a little startled.

"Excellent!" Einar said. "I do hope that you'll invite me to the wedding, although you can choose which one." He was grinning, making it clear that he wasn't serious.

"Einar, I'm going to need family on my side. The Dursleys are anything but - and I want to do something legal but nasty to them when I can - so I can think of nothing better than to have someone who will be standing in as a father with me when I marry my first wife." After a pause. "And my second, and I suspect a third as well." His eyes slid over to Heidi.

"I would be honoured to be there, Harry." Einar bowed. "Now, I believe that I shall leave you to enjoy the rest of your day."

The group spent the rest of the day enjoying Paris, with the Grangers getting to know both Harry and Heidi. As they headed to the train station to return to England, Hermione's parents said, "Why not stay here with your fiancé? I'm sure that he wouldn't complain, and I doubt that you'd complain about getting to know someone that I suspect we'll be seeing a lot of in the upcoming years." They surprised Harry by hugging him once more - Angelina kissing his cheek - and saying "Welcome to our family, Harry. It was just a matter of time, really."

"Thank you, and thank you for giving us your blessing."

"How could we not, when we could see how much she means to you?" Derek asked. "I know that I'm supposed to be the stereotypical father who threatens you and says all sorts of things, but you didn't see how devastated she was when she thought that Dumbledore had caused her to lose your friendship. And for you to forgive her, and then propose, because she means that much? I wouldn't stop anyone who makes my little girl that happy." He hugged Harry again.

---

It was the next day before Harry bought Hermione an engagement ring, and she had to convince him not to buy her one with a huge stone in it. Instead, it was a simple thing with alternating small diamonds and emeralds, since she said that they reminded her of his eyes. He ended up buying Heidi a ring as well, when Hermione nudged him as Heidi looked at some of the engagement rings longingly. At the raised eyebrows of the proprietor, Harry simply said, "Make of it what you will."

"You know he thinks you're doing something weird or illegal," Heidi said when they were outside once more.

"That's his problem. If he wants to assume that I'm somehow engaged to two beautiful women, that's his right. He's likely right, if I can manage it, although as I understand it, I can't ask you until after I'm betrothed to the bride for the Black family."

Heidi smiled softly. "You're serious, aren't you?"

"Yes. Ignoring any obvious sexual things about it, I find that waking up in a bed where I have more than one woman smiling at me is a very nice one. I've gotten quite used to waking up next to you in the mornings, and I found that adding Hermione to the bed last night was easy. I haven't had a nightmare all summer, once I met up with you, Heidi. I felt warm and safe and loved last night, and both of you made me feel that way."

"I won't stop you, Harry. And I think I know what you mean about Heidi," Hermione said with a smile aimed at the girl in question. "Other than the fact that the way that camisole top fits her gives someone a cardiac workout just from looking at her, let alone her underwear, waking up with her in the bed felt . . . it felt right. I had a wonderful man poking me in the stomach while a beautiful woman was pressed against me, and I felt safe. Given what her thumb was doing to my nipple, I also felt horny, but that's something else."

"Sorry," Heidi said with a blush. "It's sort of a somatic doodling, if you understand me. My hands seem to always be in motion in one way or another and I had a pretty tit in my hand."

"Well, you made up for it in the shower," Hermione purred before kissing the black-haired beauty gently.

"Much to my chagrin," Harry grumbled good-naturedly. "The noises you two were making led to why you ended up teaching Hermione a new use for her tongue." After a pause, he added, "Thank God!"

"I aim to please," Hermione said in the same voice she'd just used on Heidi.

"Evil woman," he groaned. He was about to speak further, but another voice calling his name startled him, so he turned to see who it was. "Cho! What brings you to Paris?" he asked as she got closer.

"Enjoying the last couple days of vacation before having to return to school for my N.E.W.T.s," she told him. "I was a bit surprised to see you here. Hi, Hermione." Her voice was a little nervous in its nature.

"Cho," was all that Hermione said, in a calm voice that gave no hint as to her feelings.

Cho chewed on her lower lip a bit. "I'm actually glad I caught you two. I . . ." She stopped, worrying her lower lip a little more. "I need to drag out my nearly non-existent Gryffindor and apologise to the both of you for last year, and explain why it happened. I deserve the cool reception I got from you, Hermione. I know that now, and I accept it. If I hadn't been an idiot, we might have been able to be friends."

She sighed, but stood still in front of them for several seconds. "I was in a bad place in so many ways last year, and everyone paid for it," she said after a few moments of thought. "I was still in mourning for Cedric, and thought that dating Harry might recapture some of that. That was quite unfair to you. Then I blamed you for having Hermione as a friend, as if you would drop her on my say-so."

Hermione opened her mouth to say something, but Cho interrupted. "Please. If you stop me, I may never be able to get the courage to finish. Please?" She received a nod from Hermione, and took a deep breath. "There was one more thing that I wasn't willing to admit, even to myself, until about two weeks ago. Our relationship was doomed, Harry, because . . ." Her lower lip quivered and her eyes became suspiciously bright. "It was doomed because I wanted to date *Hermione* as much as I wanted to date *you*. Smart people turn me on, and you're both smart, and I realised that about you. I hated that she was so close to you, and I hated that you were so close to her. So everyone paid, and I lost all my friends, basically." She stopped. "And Marietta's a bitch. I'm sorry for backing her at the end of the school year. She ran so fast there were skid marks when I admitted that I found girls interesting as more than merely platonic friends."

"Wait," Harry said. "Let me get this straight - are you saying that you want to see Hermione naked as much as most of the guys in the school want to see *you* naked?"

"Yourself included?" she asked with a weak laugh. "And your answer is 'yes'. I know that you probably feel the same way that Marietta does, but . . . I needed you to know what led to the blow-up last year, and that I take full responsibility for it."

Hermione looked at her for a very long moment before nodding, and then leaning over to Heidi. She brushed her lips gently across the black-haired girl's lips before brushing her tongue along those same lips. It was obvious that during the fifteen seconds that they were kissing that their tongues were likely to be warring sensuously. "Why do you kiss me like that when I'm not wearing a bra?" Heidi moaned softly.

"I think you just answered your own question," Harry laughed. He looked to Cho, who was stunned, and also advertising her own lack of support, although her nipples were much different than Heidi's or Hermione's. Where both of those girls had nipples as big around as his index finger and about as long as the distance from the tip of that finger to the first knuckle, Cho was displaying her areolae. The nipple itself was like the rubber end of a pencil, placed in the middle of something that looked as if someone had placed half of a tennis ball on her breast.

Hermione turned to Cho and began to walk closer, entering the pretty Asian's personal space. "You can stop me at any time," she said as she slowly moved closer. She finally was close enough that she leaned forward and pressed her lips to Cho's, and Cho almost immediately moaned. The moaning got louder when Hermione's hand came up and she brushed her thumb across one of the bulging areolae.

The kiss finally broke, and Hermione said, "I think we'll finish this conversation somewhere where we don't need as many clothes."

"You -" was all Cho seemed to be able to say.

"It's partially my apology for *my* being a real bitch last year. I wanted Harry with *me*, and he notices *you* instead. So instead of giving him actually helpful advice, I 'fix' his problems by telling him what he did *wrong* afterwards. Some friend, huh? And yeah, I was a little jealous that he might get to see you naked and I wouldn't." She thought for a moment. "Plus, I did something really stupid this summer, and Harry forgave me because I took full

responsibility for it, knowing that it would destroy our friendship. We're getting married in a couple weeks. You took responsibility for your actions. Harry set the bar, and I want Harry to be proud of my actions. I've forced others too many times, and Dumbledore took advantage of that this summer."

"Wait - information overload," Cho said. "Dumbledore's evil? You're getting married? You kissed me, knowing that you're getting married?"

"Dumbledore has a plan for me," Harry said, "and several things this summer have made me look back and question whether or not that plan is good for *me*. He talks of the greater good, but I wonder if it really is, or if it's his version of the greater good." He shrugged. "As for the getting married part, some of it is because I love her, and some of it is because it will help in my quest for freedom from Dumbledore's manipulations. I have to marry by the Potter family charter, or whatever the thing is called, and I also have to marry in order to keep the Black name out of Voldie's clutches. Due to an oddity in the Black family set-up, I have to have a second, pureblood wife - of five generations - in order to keep the Black money and name."

Cho blinked rapidly several times, and Harry was intrigued to notice that he was suddenly able to tell how fast her heart was beating by watching her nipples - it was quite rapid. "If . . ." she breathed, and then gulped, obviously trying to get herself under control. "If we can work things out, I think have a solution for you. My extended family moved here from China. It is verifiable that I am the eleventh generation witch in my family." She bit her lower lip again, hard. "I really want us to work things out," she said in a voice that was nearing a moan.

He reached out and kissed her hand. "Then, my lady Chang, I find myself hoping that our interaction is far more conducive to romance than during our school year last year."

"It seems that all of us find intelligence to be a sexual criteria," Heidi said. "We're all turned on by smart people. And somehow, beyond all logic or probability, Harry seems to have attracted three bisexual women who just might be able to live together without killing each other."

"Although I'll probably need a chisel to get the grin off my face when you ladies are done with me," he said.

"You . . . you're actually willing to give me another chance?" Cho asked.

"Can you handle that I'm in a betrothal contract with Hermione?"

"If I could, *I'd* like to be in a betrothal contract with her," was the very quiet answer.

He looked deeply into Cho's eyes as she stood before him, and found himself kissing her. This kiss was not a wet one - it was happy, and a little sad, and romantic, and there was more than a little erotic passion in it as well. They broke, both breathing a bit heavily. "I may regret this, but I think we'll need a third ring, and I'll need to find out what your family might expect for a contract."

Cho's eyes were incredibly wide. "But why?"

"I can't say, really. Something tells me that the four of us are needed. I'll need you three to keep me on the straight and narrow. Given everything the Headmaster has done to me, it could easily drive me dark, but I don't want that. I want you ladies proud of me. So with you three to keep me happy enough to stay light -"

"It's hard to go dark when you're getting laid regularly," Heidi quipped.

"I wouldn't know yet, by choice," Harry replied. "But yeah. I'm less likely to go dark with you three around. I was attracted to more than the fact that you're one of the sexiest women at Hogwarts. Note that the women I've paid the greatest attention to are all highly intelligent? Luna is a friend, Hermione is my best friend, and I fell for you. The fact that I've fantasised about you, me, and the Quidditch locker rooms is unimportant."

"Nice to know I wasn't the only one," Cho said softly.

"I don't know why, but things have happened this summer. I can see magical auras, and can tell a witch or wizard just because of that. I'm also getting feelings about things - not due to visions, but a stronger sense than that. It's why I was willing to deal with Kaatje - my Dutch 'big sister' who Dumbles kidnapped - without much worry. I stuck around in The Netherlands for two days waiting for her return, because something told me to. Something told me to accept Hermione, and now you. So far, those feelings have worked out for the best. I think magic or something is gearing up for the final showdown with tall, pale and snake-like."

"I hope you survive it," Cho said with a whimper.

He let his hands slide across the cheek of each lady before answering. "I have to. I have you ladies to give a happy life to."



## Betrayed A Return to Hogwarts

"I am going to injure that child when I see him next," Severus Snape growled. "I spent a week in the Mediterranean because of that insufferable . . . thing."

"You're just angry because he outsmarted all of us," Remus said. "He's obviously managed to meet up with Hermione Granger, and it bugs you that someone you consider to be unintelligent managed to out-think you."

"Quiet, werewolf, or I may slip and place some silver in your next dosage."

"Do it, and you won't survive to make another dosage," Remus growled.

"Gentlemen," sighed Dumbledore. "As amusing as your foreplay might be, it still puts us no closer to getting Harry back. It is now only a week before school returns to session, and finding him before then is a lost cause. He has to return, if only because of his friendships with others here. I cannot see him forsaking them, especially since he did not write to anyone except Miss Granger this summer.

"On a different note, the goblins are especially surly with me this past month, and I have been unable to ascertain why. I am not certain as to how, but I suspect that Harry is behind that as well." He scowled deeply. "I shared such an excellent relationship with them prior to the beginning of July."

"Are the plans still in effect in regards to the Weasley girl?" Tonks asked. "We know that she's more than willing, but what if Potter is less than agreeable about it?"

"Amortentia works wonders," Snape drawled. "He will be with the child no matter his original wishes." He looked to the Headmaster. "You are aware that Aphrodite's Delight mixes well with Amortentia?"

Dumbledore gave the Potions master an indulgent smirk. "You might wish to check your books, dear boy, and find out who it was who made that discovery. You will likely recognise the name."

"My apologies," Snape said through slightly gritted teeth.

"Given the amount of time that we have left," Dumbledore concluded, "it is likely best to spend this last week preparing for Harry's return to the castle. Nymphadora, I have procured your services as an undercover agent within the school. While you do not qualify as a potential Black wife, you would easily qualify as a Potter wife. I do not believe that Amortentia would be problematic to use for you as well. Between the Weasley girl and yourself, we should be able to regain and then retain control of Harry.

"Remus, I have managed to convince the Board of Governors to rehire you as a Defence teacher this year. When it was pointed out that the Ministry's own choice was less than satisfactory - to be gentle in the phrasing - they permitted me greater latitude in hiring."

"Good. Most of the students I've run across that weren't in Severus's House have told me that they think I was the best teacher for that class you've ever had. Well, except for the Death Eater. I'm sure that with the promise of more information about his family, I can get Harry back under control for you."

---

Cho Chang lay on the bed, panting heavily, trying to calm her breathing down. The sheen of sweat on her golden skin was drawing admiring looks from the others in the room. "Already, Harry?" Heidi asked with amusement, noting his rampant condition.

"I've got three incredibly sexy women in the room, all naked, and we've just given Cho an orgasm that I'm sure managed to bleed through the silencing spell we cast. She's laying there naked and sweaty and so damned sexy that I wish I wasn't vowing to keep her virgin until we can get married. I have had so many fantasies about this girl that involved her naked and sweaty, and I discover that the reality is even better than my imagination." He paused. "Y'know something? That's actually true for all three of you. What I imagined was nothing like the glorious reality."

"Harry, we're already betrothed to you," Cho said with a giggle.

"He's serious, Cho," Hermione said. "I cried the night we married, because . . . he made me feel like a goddess. The only way to describe it was that he *worshipped* me when he made me his wife in fact as well as in law."

"Will you worship me in the Quidditch locker rooms when we marry, Harry?" Cho asked, blushing deeply, and smiled in awe as she watched his rapturous attention to the way it spread down her body. "And could you guys untie my arms?"

As Heidi undid the knots in the silk ropes holding Cho gently to the bed, Cho admitted, "I've had this recurring fantasy that you came into the locker room after a practice or a game and pressed me against the edge of the shower. Gently - always gently - but you'd whisper in my ear that you were taking what was yours, and then you'd fill me in those fantasies. You'd force my hips back so that I had to lean against the wall, and then you'd pound

me, Harry. I dream of our bodies slapping together." She blushed furiously as she added, "I want you to plant our first baby in those showers, Harry, doing just that - taking me. Forcing yourself on a willing me."

"It's not forcing then, is it?" he asked, both amused and puzzled.

"Role-playing," Hermione said. "She wants a rape fantasy, but only with a man that she trusts implicitly. In other words, a rape fantasy with a man that won't rape her."

He cocked his head. "Safety. She feels safe enough around me to know that if I pick her up and throw her over my shoulder, or rip her blouse open, that I'm actually aroused, rather than doing it in anger."

"Right," Cho said when she was free. "We'll need a safe word, like 'Azkaban' or even 'safety', but if we've got a good one, then I've no problems if you walked up to me, dragged me into a classroom and then literally tore the clothes off my body. I'm pretty sure that I'd be wet enough to slip Firenze a good ways inside me by the time you got me naked." She bit her lower lip. "Is there something wrong with me that I want to be dominated sometimes?"

"Is there something wrong with me that I like making love to more than just Harry?" Hermione asked by way of answer. Cho's smile was enough to light up her face at the acceptance. She was still new enough in her realisation of her bisexual side that Marietta Edgecombe's denial of her was still a fresh and raw wound.

"I was pleased at how startled your parents were when I offered seventy-five hundred Galleons as a bride price, especially with how they had been treating me," Harry said, trying to change the direction of the conversation. He'd recently made love to Hermione, and the activities that they'd been involved in had a certain part of his anatomy demanding a rematch.

"You managed to shame them," Cho said. "They treated you like garbage, and you still offered an amount that is far above what they could have expected. You returned their insults with Zen-like calm, and that bothered them more than a little. You were supposed to be this uncultured barbarian, and you convinced them that you valued me not just for my body - and let me finish catching my breath before I deal with that for you - but for my mental capacity, and that you didn't care if I happened to be bisexual."

He grinned. "Actually, since you're with my other two ladies - sorry that we have to keep the engagement secret for now, Heidi - I find your bisexuality kinda hot, but then, I'm an armpit scratching male. Whoa!" That last was caused by Cho deciding that she was going to help him deal with the insistent body part.

He didn't say much after that, but his cross-eyed grin told her everything.

---

The first of September rolled around and found everyone working their way through the barrier between King's Cross station and Platform 9 ¾. The Potters - and future Potters - got there quite early, and were seated on the train before anyone else. Early enough, in fact, that Harry was able to grant a fantasy that both Cho and Hermione had always wanted to enact. They were dressed again before anyone else ever made it on-board. "After we're married, I promise I'll do that again, but with you in Hermione's position," he told Cho.

"At least you're proving that you know what fingers and tongues are for, or else I'd be really frustrated," she replied with a breathy giggle.

"I'm frustrated myself, because I *really* want to make that shower fantasy true, but *not* until we're married. I don't want Dumbles having *any* ammunition to break our contracts."

"I suspect that he'll discover tonight that he's no longer your wizarding guardian, when he talks to you and tries to order you around. Heidi lowering the boom on him should be entertaining at the very least," Hermione said.

"You should come along," he said to both Cho and Hermione. "Hermione, you're my wife and have a say in it, and Cho does as well as one of my betrothed." He blinked. "That can't be a word."

"It is now," Heidi chuckled. "And we're looking at the wedding taking place on the first Hogsmeade weekend. October at the very latest. Then he'll drill you in the showers."

"God, I hope so," Cho moaned loudly, and then blushed. "Sorry."

"Don't be," Harry said with a laugh. "Nice to know that I'm not the only one looking forward to finally being able to make love to you completely." He gave his own blush. "I've been having thoughts of adding a sticking charm to your fantasy. I kinda like the way you are when you're restrained."

"Harry, I'm not wearing a bra, because you like the way I make my shirts bulge. Do you really want me advertising that you've got me so horny that I'm likely to lay on the Gryffindor table and ask you and Hermione to eat *me* instead of dinner?" She paused. "What am I asking? Let me get my robes." She was laughing as she finished.

Neville showed up next. "Harry! Good to see you!" Neville exclaimed. "The Ministry has been up in arms trying to deal with Dumbledore this summer. Did you actually take off for parts unknown?"

"Hey Neville. Hey Heidi? Was I in parts unknown?"

"No. Munich is quite well known. So is Italy, and The Netherlands, and Belgium and France." She grinned as she answered him, and then turned to Neville. "Hi. Heidi Koenig. I'm his bodyguard."

"I think he needs one, with the kind of trouble he gets in to," Neville said with a grin.

"I think so, too," Hermione said. She looked at Harry for a moment, eyes twinkling, and he nodded at her. "I think he needs so much watching that I married him this summer," she finished, holding out her left hand. She wore the engagement ring and a simple gold band on her ring finger.

Neville's eyes went wide. "You got married?" he nearly squeaked.

"Yep," Harry said proudly.

"I'm just having trouble making peace in my head with the fact that you've got a wife, the both of you are friendly with last year's previous girlfriend, and none of you seem to have a problem with the fact that your bodyguard is likely to be hit on by seventh years."

"Well, I don't have a problem with them," Cho said with her own eyes twinkling. "After all, I'm engaged to be married to him soon as well."

Neville's hand came up and he began to massage his forehead. "I think I've had a stroke or something," he finally said. "Hermione is married to you and Cho is engaged to you?" he asked faintly.

"Oddity in the Black family's rules. I needed to marry a pureblood of at least five generations, and Cho's double that. We've worked out the problem from last year, and in doing so, we realised that neither Hermione or Cho had a problem with the other, and would actually get along quite well, so I asked her to marry me and carry on the Black family name. Let's not forget that it also keeps the money out of Voldie's hands as well."

Luna showed up at the cabin at about that time. "Hello," she said in her dreamy manner. "Congratulations, Hermione. And may I offer congratulations to you as well, Cho?"

"Thank you," Cho said. "I am going to do what I can to stop Ravenclaw's treatment of you this year, Luna. I've been at fault by not trying to stop them, and I was a prefect. They've made me Head Girl, and I should do something proper with the power."

"Thank you," Luna said with a smile. "I'd imagine he rather likes you as Head Girl, although he's thinking of something different at the time. Can you suck a golf ball through thirty feet of garden hose?"

Neville started to cough, even though he'd been drinking nothing, and Harry turned a bright red. Cho blushed as well, but bulled through. "Actually, Luna, you're absolutely correct," she purred. "He does prefer the concept of me being Head Girl in a slightly different manner."

"Careful," Luna said. "Some people are aroused by that tone of voice. Harry for one, and I'd imagine that Hermione is enjoying it. I find that it does interesting things to my pulse as well. I wish I'd known before now that you include women in your sexual orientation."

"I didn't admit it to myself until this summer."

"Ah." The conversation continued for a while longer, until it was just eleven o'clock, and the Weasleys just barely made the train.

"Hi Harry!" Ron breathed, being about all he could do after rushing to make the train. He took a couple moments before he said in a voice closer to normal, "I swear Mum does that on purpose, making us wait until the last second to get us to the train."

"Maybe so," Ginny said. "I think she doesn't want to admit that we're growing up and leaving the house."

"Could be," Harry replied. "After all, she did lose her brothers in the last bit of this war. She hates the idea of losing family. So she does the only thing she knows how to do in order to try to keep them safe."

"Heavy thoughts," Ron said with a slight smile.

"I had a lot of time to think at the beginning of the summer. It might even be what Dumbledore is doing, trying to keep me at the Dursleys - safety over anything else. What he and your mother don't realise is that the method they use to keep people safe just chafes, and people fight to escape."

"Which is what you did," Ginny said with an admonishing tone.

"Yes," he said simply. "I make no apologies for it. If you truly understood what it was like at the Dursley home, then you'd understand."

"Is it really *that* bad?" Ginny asked.

"Why will no one listen to the twins and me when we say that we ripped bars off his windows?" Ron muttered in a voice that was obviously intended to be heard by everyone.

"The truth can be quite uncomfortable sometimes," Luna said in her soft, sing-song manner. "It's why the average person thinks of the Quibbler as full of silly stories, because the truth scares them."

"Quite likely, Luna," Harry replied. "Many people would be completely surprised to discover the type of upbringing I've had. But that's neither here nor there," he finished.

Luna cocked her head with curiosity. "If it's neither here nor there, then where exactly is it? It can't be nowhere, because then it doesn't exist, which negates the whole thing."

Hermione blinked, and then got a slightly evil look on her face. Her eyes darted to Ginny for just a split second before she said, "I've always wondered about something being described as 'in the middle of nowhere'. If it's nowhere, how can it have a middle?"

Luna focused on the pretty brunette. "Exactly! You understand the conundrum! May we talk more about this during the school year? Perhaps between the three of us, we can figure some of these important questions out."

Hermione shivered under the sharp gaze of the blonde, and Harry was amused to note that it wasn't fear. "I won't promise, Luna," she said softly, trying to hide the husky tone, "but I hope we can."

Luna tilted her head slightly. "Yes. We may solve far more important questions than that," she finally said.

Ron and Ginny dropped into the cabin across the hallway from the six and got their things in order. "Was it me," Cho asked, "or was Ginny trying to force two of us out of here by sheer force of will?"

"She wanted to be here, but couldn't find a way of requesting it that wouldn't make her sound like a bitch queen," Hermione replied.

"One request, you two," he said, looking at Neville and Luna. "Please don't say anything about the relationships between Cho, Hermione and me until I say it's okay?"

"Certainly, Harry," was Neville's response. Luna nodded vociferously, making it look as if her head were going to roll off. Harry was amused to note that all three girls and Neville were watching the secondary vibrations below the girl's neck with some enjoyment. *Hell, I'm enjoying it too*, he finally admitted.

"Next time I'll do it without a bra, if you'd like," Luna giggled. "I'd like some time to recover, though. That made me a little dizzy."

"Busted!" Harry said with a snort. "We're caught. Thank you for the show, though. I, for one, found it pleasant."

"Harry!" Hermione squeaked.

"What? She called us on it. I was watching, and I noticed the rest of you watching as well. If she chooses to do that as performance art, or something, then I see no reason why we can't enjoy the performance that she's giving us." He reached out and brushed his thumb along Luna's cheek. "As long as she does it only for fun and enjoyment, and not because she thinks she needs to in order to keep friends. Real friends like people for who they are, not who they might be, or for what they do or can do for them."

Luna's eyes widened, and tears formed in her eyes. "Really?" she asked in a quavering voice.

"Yes. You confuse me sometimes, Luna. I don't deny that. Sometimes I have that 'What the hell does that mean?' look, but it doesn't mean that I don't like you. You are my friend. End of statement."

"Thank you," she said softly. The moment was gone a second later as an impish look came into her eyes. "I'll probably do that again soon. I liked the way that it made my nipples rub against my bra. They're quite hard right now."

Neville made a choking noise. His face was a brilliant red, and the way his eyes kept slipping to Luna's chest, Harry suspected that he was interested in a hands-on inspection. He had to admit that the thought had some appeal to himself as well, but with one wife, and two fiancées, he had his hands full.

"I think that you might have to be careful about saying that," Cho said. "Someone might insist on proof."

Luna bit her lower lip. "I think we should stop this line of conversation, or else I just might prove it," she whispered. "They hurt right now."

"Let's change the conversation then," Harry said. "Besides, now that the Weasleys have gotten everything put away, they're coming back over."

"How did you hide from the Or - the people searching for you?" Ginny asked. "Did you learn some new magic or something?"

"Nah, I just ignored almost all incoming owls, especially from Dumbledore. Kaatje Houghtailing can tell you the dangers of accepting letters from him."

"Who's she?" Ron asked.

"A Dutch national that Dumbledore managed to kidnap, rather than me. Also someone who kinda adopted me as a little brother." He laughed darkly. "I find it amazing that there was not a single Death Eater attack during the whole summer. None aimed at me, at least, and that seemed to be the thing that Dumbledore was most worried about. His attitude was that if I was out, they'd find me, kill me, and then eat my flesh. Or something."

"Uh, is there anywhere we can sit down?" Ron asked, realising that the conversation was going to go on for a while.

"Sure," Harry said brightly, before moving Hermione solidly into his lap. "There, that frees up room for one of you." Luna followed suit by winking at Neville, who nodded, and she bounced into his lap. Heidi pouted for a moment, and then pounced Cho's lap, amidst chuckles from the cabin's original occupants.

Ginny looked a little put out at Harry perching Hermione on his lap, but sat down next to him. Ron parked next to Neville and Luna. The conversation continued for a while, with Ron and Ginny returning occasionally to the compartment that they had, and visiting others as well. Hermione, Cho, and Ron had to leave for the prefect's meeting, but Neville and Luna remained behind, as well as Heidi.

"So Harry, what really happened this summer?" Ginny asked.

"Pretty much as I said. I tried to go to the goblins and was rather soundly insulted by them, and was stunned by Dumbledore and returned to my relatives. I was doing okay until three letters arrived, one of which was a Howler. I've still got the fresh scars from the belt whipping that Vernon gave me after the Howler went off."

Ginny's face went white. "I never meant for -"

"I know, but it shows how people simply aren't listening or aren't thinking when it comes to me. I live with Muggles - or did. Howlers aren't appreciated by the most tolerant of them, and I really doubt that the word 'tolerant' has ever been used to describe anyone with the last name of Dursley."

"I'm sorry," she said, and sidled up to his arm. He felt a shiver run through him, and a sense of . . . foreboding wasn't the word, since that implied menace to him, but a strong sense that she was not what she was seeming to be, and that she could only lead him to problems. He didn't know where these unusual abilities were coming from, but they seemed to be serving him well.

"Ginny, you're making him uncomfortable," Ron said. "Back off some."

Her response was what Harry had come to expect from an offended Weasley, and while it didn't get crude, it did involve telling Ron where he could get off. Harry derailed it by forcibly removing his arm from her grip. "Ginny, he's right. I'm a little twitchy right now, not the least reason being that you were the cause for my last beating, whether or not you intended it to be the case. I need to get past that."

She looked startled and stared at him for a moment, and then ran into the other cabin. "I don't think she wanted to hear that," Ron said, shrugging.

"Not angry at Harry for saying it?" Hermione asked in curiosity.

"I think those brains did something to me, to be honest. I've pretty well screwed my chances to be a really good student over-all, but I've decided to work on it this year." He looked at Harry. "I need to talk to you later. I heard some things I didn't like this summer. Some of it involves Ginny."

"If it involves your family, I should hear it. We'll get together later and talk. These three ladies will be there for it," he said, hugging Hermione and nodding at Cho and Heidi. "Heidi is my bodyguard, and Cho is . . . well, for security's sake -"

"Say no more," Ron said, holding up a hand. "What I don't know I can't tell, no matter whether I meant to or not."

"Thanks," Harry replied. "I promise, you'll know shortly."

"Save it until Dumbledore isn't paying quite so much attention to me. He's itchy about the fact that you got away from him. Oh, by the way, I need to insert an angry rant here for you not telling me where you were, since I'm a hot-headed idiot."

"I never called you that, or felt that way," Harry said quickly.

Ron grinned. "No, but I did a lot of self-examination, and I've concluded that I am just what I said."

"Was," Hermione corrected. "You're certainly not acting that way now."

He looked at her. "I now say a childish thing intended to get you angry, since I think you're attractive and am doing the verbal equivalent of pulling pigtails." He raised a hand. "I know that you're with him. You're on his lap, and he seems to be enjoying that fact. I know *you* do, because . . . well, you're female, and reminding me that it's the case." Harry looked and saw that her nipples were poking gently against the cloth of her blouse.

"I'm sorry, Ron," she said.

"It's okay. In all honesty, Hermione, you need someone who can challenge you. Harry can do that better than I can." He smiled honestly at her, and she relaxed.

---

The rest of the trip was uneventful, except for the fact that Malfoy didn't bother them on the trip to Hogwarts. They saw the Unholy Trio walk past the cabins and look into them, but he merely scowled and walked past. There was some conversation about it, but it was decided that they simply didn't care enough to worry about it too much.

There wasn't another incident until they reached the school. As Harry and his 'entourage' entered the building, Snape walked up and said, "Come with me to the Headmaster's office, Potter."

"Hmm, not even waiting for dinner. He must be angry," Harry murmured as he began to follow the Potions professor.

"His motives are not yours to worry about, Potter. Your arrogance knows no bounds. Fifty points from Gryffindor for your cheek." He turned to smirk to at Harry and noted that Heidi, Cho, and Hermione were following them. "You were neither invited nor asked for. Leave now," he demanded.

"No," Heidi said simply. "We are accompanying Harry to the meeting with the Headmaster."

"I shall see you three expelled if you do not leave now," Snape growled darkly. "As it is, you have cost your houses fifty points each." He turned to continue the way to the Headmaster's office, and caught the smirk on Harry's face. "I suppose you find the expulsion of your classmates to be funny, Potter? Do you truly hate the mudblood that much?" Harry's only response was to laugh. "I do not think you will be laughing in a few minutes. March!" He grabbed Harry's arm and threw him forward, making Harry stumble.

Harry never fell, although it was a close thing. His eyes continued to sparkle as he walked toward the office, though.

They reached the gargoyle, which opened as they approached. A quick ride up the moving stairs led them to the door to the office proper, which opened for them. There was no one inside. "Ah, I see that we are to miss dinner because of this. Petty, really."

"Wait here until the Headmaster arrives," Snape sneered at them. "I shall inform the house elves not to unpack your trunks, since you will not be staying, ladies." He swept from the office.

"Dobby?" Harry called into the air, and the house elf so named appeared.

"How may Dobby help Master Harry Potter?" he squeaked.

"Contact the Headmaster and ask him if his intention was for me to miss the Welcoming Feast, if you would?" When the elf disappeared, he turned to Heidi. "I assume that you're cataloguing all this?"

"Oh yes. At least one of the two - Snape, I believe that one was? - will have quite a bit to explain to the Board of Governors for this school, as well as your proper wizarding guardian."

Dobby popped back into the office. "Headmaster Dumbledore says you not required to be in his office right now. Get to feast, and talk later."

"Right. It was Snape who set that up, then," Hermione said.

The group of four walked to the Great Hall, entering proudly as they opened the doors. They stopped halfway up the corridor and turned to Cho. "So, admit that something is going on right now, or drop it on the headmaster in his office?" Harry asked.

"Well, since there's nothing any of us are aware of that renders the contract null and void, I see no reason why we can't announce it here, if you want to."

"Works for me," he said. With that, he pulled her close and kissed her gently. "More later, but that should make the point," he said as the kiss ended.

"I never want them to end when you kiss me," she sighed. "But it's off to my table," she said sadly.

Before she could turn, Hermione pulled her close and kissed her lips softly. The room was dead silent. "Let 'em talk," Hermione whispered. "We've got each other, and we know the truth."

Cho smiled and walked to her table amidst complete silence. Her demeanour was happy and proud. Harry held up his arm for Hermione, and led her to the Gryffindor table when she took it. "If you would be seated, love?" She smiled and sat.

"That was interesting," Ron said. "And I begin to see some of what you weren't saying on the train, at my request. And it matches interestingly with what I overheard. The twins and I are less than pleased at what we've been hearing at home."

"Well, assuming I'm still a student here in a few hours, I'll explain it all soon." He looked to the head table, seeing the usual crop of teachers there, and intrigued to find Remus there as well. "Is he part of the 'Keep Harry stupid' crowd as well? I tend to think so, if he's here."

Snape was glaring at him, and he rose and approached Harry. "I believe that I told you to remain where you were until the Headmaster came for you, Potter," he growled. "Another fifty points lost from Gryffindor."

"Well, considering that the Headmaster said that we should be at the Welcoming feast, I believe that your order was out of line, and I will be contesting the loss of points."

"Contest them all you desire, but the loss will remain, Potter. I will drive this arrogance of yours out if it is the last thing that I do."

"It may well be," Heidi interjected. "You'll understand my meaning later, but you dig your grave deeper with every word." With that, she led Harry and Hermione away from Professor Snape.

"What in Merlin's name is going on?" Seamus asked. "The both of you kissing Chang, and then the little blow-up with Snape?"

"Sorry about the points," Harry said, "but he was determined to hit me for things that happened over the summer. I forced some friends of his to explore Syracuse. If they were stupid, they assumed I meant Greece." This was said in a voiced slightly louder than conversational.

"Geez," Dean said. "Did you know that Snape could turn puce?"

"It's not a good colour for him, I'm sure," Harry said without looking. He seated Hermione and then kissed her hand, then turned to Heidi and helped her sit. "By the way, guys, this is Heidi. She's my bodyguard for the foreseeable future."

"Don't take this wrong, Harry," Colin Creevey said, "but you're luckier than anyone has a right to be. A beautiful bodyguard, and *two* girlfriends? Who know about each other?"

"Long story, and you're right. I'm luckier than I deserve."

## Betrayed Danger Rising

The meal went as usual. The Sorting hat delivered yet another admonishment that the houses needed to work together, and students were Sorted. There were only twenty-four this time, and most of them seemed to end up in Hufflepuff and Gryffindor, with Slytherin and Ravenclaw each getting two.

Professor McGonagall came over to Harry as the feast was ending. "Mr Potter, the Headmaster will see you in his office now."

"Understood, Professor. By the way, before I leave, I'd like to let you know that there will be roughly two hundred points contested from Gryffindor and fifty from Ravenclaw. Professor Snape was being himself, and taking points like mad as soon as we came in the door."

"I understand. The final arbiter is the Headmaster, but the points should likely be revoked." Harry rose to his feet, Hermione and Heidi rising simultaneously. Cho came over to be with them, and they began to head out the door. "Mr Potter, the Headmaster requested only you."

"For reasons that will become clear - sooner rather than later if you are part of the meeting - these three ladies need to be part of this meeting with the Headmaster."

McGonagall's eyebrows rose nearly to her hairline, but she said nothing more, and the foursome made their way once more to the gargoyle.

"And they conveniently forgot to tell me the password, or leave it open for me. Typical. Heidi, chairs if you would, please?"

"Certainly, Mr Potter," she said, and waved her wand. Four comfortable chairs appeared in the hallway surrounding the gargoyle.

"Shall we take bets on how long it will be before Professor Snape comes down and berates us for not contacting anyone?" he asked when they were all comfortable.

"What would the winner get?" Heidi asked.

"How about kisses in a place of the winner's choosing?" Cho asked, eyes sparkling with amusement.

"Ah, so I win no matter what," Harry replied with a laugh.

"We all do," Heidi replied.

They sat and laughed for about fifteen minutes before the gargoyle moved aside. Professor Snape glared at them. "I assume that it was too difficult to find a way to contact the Headmaster and let him know that you were down here? Or perhaps guess the password, since his preferences are known?"

"I can't speak for you, Professor," Harry said, "but I choose to practise security. It's bad enough that anyone who knows the Headmaster in the slightest knows his password preference, but for me to be sitting here chanting various candies while the possibility is there that someone in the shadows works for Voldemort -"

"Do not repeat the name, Potter. There is a valid reason for not saying it." There was a tone of fear in Snape's voice.

"No one has ever told me why it shouldn't be said, just that it shouldn't. Now, back to my comment. The Headmaster is the only one that Tom fears." Snape inhaled sharply when Harry referred to his nemesis as Tom. "So, my chanting candy names until the gargoyle moves is simply giving the password to a supporter of Riddle's, hence no password guessing. As for sending a message - how? All our things are packed, my Firebolt is in the basement of the school at best, and Cho's is in her luggage as well. Hermione doesn't fly. Heidi is my bodyguard and therefore is not leaving my side. The owlery? Yes, I want to see Hedwig, since you people kidnapped her this summer, but I'd still be heading there at this very moment if I went for an owl. Besides, I figured that this was a petty little revenge for the summer, when I slipped the leash and learned things."

"Upstairs, Potter," Snape growled. "I will not take points from you, because I doubt that you will be a student in Gryffindor for much longer." Harry rose, and the ladies rose with him. "They are not accompanying you, Potter."

"I beg to differ, Mister Snape," Heidi replied in clipped tones. "There are things to which you are not privy that require the presence of myself and these two in the meeting with Headmaster Dumbledore."

Snape narrowed his eyes and glared at Heidi, who met his eyes defiantly. Harry's wand was in Snape's neck immediately while he said "Look away! He's using Legilimency on you!"

"He tried," Heidi said with a glare. "It's not a common thing to learn, but one of my friends at school was an empath. We learned it for her health. I detected Mister Snape's attempt."

"Get your wand out of my neck, Mr Potter," hissed Snape. "I will finally see you expelled for this."

"I somehow doubt that the Headmaster will let his weapon out of his grasp again," Harry replied. "You're welcome to try, but I think you'll find it difficult. Now, ladies? If you'd give me the very great pleasure of walking up the stairs ahead of me?" Harry asked.

"You just want to watch my arse wiggle," Hermione said.

"As an American comic said, 'I am dumb, but I am not so dumb'," he replied impudently. Snape started up the stairs first. "Crying to mama before we can say anything," Harry muttered, but doing so that all could hear it. Snape's neck turned red, but he did nothing else.

Heidi climbed on first and began the ride up, followed by Cho, who whispered, "I do love that arse," to Heidi. Harry squeezed in next to Hermione, and 'accidentally' let his hand land on her bum.

"I'll give you a week to remove that hand, Harry," she whispered.

"And if I don't?"

"Then I'll give you a month."

"If I still don't?"

"Then I guess I'll be stuck with a lifetime of a sexy man fondling my bum," she replied, giggling even as she leaned against him slightly.

As they reached the top, he gave it one final squeeze and let go, while the ladies arrayed themselves around him - Heidi to his left, Hermione to his right, and Cho behind. Not a word was said to put this configuration together. They entered the office as a team.

"Mr Potter, I believe that I requested only you," Albus Dumbledore said kindly, but firmly.

"Perhaps, but I suspect that this conversation will cover things that they have knowledge of as well. Besides, I have need of a change in housing. I do not believe that sleeping in the boys' dormitory of the Gryffindor Tower will be conducive to my study habits this year."

"And why would that be?" Albus asked, amused.

"Because I would not be sleeping with my wife." He reached out and took Hermione's hand.

"I fear that I must deny your request, Harry, since you did not receive permission from your wizarding guardian to marry, therefore the wedding ceremony you underwent is null and void." There was a look of triumph in the man's eyes.

"Ah, you see? Immediately we hit a subject where the presence of the ladies is important. Heidi, if you will?"

"Oh course, Mr Potter." She reached into her purse and pulled out several sheets of paper. "All these are copies - the originals rest in the Ministry and with the people involved. This one shows a legal change of wizarding guardian to Mr Einar Hogunson. This one shows, by the way, that Mr Hogunson has hired me as Mr Potter's bodyguard, and places some restrictions on your ability to remove me from the castle. The third sheet is a permission form for Mr Potter to marry Miss Hermione Granger, and the fourth is the marriage certificate, stating that she is now Mrs Hermione Potter. I believe that you will find all quite legal and within bounds, sir."

Dumbledore looked at the paperwork, a scowl forming on his face at the first, and it only deepened as the paperwork landed before him. By the time the fourth sat before him, he was in a state Harry had never seen on him before, but that he knew had graced this office - rage. The Headmaster gripped the edge of the table and visibly calmed himself down.

"You truly have no idea what you've done, do you?" he asked when his face was no longer an unhealthy shade of red.

"I know that I've gotten out from underneath abusive relatives. I know that I am happy for the first time in a long time. Also, I know that my name isn't Beowulf."

"And what does that have to do with anything?" Snape asked in his trademark sneering drawl.

"... *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 . . .*" "I'm surprised, sir. I thought that you did better in history of magic than that. That's the Beowulf prophecy." He looked to the Headmaster. "It's also the prophecy that the Headmaster quoted at me less than an hour after Sirius died, knowing that I don't do well in History of Magic." He leaned forward. "That's the real reason you wanted me kept apart from everyone, isn't it? You wanted me to brood, and maybe get angry at my friends, but basically you wanted me to internalise it and not tell anyone, so that they wouldn't tell me how you'd flim-flammed me."

"What's the real reason that you've done this to him, Headmaster?" Heidi asked. "Why have you been his guardian without ever telling him, keeping his key from him - and we'll need that key, thank you very much - and generally controlling his life for him?"

"I do not have to answer to you, Miss . . .?"

"Koenig," Heidi responded. "Very true. But one way or another you will answer, whether to me and Harry's guardian, as I stand proxy for Mr Hogunson, or you will answer to the Wizengamot and International Confederation of Wizards, but answers will be forthcoming." When Dumbeldore smiled, she returned it. "Mind you, your position will avail you not at all, since we would of course demand you recuse yourself from the positions in



question during the cases we brought before those august bodies."

She stopped and waited a second. "Do you wish to explain here, or before a large number of people where the press can overhear the accusations?"

Dumbledore scowled. "There are wheels within wheels, Miss Koenig. It is not as simple as you would have Mr Potter believe."

". . . *the Dark Lord shall fall to the Marked One . . . beware, though, lest greater evil rise in his stead . . . the Dark Lord shall fall to the Marked One . . .*" Harry said. "I've said that right in front of Professor Snape, knowing that he can now run to his other master and deliver." He turned to face Snape. "Remind him to pay very close attention to that, sir. I am the Marked One, and he is the Dark Lord. He will fall, make no mistake."

"Harry, the reason that I told you the Beowulf prophecy was that, yes, I know your History grades, and I was fairly certain that you would be willing to face Tom someday, but not yet. You need training, and I need you to be ready to face him. I don't believe that you are as of this point. I feared arrogance in your demeanour, and that you might doom many people by deciding to run out and fight him, thinking that the prophecy protects you from harm."

"I can understand that, Headmaster. Are you willing to permit the extra training, so that I can deal with the Dark Idiot once and for all?"

"Will you promise not to run off until you are properly trained to kill him?"

"I will give you an Oath, if necessary, not to fight him until I am sure that he will die and I will have a reasonable certainty of surviving the fight. That means I have a better than fifty percent chance of surviving."

The Headmaster looked worried. "I would prefer a better -"

"I'd prefer to promise not to fight him until I know beyond a shadow of a doubt that I won't die, but that's a pipe dream. What I can work on is being ready at the drop of a hat to do everything possible to bring him down and live to enjoy life after."

"What if the only method to defeat him involves the sacrifice of your own life, though?" Dumbledore asked, a troubled look in his eyes.

"Unless you know something I don't about his ability to survive, then I don't see that as likely. But if it turned out that the only possible method involved me dying, then I suppose that I'd suck it up and go out like a true Gryffindor." He paused. "Actually, no. A Gryffindor would likely take out half the countryside too, in an overly heroic method of blowing himself up." Cho snickered at that.

"Thank you, Harry," Dumbledore said. "You just pinpointed why oaths are so dangerous, though. Carelessly worded oaths have killed before."

"Well, I said I'd be willing to make an oath. I'd want it properly phrased first."

"You still haven't explained the reason that Miss Chang is here," Snape said. "You have explained that you and Miss Granger are living in sin, I believe the phrase goes."

"Oh no, Professor, it is quite legal and binding. Hermione is, in fact, Hermione Potter. As for Miss Chang's presence? It has come to my attention that an oddity in the Black family charter requires a pureblood wife of at least five generations, and this position cannot be held by any other wife, if the situation is such that the Head of the Black family is also Head of another family. Miss Chang is verifiable as the eleventh generation magic wielder from her father's side of the family, and a fifteenth generation on her mother's side. She quite clearly meets the requirement, so I spoke with her parents and negotiated our betrothal contract. The wedding will be happening by Christmas at the very latest, so you may wish to choose those quarters for us as allowing four occupants, since my bodyguard, Miss Koenig, will need to be situated in there as well."

"And why would you need her there, Potter?" Snape sneered. "Are two women not enough for you that you must rub in their faces that you need a third?"

"You arse," Harry growled. "How do you actually manage to be a spy for Voldie . . . I mean for Dumbledore?" He let his eyes show that the 'slip' was no slip.

"How dare you speak to me in -"

"I'll use small words for you, Professor -"

"ENOUGH!" yelled Dumbledore. "Harry - enough baiting of Professor Snape."

Harry looked at the Headmaster for a long moment before nodding. "Agreed. Now, if you will see to our quarters? It's likely best to put Cho in there now, and perhaps someone to verify that we are not committing any sort of act that would draw her . . . ah, suitability for a white wedding gown, shall we say, into question? Perhaps a trusted house elf, such as Dobby or Winky could take care of us. I can guarantee that they would also be able to prevent us from doing anything untoward."

"Yes, perhaps that would be best," Dumbledore said, obviously lost in thought. "You know and trust them. Dobby? Winky?"

A moment later, the elves in question appeared. "Headmaster Dumbledore calls Dobby?"

"Yes, I need you two to prepare the quarters in the East Wing that used to house the Founders. We have need of those suites for Mr Potter and these three ladies."

"Dobby and Winky will do!" the excitable elf squeaked, and a moment later, the two were gone.

"While they're gone, sir," Harry said, "we need to talk about a situation that came up when we came into the building. We had several points removed from our houses before even the feast began, and for spurious reasons. We also heard a teacher refer to a student in a derogatory manner, using a particularly ugly epithet. This same professor has, in the hearing of other witnesses, made disparaging comments about the same student's appearance. While I know that you will do nothing to stop his flagrant abuses of the student body, I felt that you should at least be made aware of the situation."

"Can you not forgive Professor Snape for the part that he must play?"

"How long has he been forced to play it, sir?" Hermione asked sharply. "Since before Harry and I started here at Hogwarts? I remember the very first day of classes, sir, and the derision that he treated Harry with. I was likely the only non-Slytherin in that room to know what a bezoar was, or that aconite, monkshood, and wolfsbane are the same plant. Let's not talk about his Draught of the Living Death question. I read ahead and barely knew that one."

"Of course, so much of this is unprovable," Harry said, "because Pensieve memories can be faked."

"Idiot boy," Snape replied. "Proof that you speak on matters you know nothing of."

"Then you'll have no problems walking through Diagon Alley with me tomorrow while we talk about the Dark Mark that sits on your arm? It's an equivalent situation to the memory that you used as an excuse for why you were stopping teaching me. Remus walking through Hogwarts, in hearing range of other students, talking about and making jokes about his being a werewolf, when it likely could have gotten him expelled at the very least? Not to mention the fact that you didn't learn that he was a werewolf until Remus's *Sixth* year, and not the *Fifth* year memory that you allowed me to see." He paused. "Was there a small Imperius to make me want to watch that memory?"

"Are you going to believe this child, Albus?" Snape asked incredulously. "He flouts the rules constantly and you help him with it. He invaded my privacy, and now lies about what he saw."

"The Headmaster said that oaths are dangerous. Are you willing to swear one under pain of death that you did not create a memory - that the incident happened exactly as I saw it in the Pensieve?"

"I will make no such oath to you Potter. I will be no more beholden to you than I must be."

Harry snorted. "A life debt? You paid that back first year, when you helped keep me from falling from my broom. There is no debt between us, and I prefer it that way. If there are magical debts between us, then I freely release you from any that you feel you owe me."

"This is getting far afield," Dumbledore said. "I seem to have no choice, but to permit you your own rooms - but make no mistake that I will be checking with the Ministry to verify the validity of these claims. If they are proven false, then there will be severe penalties."

"I am aware of that, sir," Harry said. Dobby popped in before anything else could be said.

"Rooms for Master Harry and his ladies are ready!" he said. "Their clothes are already moved there."

"Thank you, Dobby," Hermione said. "We appreciate it."

"Then shall we repair to your rooms?" Dumbledore asked.

---

"I can't believe that -" Hermione said, but was stopped by Heidi raising a hand. She scanned the room quickly and quickly located several monitoring charms. A few moments later she motioned for Hermione to speak again.

"What was that?"

"Monitoring charms. Einar Hognunson taught me a few Gnomish tricks to keep others from listening in."

"Thank you." Hermione turned back to Harry. "I can't believe that you didn't say anything about so much of this summer. He avoided a few things entirely."

"Oh yes, I know. This isn't for me to have a chance to completely unload on him. If I do, he'd have a chance to design some sort of response. There are things I may never say to him. But I want him off balance. He'll check out the marriage and the guardian thing, spending most of his time on that. If he had someone else in mind for me to marry for the Blacks, then he'll spend time working on that, and trying to invalidate the current contract." He brushed a thumb across Cho's cheek. "Which is why the next few weeks are going to be a delicious hell for me, Cho. You'll be able to parade around here in whatever you want, and to keep you pure for the contract's purposes, I can't touch you the way I want to."

She chuckled deep in her throat, stood, and dropped her robes, displaying a sexy bra and knicker set in her house colours. "You mean like this, Harry?" she asked as she sat on his lap. "I can help you with the problems I cause. We just can't pre-consummate the marriage."

"How do you think I feel, though?" Heidi asked. "I can't even touch him now until Dumbledore has been defanged. I'm going to be relying on you two ladies to help me."

"That's not a problem," Hermione chuckled. "Now, before we make Harry explode before it's a proper time, what else do we need to cover?"

"Other than Cho's magnificent tits?" Harry asked. "I mean, if you want me to think?"

"I'll be crafting a letter to Einar and the Board of Governors tomorrow. I know you three aren't happy with it, but *I'm* glad that the very first class that you have is with Snape. I'll wait until after the class to go speak with the Headmaster. As soon as that conversation is over, whether for good or ill, I'll craft the letter to Einar."

"And I'll start thinking about what I need to know to fight, defeat, and win against Riddle. I'm honestly thinking that a nice few ounces of lead might do the trick."

Hermione's eyes went wide. "You'd be shunned forever in wizarding Britain if you used a gun against him!"

"And I care about that why?" he asked in return. "I just want the little bastard dead."

"It could be hard to get the reforms through that you'll need to improve this place," Heidi said.

"Or I could use it as the platform to show how pureblood-heavy the government is, and how everything is weighted in their favour. 'Oh dear! You killed him, but you didn't follow pureblood methods! We'd much rather he be murdered thousands now than ever admit that the Muggles might have good ideas!'" He sneered as he finished. "Has anyone in England ever thought about how insulting the word 'Muggle' really sounds?"

"They think it sounds quaint," Cho replied. "Which is an insult of a different type, if you think about it."

"Even Arthur Weasley falls prey to it," Harry said. "Thinking Muggles quaint, that is."

---

The next day at breakfast Harry noted that Dumbledore was nowhere to be seen. "I'd imagine that he's gone to the Ministry to see if he can . . . to verify the validity of the paperwork he was given last night."

"What were you going to say?" Seamus asked.

"The same thing, but wordier. Something like '. . . if he can prove that the paperwork we gave him last night was real'. Less clear than what I said."

"But what are we going to do if you start being understandable?" the Irishman asked with a wide grin.

"Love you too, Seamus," Harry answered him with a laugh. Breakfast went well, except for the small bobble when Ginny arrived. She was still unhappy at Harry's comments to her on the Express, and she was now to the stage of being angry. She said nothing, but her glares at Harry, Hermione, and Cho as well made her opinions quite clear.

"I'd say that I'm done," Harry said. "Meet you in Potions, Hermione?"

"I'm done, to be honest. Let's get there early, to avoid giving him *that* reason to remove points." Cho joined up with them, and the four - Heidi bringing up the rear - made their way to the Potions classroom.

"I will lay money on your Professor Snape attempting to remove me from the class," Heidi said, "knowing that I am a bodyguard. He will not wish me protecting you, and he will not wish me to be able to gather evidence against him."

"Stand your ground. What he'll end up doing is ejecting *me* from the class, since your attitude is obviously due to my incredible arrogance, and if you refuse to leave my side, then I will be disrupting the class, and therefore I will be forced out, receiving a zero for the day."

"I wish I could argue with you," Hermione said. "You weren't originally thinking what you told Seamus at breakfast, were you?" she asked, changing the subject.

"No, I was thinking that he was at the Ministry to see if he can weasel his way out from under the paperwork. Apparently Einar used all the French judges that he could on those things that had international standing. Dumbledore has offended them a few times, so they're less likely to reverse their rulings. He can't afford to have me free of his control, I suspect."

"I suspect that you're right," Cho said sadly.

They entered the classroom, the first ones to be there, in fact. "Let's sit where we choose, but Heidi, mark my words - he will walk in and proceed to pair us as he chooses, claiming that he wishes to prevent cheating. He will not mention me by name, but he will be openly glaring at me at the time." Harry and Hermione sat together, with Cho on Harry's other side.

The rest of the class filtered in - a smaller class than Harry was used to, and it contained people from all four houses. As the last of them filtered in, Snape breezed into the classroom with his characteristic sneer, his cape billowing behind him in a manner reminiscent of a psychotic moth. "You are all in N.E.W.T. Potions, although how some of you made it into this class can only be attributed to blatant favouritism." As he expected, Snape's eyes were directly upon Harry as he said this. "Only connections with people in high places could explain the presence of such students." Snickers could be heard from the Slytherin section of the class.

"Be that as it may be," Snape continued, finally taking his eyes from Harry, "I will not permit even less . . . non-Potions related behaviour than I have allowed in your earlier classes. There are potions in this curriculum that will cause explosions if they are not precisely followed. I will also deal harshly with cheating." His eyes once again snapped to Harry. "In fact, to prevent this, I will rearrange the seating. Granger, sit with Malfoy. Potter, sit with Parkinson. Chang, sit with Edgecombe. Patil, sit with . . ."

This continued until the entire layout had been changed. "This seating will remain until such time as I choose otherwise. Miss Koenig - leave."

"I think not, Professor Snape. I am Mr Potter's bodyguard, and I remain with him."

"I am the master of this domain, and I will not have your presence distracting my students. You will leave. I offer you the choice of whether or not it is under your own power."

"Am I to understand that you are stating that you will use physical force to remove me from the room?" she asked, her wand sliding into her hand.

"A bodyguard as stupid as her charge. I would think that had been quite obvious, Miss Koenig. I shall repeat it, using small words so that your imbecilic brain can understand me. You will leave or I will force you out."

Her wand rose. "I will not leave my charge."

His rose and he snapped off a spell in her direction. She slid sideways, causing the spell to miss her and blow a significant portion from the wall. Several students screamed and bolted for the doorway. "Leave now!" she ordered Harry. "This room is not safe!"

Harry gathered Cho and Hermione and left at the highest speed he could manage. A moment later a loud bang happened inside the room, shaking dust free. Snape exited the room with an unconscious, bruised, and bloody Heidi hovering before him. "Some bodyguard, Potter," he sneered.

"Well, she was up against an Inner Circle Death Eater, what can I say?"

Snape's wand spun on Harry, dropping Heidi to the ground unceremoniously. Before Harry could do anything, an ugly purple beam exploded from the end of the wand.

---

Harry awoke in the hospital wing. "Don't move!" Madam Pomfrey insisted. "The explosion broke several ribs and punctured a lung. You're still healing."

"What explosion?" he coughed. "This was caused by Snape hitting me with a Bludgeoning Curse."

Pomfrey looked startled, and then scowled. "I'd ask if you're sure, but you've always been honest if you didn't know. What was that man thinking?"

"Well, I did publicly accuse him of being an Inner Circle Death Eater, but I think that I would be chewed out if I fired a spell at someone after they merely verbally attacked or insulted me."

"You are correct," she replied. "I can't believe that man would do that." At Harry's look, she corrected herself. "I'm sorry, that was imprecise. I believe you, it's more that it's an unbelievable thing he did. Does that make sense?"

He nodded. "I think so. You're not doing what I predict Dumbledore will do, but rather saying that you don't like it."

"Exactly."

"How's my bodyguard? She was bleeding and unconscious the last I saw."

"She's hurt, but she'll recover as well."

"How long for the two of us to recover?"

"You'll be here longer than she will, at least as a patient. That punctured lung was not as easy to deal with as the bones of your ribs were. You ache more because of the muscle strain, but your lung is not as easy to repair. You will likely be here until Wednesday at the earliest."

"Wonderful. Well, at least Hermione will get all my homework for me."

"Have you asked her to?" Pomfrey asked with amusement.

"No, but he knows me so well," Hermione said as she and Cho entered the room with Ron in close pursuit. "How are you?"

"I ache, but she tells me I'll live, no thanks to Snape. How many did he Obliviate?"

"He can't - they've told too many people. The Slytherins in the class are denying the story the way that it's being told, instead saying that Harry pulled his wand on the professor, forcing said professor to defend himself. The reason is your lover, also known as your bodyguard."

"Expect some comments from them when we see them next," Cho said. "Edgecombe has already made a few snide comments in public."

"We know the truth, though, no matter what she says," Hermione said. "We aren't with you because we're settling, we're with you because we love you."

"When we're done dealing with Voldemort, I suspect that it would be best if we just leave. I personally find less and less to admire about the wizarding world. There's a Headmaster trying to manipulate me for his own purposes, and a bunch of people who expect me to deal with a problem of their own devising, and who hate me when I don't do it fast enough, or 'the right way'. I see no reason to stick around to try to fix a problem that they don't want fixed, and that they're just going to vilify me for anyway."

"I want to argue," Cho said, "but you're right. From things you've said, the Headmaster had to recognise that something was odd with Riddle when he was here at school. As soon as it was announced that the school might close, Riddle just happened to find the supposed culprit? It must have

thrilled Riddle to have someone else go to prison for one of his first murders."

"Logic has never been a wizarding strong point, Cho," Harry said.

"Harry!" the Headmaster exclaimed as he bustled into the infirmary. "How are you?"

"Surprisingly well, despite your professor's best efforts."

"He tells a somewhat different story, my boy. And he has students to back up that same story that he tells."

"Very well," Harry said. "The four of us will prepare our things and be out of the castle before the week is out. As per your story, I attacked a professor, and that is an expulsion offence."

"No, my boy, you will be remaining right here. I have managed to find out the legal trickery involved with your supposed change of guardians, and it has been returned to the proper individual, who has control over your schooling. Since this guardian did not give you permission to marry Miss Granger, the marriage between you is null and void, as is the contract between yourself and Miss Chang. As for Miss Koenig, she will be leaving the castle as soon as she is healthy enough to do so."

"Congratulations, sir," Harry said through clenched teeth. "You have just managed to enter the British wizarding world into a second war. I, for one, will sit back and watch you attempt to fight it on your own."

"You will someday understand my reasoning, Harry," Dumbledore continued in a grandfatherly voice. "Right now it hurts, but you will someday see that it is all for the best."

"So you say. So, do I start my detentions with Snape tonight, or will you wait until my ribs heal?"

"You will begin detention with *Professor* Snape on Monday next, and will be in detention with him for at least two months for your infraction."

"Right." He laid his head back and closed his eyes. Tears had begun to leak from the corners.

"You will someday understand, Harry," the Headmaster said, clapping a hand on Harry's shoulder. He then turned and left the room.

Harry sat up immediately, his ribs protesting. "Get Heidi and the three of you get the hell out of here. Immediately. He obviously blackmailed a few people at the Ministry, and I know that he won't want Heidi reporting to Einar. Get her out now. And the both of you go to your homes. Ron, I need you to tell everyone in Gryffindor what happened. He wants a war, he's got one."

"I'll get Miss Koenig ready to go," Madam Pomfrey said. "I want to believe him, but . . . something felt wrong about what he was saying. There was a feeling of gloating in there. He was pleased to be pulling something." She shook her head. "I just wish that you were in a condition to travel with them."

"Oh no, if I leave too, he'll mobilise the Aurors to get me back. If I stay here, he'll simply think that Hermione and Cho left in tears at their humiliation, and not go hunting them."

Heidi came into view. "I overheard the conversation. I was awake when the Headmaster came in. Harry's right. I need to get out of here before he can Obliviate me."

"Dobby?" Harry called, and the elf appeared. "Can you get Muggle clothing for the three ladies and bring them here? Afterwards, we'll need you to move their trunks elsewhere, once we know where they're going to be staying."

"Missuses Potters are leaving Hogwarts?" the green fellow asked in alarm.

"Yes. Something bad has happened, and they need to leave as soon as possible." Dobby popped out and returned with the girls' trunks in hand. "Missuses Potters can choose their own clothes, and Dobby will return trunks to rooms."

A few minutes later, they had stripped down and changed in front of Harry and Madam Pomfrey, much to the woman's surprise and amusement. "We'll leave our robes on and sneak to one of the tunnels out, and Floo to London immediately," Hermione said as she grabbed her money, an action mirrored by the other two. "We'll get to France and try to meet Einar as soon as possible. We probably won't be able to return before tomorrow, unfortunately."

"Take a different route," Harry said. "Now that you've told me, I expect that Dumbledore and Snape will mind rape me to find where you are to stop you. Get to him, but do it in a manner that is anything but the one you just told me."

"You're right," Hermione said. "Add a day or two to our trip, then, because it's going to take longer." She leaned down and kissed him, eyes bright with tears. "Stay as safe as you can, my love."

"And you three," he replied, voice thick.

With that, the three girls sped from the infirmary.

---

"We shall need to work quickly, Severus," Albus said in his office. "Miss Koenig will not be a patient for much longer, and we cannot permit her to report to her employer. I have forced several things through certain channels that will not hold up under any real scrutiny, but as long as no one actually forces a trial, I can do what needs to be done."

"I shall Obliviate the little bitch with great relish, Albus," Severus Snape responded. "I hope that you've managed to break the little bastard's spirit with this manoeuvre. If not, the detentions with me should do the trick."

"I need him able to fight, Severus. If you break him too much, then Tom wins the day, and life will not be good for any of us, even you."

"I am no child like Potter. I know the limits of what to do. Perhaps I overstepped my bounds by attacking the child before witnesses, but they have never reported things before, and I do not believe that they will this time. I am used to the stories, and those rise and fall with the tides. I shall weather this as I always have."

"Excellent, dear boy. Now, please go to the infirmary and send Poppy to me, at which point you can Obliviate the Koenig girl and send her on her way."

---

The three ran through the halls until they reached the hump-backed witch statue on the third floor. "Dissendium!" Hermione whispered as she touched it with her wand, and it moved aside, exposing the tunnel to Honeydukes. "Let's go! We can be in London within twenty minutes!" They all sped down the corridor.

Cho asked, "What's our plan?" as they ran.

"Not saying until London," Hermione panted. "He might have ways of picking it up while we're in Hogwarts territory, even if it's something he listens to later." Cho nodded, and they ran in silence.

Minutes later, they burst from the door of Honeydukes, breathing heavily, but they continued to run to the Three Broomsticks. "Emergency, Madam Rosmerta!" Cho gasped. "We need to Floo to the Ministry immediately!" The startled patroness simply pointed at the fireplace.

"Nicely done," Heidi praised as they spun to a stop in the Ministry Floos. They quickly exited the building and headed for King's Cross.

"We take exactly the route we described to Harry," Hermione said as they purchased their rail tickets. "He made certain to tell us that it was unsafe, and I know that Snape will yank that from his mind - that he told us that, I mean - and that makes this actually the safest route, even though they'll know exactly what we're doing."

"Why do you act so smart when you know it makes me horny?" Cho giggled.

---

Snape billowed into the Hogwarts infirmary carrying a small box. "Poppy? Albus needs to see you in his office for a moment. I shall place these in the usual cabinet."

"Thank you, Severus," she said. "You may wish to watch your temper, however. Whichever version is the truth, both show a sharp temper, and that could cause you problems if some student decides that he wants to tell his family."

"I'm not worried about these dunderheads. They simply do not understand discipline."

She shook her head. "On your head be it. I'm off to speak to Albus." She bustled from the room.

Severus Snape walked over to Potter's bed and sneered down at the boy before walking deeper into the infirmary, checking the beds. Except for Potter's, all of them were empty. A closer examination showed that one of them had been used recently, and Severus found signs that this had been Heidi Koenig's bed. He sat and chose to wait for a few minutes, figuring that the girl had simply stepped to the water closet.

After five minutes had passed, he scowled and stepped to the girls' W.C., finding the door open. He took a momentary look inside and quickly realised that she had not been in this room recently, if ever.

He stalked over to Potter's bed, kicking it hard and making the insufferable child start violently. He smiled softly to himself at the wince of pain the movement caused. "Where is she, Potter?" he growled.

"Who?"

"Koenig - the slut masquerading as your bodyguard. She is no longer in the infirmary."

"I have no idea where she is, sir," the brat said with a smirk.

"We shall just see about that! LEGILIMENS!" he bellowed, and sank into the child's memories.

*Harry sat up immediately, his ribs protesting. "Get Heidi and the three of you get the hell out of here. Immediately. He obviously blackmailed a few people at the Ministry, and I know that he won't want Heidi reporting to Einar. Get her out now. And the both of you go to your homes. Ron, I need you to tell everyone in Gryffindor what happened. He wants a war, he's got one."*

*"I'll get Miss Koenig ready to go," Madam Pomfrey said. "I want to believe him, but . . . something felt wrong about what he was saying. There was a feeling of gloating in there. He was pleased to be pulling something." She shook her head. "I just wish that you were in a condition to travel with them."*

*"Oh no, if I leave too, he'll mobilise the Aurors to get me back. If I stay here, he'll simply think that Hermione and Cho left in tears at their*

humiliation, and not go hunting them."

Heidi came into view. "I overheard the conversation. I was awake when the Headmaster came in. Harry's right. I need to get out of here before he can Obliviate me."

He scowled. *The little bastard thinks he can play with the big boys, does he?* He tore further through the child's skull to find out where they went.

A few minutes later, they had stripped down and changed in front of Harry and Madam Pomfrey, much to the woman's surprise and amusement. "We'll leave our robes on and sneak to one of the tunnels out, and Floo to London immediately," Hermione said as she grabbed her money, an action mirrored by the other two. "We'll get to France and try to meet Einar as soon as possible. We probably won't be able to return before tomorrow, unfortunately."

"Take a different route," Harry said. "Now that you've told me, I expect that Dumbles and Snape will mind rape me to find where you are to stop you. Get to him, but do it in a manner that is anything but the one you just told me."

"You're right," Hermione said. "Add a day or two to our trip, then, because it's going to take longer." She leaned down and kissed him, eyes bright with tears. "Stay as safe as you can, my love."

"And you three," he replied, voice thick.

With that, the three girls sped from the infirmary.

Sickening, he thought. *But they are gone. Albus will not like this.* He turned and stalked from the hospital wing, leaving behind a thoroughly unconscious Harry Potter.

He stormed through the castle and burst into the headmaster's office, where Pomfrey still sat with Albus. He looked at the man, which told the Headmaster everything he needed to know.

"Where is she?" he asked harshly. "Miss Koenig is gone, apparently, and I need to know where she is. At this moment, she is a danger to everyone in wizarding Britain."

"More likely that she's a danger to your schemes, Albus," Pomfrey barked back. "She's gone, as are Chang and Mrs Potter. Whether or not you dissolved it, they are married, and will be again as soon as legally possible."

"Unlikely," Albus said. "Given the fight he must someday face, I doubt that he will live that long."

"So you need him under your control until he can die, leaving you the hero of the wizard world?" she asked with disgust.

"You simply do not understand," the elderly man said. "There is a far greater good at stake, and a life here or there is worth it if the world is saved in the process."

"As long as it's someone else's life, you mean," she said. "You gladly give up Harry's, and likely mine now that I know too much."

"I would not do such to you. You will be Obliviated of the knowledge, but you will be left alive."

"Small comfort, but at least I know that the students will still have someone to watch over their medical needs."

"Speaking of which," she said, rising to her feet, "I have a patient still in the infirmary that needs looking after, given the damage that your dog here did to him earlier today." She turned and left the office.

"You know what to do, Severus. We cannot trust that a simple Obliviation will be enough." Snape nodded.

"Pity. I rather like Poppy."

"So do I, but we've come too far. too much has happened to allow it to fall apart now, my boy."

## Betrayed Excrement, Meet Fan

Poppy Pomfrey entered her hospital wing to find Harry rummaging through her medicine cabinet. "Mr Potter, what are you doing?" she yelled.

"Is this one pink? I can't tell?" he whispered. "I can't really see anymore." His voice was severely slurred.

She ran a scan of him and was startled by the amount of pain that the boy was in. She grabbed the vial he was obviously looking for and held it to his mouth. He sighed as the headache potion hit its mark. "What happened?"

"It was Snape," he replied, still slurring his words. "When he found Heidi gone, he used Ledge . . . Leg . . . he mind raped me for the information."

"And now I know it. I need to leave as soon as . . . but I can't. The students are worth more to me than my life."

"You can't protect us if you're dead, ma'am," he said. "Just get out now, while you can. I won't put it past Dumbles to have you Obliviated."

"Or worse. I know some of his schemes now, and that Severus is helping."

"Knock me out and leave now," Harry said. "He'll mind rape me again, but I can't tell what I don't know."

"He could kill you if he does it again!"

"Dumbledore will kill him if he does so he won't." He shook his head. "That made no sense. Head still hurts. Go. Stay alive. Just remember Deutsche Bank, Einar Hogunson and my name. That should help you."

"I'll try. I'm not used to this, though." She grabbed another vial and filled it. "Dreamless Sleep. It should leave you unconscious for at least eight hours. More, since you're healing." He lay on his bed and drank it, and was out almost immediately.

She ran to her room to grab her money bag and a change of clothing, and then left the infirmary. There were routes to the infirmary that only the staff ever used, and even then it was infrequently. She hoped that no one else thought of it.

No such luck. She was met by Minerva on her way out. "Poppy! Where are you going in such a hurry?"

"I need to speak with Madam Rosmerta, Min," she said quickly. "The wing is quiet, and Potter is down for the night, healing. I can leave for a few minutes without a real problem."

"Would you like some company?"

"I'd love some, but we all have duties, and this is the first full day of the school year. As much as I'd like your companionship, I know you've got House duties to perform." She sighed, hoping that it wasn't too theatrical. "Probably for the best. I shouldn't be away too long, and if you're with me, I might be tempted to stop and sit with a cup of tea with an old friend. We don't get to do that enough."

"I understand. Hurry back." With that, Minerva bustled away to continue her work, and Poppy held in the sigh of relief.

It was not over yet, however. Her worst point was going to be getting out through the front doors. If they were after her immediately, then they'd be prepared for her exit right there. She cocked her head and then smiled as she thought of a potential solution. *I hope Mr Potter forgives me for what I am about to do.*

Five minutes later, she was rocketing through the halls of Hogwarts riding Harry Potter's Firebolt. *I played Quidditch in school, although only as a Keeper. I think I can handle this.* She shot around corners, once scaring a prefect out of her wits as she knocked the hat off the young witch's head.

It was when she exploded out the doors of Hogwarts that it got interesting. Apparently her disappearance had been figured out, and Dumbledore himself was waiting for her. He was not, however, prepared for her to shoot over his head at well over a hundred miles an hour, and his first shot to bring her down was extremely wide.

Her old Quidditch training came back to her, and she jinked around the local obstacles, making the shot that Albus would need to use to bring her down difficult, if not impossible. She was personally hoping for impossible. She also remembered to think three dimensionally, and bounced up and down in her flight from the school. He was only able to get one more shot off before she was well out of his range.

She landed right in front of Rosie's place, and ran in holding the broom. Without a word, she Floo'd to the Ministry and then ran for the Ministry's Apparation point. Moments later she was in France, outside her sister's home.

The door opened and the bone-weary woman was dragged inside the house. "Poppy? What's wrong?"



"I need to get to the Deutsche Bank as soon as it opens, Margaret," she gasped. "It could be a matter of life and death."

"Wizarding or Muggle?" her younger sister asked.

"Wizard."

"You rest while I call them, then, and see if anyone is available." The woman began to walk away.

"Mention the names Einar Hogunson and Harry Potter. It's apparently very important."

---

"She seems to have realised what was likely to happen, Albus," Severus said as he entered the office. "Potter is under the influence of Dreamless Sleep, and the only antidote I could give him would likely kill him with the damage I did getting the information regarding the three chits."

"So what do we do now?" Remus asked. "From what you tell me, if they can get Hogunson involved, then a very large wrench gets thrown into your plans. We need for Harry to defeat Riddle and then die in the process. He's showing signs of becoming a very powerful wizard, and we're already in trouble with one Dark Lord with immense power. We don't need him replaced with one just as powerful, or more so!"

"As ever, your grasp of the obvious is astounding, werewolf."

"As is your ability to screw things up, Snivellus. If you'd have been able to avoid getting into a dick-waving contest with a girl - who won the contest in the long run, if you think about it - then we wouldn't be worrying about the alliances that Harry has been building."

Before Severus could return the scathing retort he was obviously planning, Albus interjected, "Remus is right in both, Severus. Had you kept your temper, this never would have happened. And Harry building international alliances is a very bad sign for when he attempts to become a Dark Lord." He shook his head. "Unfortunately, this turn of events means that a large portion of this will likely be fought in the public eye. I shall have to see how we can keep the press away."

"You know how the press is, Dumbledore. Alter things a bit," Remus said. "Chang is the homosexual, but let slip to the press that Harry is instead, and that he's overcompensating or trying to fool everyone by having three girls on his arm. Hints can be made about Chang's sexuality, and you get Granger in the splash as well. I'd imagine that with that all across the headlines, some of the political wrangling will slide beneath most people's notice."

Severus looked at the man with the closest to admiration that he would ever come. "That was quite Slytherin of you. I'm surprised that you were capable."

"Hiding a condition like mine for as many years as I have is conducive to letting out my Slytherin side. And thank you for the compliment." At Severus's extremely expressive eyebrows questioning his sanity, Remus added, "For you, that was a compliment."

"Sorry about that. Never meant it to be."

Remus simply snorted.

---

## **September 4th, Daily Prophet**

*POTTER A POUFTAH!*

*Does the Boy-Who-Lived bang boys?*

*By Rita Skeeter*

*It has come to this reporter's attention that our precious Boy-Who-Lived may not be as pristine and pure as we all thought. It seems that he has been caught multiple times in various broom cupboards over the years with members of his own gender, in very compromising positions.*

*Many will point to the fact that he has recently been seen with multiple women of admittedly attractive appearance (although one wonders what magics Miss Hermione Granger has used to improve her once exceedingly plain appearance). Overcompensation, readers. The girls feel safe being around him, most likely, knowing that their virtue is going to remain intact.*

*There is another possibility as well. It is known that Miss Chang is a homosexual, according to Marietta Edgecombe, whom Miss Chang apparently sexually assaulted this past summer. It has also been reported that Miss Granger planted a very public and very romantic kiss on Miss Chang's lips during the Welcoming Feast at the school.*

*Is this group giving each other a public alibi - supposed 'proof' of their heterosexuality - while actually being involved in perversions behind closed doors?*

*Do we really want Pouftah Potter where he can prey on our other students?*

---

"This has Dumbledore all over it," Hermione growled. "This sort of report will generate all sorts of Howlers that Dumbledore will happen to let through the wards, which will demand his removal from the general population. Dumbles will accede to the insistence of the Board, giving him

complete control over Harry. He will then hold him hostage for as long as he can. Make no mistake - he'll use him as a bargaining chip."

"I suspect as much," Einar said. "All I can do is go ahead at full speed." His eyes narrowed. "I do not know how, but that young man has touched me in a way I would not have expected. I begin to feel as if he were my son, and that bodes quite poorly for your Albus Dumbledore."

"What can we do?" Cho asked. "He's got our Harry, and he's already dissolved the betrothal contract. More precisely, he convinced my parents to do so in a manner that prevents its reinstatement." She had received the letter from her parents informing her of the payment of thirty pieces of silver to Harry's account for his breaking of their contract by lying to them. Such a payment was a mortal insult if falsely given. She had written back to her parents informing them that since she was seventeen years old, she was now considered an adult, and would have nothing to do with them ever again for their insult of Harry. They had disowned her.

Hermione's parents were livid, and her father was still prone to moments of blinding rage at Dumbledore's and Skeeter's treatment of their daughter. It was unlikely that she would ever return to Hogwarts while Dumbledore had a presence in the school.

Heidi seemed unable to laugh or even smile in the last few days. Being bested and badly wounded, followed by being forced to leave her principal (and fiancé) behind, and then reading the insults aimed at him had changed her. She was out for blood now.

"This will blow up in Dumbledore's face," Einar said. "He cannot kill Harry because of the true prophecy. More precisely, he *will* not kill him. That reluctance to do whatever is necessary to prevent our retrieving him will spell their doom. I would imagine that he will do whatever is necessary to escape from the school, and from what you tell me, he has those who will support him within the halls of Dumbledore's castle. Dumbledore is fighting a losing battle, for there are those believed to be either powerless or on his side who will help us instead, by helping Harry."

"Is there anything that we can do other than sit around waiting?" Poppy Pomfrey asked.

"Right now? No."

---

Dumbledore was smiling as he entered the room where he had Harry locked. "Well, my boy, I have completed negotiations on your behalf. The Changs have renounced the contract, giving you the betrayer's price for not dealing with them in good faith, so that left you open once more for negotiations with an acceptable pureblood family."

"Now I understand Ginny's attitudes during the train ride and over these past few days."

"Precisely! I am glad you approve!"

"I didn't say that, Albus," he replied. "I said that I understood. Tell me - what will happen to the contract - and more precisely to the negotiator - when it is discovered that the contract was negotiated illegally? And what will happen to the family?"

"There will be no worries about that, Harry, because the wedding will be performed before the week is out, so that even after Hogunson manages to unearth the paperwork, he will be completely unable to undo the marriage, and you will be properly bound to the Light side."

"They're in your back pocket - how can they be Light side?"

"I wish you could understand, Harry. There is a great darkness out there, and so few can resist it. It shows its tendrils in you by your refusal to work with me toward the destruction of Voldemort."

"So you are the final arbiter of who is Light and Dark?"

"Few have the clarity of vision that I have worked for these many years. But some trust my vision, such as Remus and the Weasleys. Severus. Minerva. A few others, such as Alastor and Nymphadora, offer further support as they may."

"Thanks for the list of traitors," Harry said brightly. "I'll remember it at your trial."

Dumbledore shook his head. "I hope that I can make you understand. No worries, however. You will enjoy your wedding greatly."

"Are you really sure that you wish to inflict 'Pouftah Potter' on the Weasley family?" Harry asked with a mocking tone.

"That story can easily be refuted. But for now, it is for the greater good." He stood and walked from the room, and Harry heard the click and then the squelch.

*Not that it matters. He's got my wand.* He walked the room as he had so many other times these past few days. He could see sparkles and feel twinges as he walked throughout the room. *Makes sense, though. He's locked the room, and even if I climb out the window, I've got a narrow handhold on the stone and probably a hundred feet or more to the ground.*

He opened the window and looked down. *There's a ledge down there, but it's a bit of a drop.* He looked back to his bed and then grinned. *That ledge is about twenty or thirty feet down. I'm betting that if I tear the bedsheets into strips and braid them together, I can make a rope strong enough and long enough to get me down there.*

He closed the window and waited for the lights to go out. That was his signal to sleep. Dumbledore, of course, did not know about his ability to see magic, and the fact that Harry was getting used to sleeping in light as bright as day. He peeled the top and bottom sheets from the bed and looked for a sharp edge in the room, chuckling as he realised that Dobby had left his dinner things alone. He grabbed the knife and used the serrated edge to rip the blanket evenly, and soon had two inch strips that were six feet long. Counting them came to forty-eight of them, so he divided them into

three even groups and began tying the ends together tightly, until he had three long strands. He tested each knot to ensure that it was strong.

When his three strands were done, he took the ends and tied them together and began to braid them. It wasn't long before he was tying a knot in the other end, a strong makeshift rope in his hands. He tied the one end to a wall sconce after verifying that it could hold his weight, and then threw the end out the window.

When he had reached the ledge, he looked further down and realized that the rope came to within twenty five feet of the ground. He could likely climb all the way down, and the twenty foot drop at the bottom, into soft grass, would likely not harm him. If it did? Well, he knew how to make a splint.

---

The Ministry was in an uproar. The head of the European gnome confederacy had arrived and was demanding information regarding his guardian. This had most workers in a tizzy, because they hadn't ever known that there was any other type of gnome than those brain dead potatoes that they threw over their fences. A short time into the uproar, Albus Dumbledore soared into the Ministry, quite obviously angry. Most sighed in relief, because he would obviously fix the situation.

They were wrong.

---

Dumbledore was angry, and he would show that child just how angry when he returned him to his control. He fought the anger from his face and demeanour before looking to the gnome leader and asking, "How can we help you today, sir?"

Einar Hogunson looked at him and said, "Where is Harry Potter, Mr Dumbledore? After you illegally dissolved a betrothal contract and declared a marriage null and void, you now keep my ward in seclusion?"

"I believe that you will find that the paperwork you refer to was in error, sir," Albus said diplomatically. "It did not actually transfer guardianship to you."

"I had that paperwork looked over by a member of your own Ministry, good sir. A member of your own Unspeakables. His work is unimpeachable."

"Oh, which one? Some are not properly up to date on the most recent changes."

"Later. Now, is anyone in this building capable of doing a proper paperwork search and locating the information I seek?"

"You do not endear yourself to the wizarding public, sir," Dumbledore said with some affront.

"I have no desire at this time to endear myself to the British wizarding public. A young man that I have come to think of as a son has gone missing, last seen at your school. His wife and his intended were forced to leave the school at high speed, for fear of being Obliviated by someone on your staff. A staff member left under similar circumstances, after learning that you have no intention of giving Mr Potter a fighting chance against your Dark Lord. She was literally in fear for her life, and reports that you personally fired at her as she left the school. And worst of all, one of your employees fired on *my* employee because she was doing her job of guarding my ward!"

"You speak dangerously," Dumbledore said with a growl. "That could be taken as threats that could lead to war between our peoples."

"Right now, Dumbledore, your actions are what drives this inexorable drive toward the war that you threaten. I want the paperwork found, and I want Harry Potter brought to me."

"So that you can deliver him to the Dark Lord?" Dumbledore fired back. "Don't think that I haven't found links between your people and Voldemort, Hogunson!"

"So war it is, then?" Einar replied quietly.

"DUMBLEDORE!" bellowed a woman from the edge. "WHAT IN MERLIN'S NAME ARE YOU DOING? YOU DON'T SPEAK FOR THE MINISTRY IN THIS!"

"Madam Bones, I-" he began imperiously.

She would have none of it. "You are perilously close to a stint in one of our cells if you keep inciting this toward war! You do not work for the Ministry - you are a member of the Wizengamot - WHICH IS NOT IN SESSION!"

Before anyone could say anything further, a young wizard came running up to the group. "Mr Hogunson?" he asked, looking around.

"Yes?" Einar asked.

"I have your paperwork, and the more recently input paperwork by the Chief Mugwump." Dumbledore made a move to reach for them, but Einar took them before he could touch them.

"If my services are not needed here," Dumbledore said in rather a huff, "then I believe that I shall retire back to Hogwarts."

"I wouldn't if I were you," Madam Bones said. "You and I need something of a talk after I'm done speaking with Minister Hogunson."

"I do not believe that you can hold me here," he replied darkly.

"Nor do you want her to keep here, Einar said into the quiet, "especially since these documents show that you knew quite well that my claim to guardianship was valid. You have your own version of the Death Eaters secreted about the Ministry, don't you?"

"Are you equating me with Voldemort?" Dumbledore exploded.

"Yes."

This simple one word answer had a startling effect on the assembled people. There was dead silence for several seconds, and then a cacophony of people talking and yelling over each other. Dumbledore tried to disappear in the sudden flurry, but Amelia Bones was watching him too carefully. "Don't make me stun you, Albus," she said. "I won't hesitate to."

He seemed to collapse in on himself for a moment, before suddenly bursting upward and firing a series of spells. Everyone ducked in order to avoid being hit, and by the time any of them looked back in Dumbledore's direction, he was gone.

"Madam Bones?" Einar asked. "Are you empowered to speak for your government?"

"I'm in charge of law enforcement, not diplomacy."

"Law enforcement is what we need at the moment. We shall need to go to Hogwarts and free my ward, and arrest Severus Snape."

"Now would be the time for that, given that Dumbledore is probably not returning to Hogwarts right now."

"How soon can you have a team together?"

---

Fifteen minutes later saw Amelia Bones leading a troop of Aurors up the walkway to the Entrance Hall of Hogwarts. They were met by Minerva McGonagall. "May I help you?" she asked in her thick brogue.

"Yes. Give us access to Severus Snape, and if he is here, Albus Dumbledore. Also, tell us where Harry Potter is."

"I've not seen him," she replied. "Not since he was hospitalised after firing on a professor."

"I've heard a rather different story from witnesses, Minerva. My niece being one of them."

"Hey Tonks!" yelled a student from the side. Amelia looked up to see that it was a Weasley. Being male, it was likely Ronald Weasley. "Here to help Dumbledore do more damage to Harry?"

"Care to explain that, Auror Tonks?" Amelia asked with a raised eyebrow.

"He's the kid who got hit by the brains a few months ago, ma'am. I doubt his sanity." She gave Ron a look that promised retribution.

"Mr Weasley, why would you know Auror Tonks in the first place?"

"She and Shacklebolt are part of Dumbledore's -" his face blanked at that moment, and he began to look confused.

"Who performed that Obliviation?" she yelled, spinning on her Aurors.

"It was the big black one with the earring!" one of the girls yelled. "I saw him point his wand at Ron!"

Before anyone could react, Amelia Bones had dropped both Shacklebolt and Tonks. "Looks like we're taking these two in for questioning as well. Care to explain who else is involved with this?" Amelia asked Minerva.

"Why do you believe that I would know?" the professor blustered.

"Because you dote on Albus and think he can do no wrong."

A sandy-haired boy ran up. "If you can, get some people at the Shrieking Shack and at the Whomping Willow. A few should be outside Honeydukes as well. There are apparently secret tunnels at those places."

"You think that Dumbledore and Snape know of them?"

"Snape knows the Whomping Willow one," Ron said. "He's used it before. Seamus is right, though. If either of them is still here, they'll be running for those places to be able to Apparate away."

She motioned and several Aurors broke away and headed to cover the areas in question. Two others picked up Tonks and Shacklebolt and returned to the Ministry. This still left ten Aurors with her. "Now it's time to figure out where Mr Potter might be. Any suggestions as to how to find him?"

"Could try Hedwig," Ron suggested. "Might not work, but it's worth a shot."

That quickly turned out to be a dead end, because the striking white owl was nowhere to be seen. "I wonder what they did with his owl?" she asked out loud, not really expecting an answer.

"Well, it's another way to control him," Ron said with a near growl.

"True. Unfortunately, that means that we now have to go about this the long way, and attempt to search an entire castle with potentially hostile teachers hampering us."

They had begun the trip back to the front of the school when a silvery dart stopped in front of her and murmured. She snickered. "Mr Weasley? Can you get your broom and return here? I have a mission for you."

He pointed toward the castle and called out "Accio broom!" At Ginny's startled look, he said, "Harry did it, and I've been studying this summer." A moment later, his broom zoomed in.

"If you could circle the castle, I think you'll see where I want you to check out, Mr Weasley. There's an Auror beneath the spot as well."

---

Ron Weasley mounted his broom and headed off in the direction that the silver dart had come from. He hadn't gotten far when he saw immediately why she had reacted, and why she had snickered. "Harry, you sneaky bastard!" he said with a laugh as he looked at the makeshift rope. "Living with the Muggles did you a world of good in this case!" He looked down at the Auror, who waved up at him.

He flew down to the man. "I think somehow that Potter's not here anymore," the Auror said with a small smile.

"Ythink?" Ron replied with a laugh.

"Would you mind looking in the room and see if there's anything else we can find out, like where to get to the room without a broom?"

"If it helps find my friend? I'll draw fire from Death Eaters if that's what it takes."

"Luckily, it just calls for flying up to a window," was all that the Auror said.

Ron's flight was quick, and he landed inside the room with little trouble. He pulled his wand and aimed at the door after noting that it was locked. "Alohamora!" The click told him that the door was now unlocked, so he opened it, and immediately scowled. While he couldn't immediately remember being in there before, the fact that it was Dumbledore's office was blatant.

His anger was impressive when he recognised a particular wand on the desk. He nearly vibrated with rage before walking back out and yelling to the Auror, "Get Madam Bones up to the Headmaster's office!" The Auror nodded and fired off the communication spell, while Ron waited in the office.

---

It took several minutes for Einar to be able to speak to Harry when he appeared, because the ladies were laughing and crying over him. "Are you feeling better, dear boy?" Poppy asked. "After that monster did what he did to your mind, I'm astonished that there wasn't permanent damage."

"Not for lack of trying on his part," Harry said. "And I am so glad that most wizards insist on remaining ignorant of Muggle customs and ideas. If Dumbledore had thought that I might be able to do what I did with those sheets . . . well, I wouldn't be here right now."

"What you *did* do once you were free was brilliant," Einar said. "Floo to a destination that people can't remember due to the Fidelius covering the place, and then Floo to another location from there. Going to Ms Houghtailing's studio was excellent thinking."

"Although waking up from being Stunned when I appeared without warning was less than fun."

"What was she wearing at the time?" Hermione asked. "That might explain it."

"I have no idea. Was that why she Stunned me? Should I have complimented her clothes when I burst in on her like that?"

"What if she was naked at the time?" Cho asked with amusement.

"Good point. She Stunned me before I had a chance to see. Besides, I've got three right now. I don't need a fourth, and she's more of a big sister to me."

The assembled people started to smile at that comment when a familiar snowy owl drifted into sight. "It's Hedwig!" Hermione said, a bit unnecessarily.

"It's for you," Harry said as he turned to look at his owl with his own wide smile.

Sure enough, Hedwig flew past Harry and landed near Hermione, holding out her leg for delivery. As soon as she had been relieved of the message, Hedwig flew the short distance to Harry and perched on his arm. "I need to get owl treats as soon as possible. She deserves them." There was an answering bark from her, and he chuckled. "Yes, I know. I've neglected you horribly this summer. Dumbledore used you as a pawn in his game against me, and I'm sorry you were put in that position." She bobbed her head and nipped his finger gently. "Thank you for forgiving me, girl." The others were looking at him when he was finished, and there were soft smiles on all the faces.

"I assume that you sent the letter?" Cho said. "It would explain why you knew who it was for."

"Yeah. I escaped from Dumbledore because he forgot that the non-magical make due without magic. He's still got my wand somewhere. But all the important things I did involved no wand-waving."

"Hermione," the addressee read, "Worry not. This message should get to you after I'm there. If not? Well, I'm free of AD for the mo, and on the run."

Talk to KH (EH knows her) and see if she's heard from me." She looked up. "'Worry not?'"

"Faster to write. Less letters than 'don't worry'. I was still on Hogwarts grounds right then. Maybe only one and a punctuation, but you'll note the entire letter was written fast. Every second counted, as far as I was concerned."

She nodded and then pulled him in for another welcoming kiss. He returned it with a fervour that startled her, and she noticed that he was shaking. "What's wrong?"

"I looked up to that bastard, and all he's been setting me up for is to fight Riddle and die against him. I'm sure that's who the Dark Lord in question is - if I don't do something, then Dumbledore rises to control everything with his 'It's for the greater good' crap, where he takes everyone's freedom."

"Did he tell you that he was going to kill you?" Hermione asked, aghast.

"No, but his demeanour made it obvious. Explaining his plans does sort of make that clear. Telling me that no one else has his 'clarity of vision'? He has no intention of letting me stick around and bother anyone, or tell anyone what he told me. Besides, I think that even after I'm done with Riddle, I'd like to leave the U.K. and let British wizarding society finish the job of destroying itself from the inside." He shook his head. "I'd do it now, but that would leave Dumbledore in charge, and Riddle alive to kill more people. So we defeat the both of them. Actually, I think we'll need to return to Hogwarts, to be honest. Once word gets out that Dumbles is losing it, Voldemort will attack. If I'm there to deal with it, then we can finally be clear of that menace. And if Dumbles is nowhere to be seen at that battle? It helps us discredit the man even more."

"Are you sure you want to leave?" Hermione asked.

"Not really. Part of me wants to, but I'm not going to insist that the two of you leave your home country just because I've gotten tired of being picked on." He looked to Heidi. "For that matter, I'd probably be forcing you from that big penthouse of yours."

Cho giggled. "Harry? Ever hear of commuting? Floo? Apparating?"

"She's right," Heidi said. "There's room for all of us to have our own rooms for those times when we want to be alone, and still have one big bedroom with a big bed we all can sleep in. You could live in Germany or the United States or wherever you want to. You mean more to me than a damned apartment building. I'll even sell it at a loss, if I have to."

"Don't do that. We'll worry about what to do later on. First, let's get Riddle and Dumble out of the way. Then we can decide where our orgy suite will be."

"Let's get other things out of the way first," Heidi said. "You have a woman here that you are betrothed to, and there's nothing I can see in the way of marrying her."

"True. That reminds me, though - when the Ministry admits that Dumbledore lied to the Chang family, I want whomever Einar is willing to sic on them to get back that seventy-five hundred Galleons. They broke the contract, so I want them to return it." He grinned a rather nasty grin. "I think that, with Cho's permission, we make sure that word gets out that they also gave me the traitor's payment."

"Go ahead. They aren't my family anymore."

He blinked. "Your choice or theirs?"

"Disowned," she said with a sniff.

He pulled her into a hug. "Then we need to check the rules as to whether or not you still qualify as a witch fulfilling the Black requirement, but we're marrying either way."

He stopped and furrowed his brow for a moment. "Either magic or the prophecy or *something* has sped up the process, as far as I can tell, because I shouldn't feel like this without knowing you for a lot longer, but I love you, and am going to marry you whether or not you fulfil some stupid requirement for a family that doesn't really have any members anymore."

She sniffed again. "I want to be your wife as soon as we legally can, Harry. And once I am, I want you to destroy them. Take their apothecary from them. Bankrupt them. *Maybe* then I'll accept the apologies I know that they'll try to give to assuage their so-called honour."

---

"So, Mr Snape," Amelia Bones said with some relish, "you admit to being a member of You Know Who's ranks, but say that it is only as a spy for Dumbledore."

"And I am also aware that he is likely to hang me out to dry, as the saying goes," was the resigned response. "I have no one else who can vouch for my membership, as far as I can tell, because none of the other people who know me as working for the Light are Death Eaters."

"Are there those who can vouch for your sympathies?" she asked.

"Yes, but they are not in your best graces right now. Minerva McGonagall, Nymphadora Tonks, Kingsley Shacklebolt, and - of course - everyone's favourite werewolf. Perhaps Arthur Weasley might be willing."

"What can you tell me of Dumbledore's plans, and why you were so mixed up in them?"

"Dumbledore is aware that the Dark Lord will fall, but the prophecy in question states that Potter will rise in his place. As for why I am so mixed up in

them? Between Albus controlling my freedom and the blood feud between myself and the Potters, I think that largely explains things."

"Why did you not come forward with some of your information when you realised that the Headmaster was blatantly breaking the law?"

"First off, as much as the phrase annoys me even more than Potter does, I truly believe that Albus is doing things for the greater good of the wizarding world. And if I didn't, this tattoo on my arm is a one way ticket to a cell, without ever speaking to someone in authority. I doubt that just anyone can approach you, or else you'd have all the people who believe the Quibbler trying to get you to investigate their various . . . ideas."

"True, in regards to approaching me. But do you truly believe that Albus Dumbledore casting an Unforgivable on someone is for 'the greater good'? That illegally ending a betrothal contract in such a way that it will end up destroying a family in all likelihood is for 'the greater good'? His methods are likely to leave young Mr Potter dead!"

Snape grinned slightly. "Please, I doubt you are trying to make me happy. Did you not hear that the prophecy states that Potter will rise to take You Know Who's place?"

"I think I need to talk to the Department of Mysteries. I need to hear this prophecy."

---

## **Dark Lord Dumbledore?**

*By Dillwyn Barton*

*Sources at the Ministry are talking about an investigation that will rock the wizarding world. In fact, it is already starting to.*

*It seems that Albus Dumbledore has been less than honest with us over the years. This came to light when an incident happened a few days ago, where he single-handedly almost brought us to war with another magical species, which likely would have brought other magical populations into the mix.*

*It has long been understood that Albus Dumbledore was the wizarding guardian for the Boy Who Lived, Harry Potter. Apparently, this summer led to a situation where Mr Potter legally petitioned for a change in guardianship. (The reason for this is as yet undiscovered by this reporter, but it raises questions as to what had led to such a course of action.) This change was authorised by international wizarding courts at The Hague, and several actions were undertaken because of this, including a marriage that satisfies the Potter family requirements, and a betrothal contract to satisfy the Black family requirements for continuing the line.*

*Evidence uncovered in the Ministry shows that Albus Dumbledore faked paperwork and evidence to make it appear that the guardianship change was illegal, and he proceeded to reverse the marriage and break the contract.*

*As we began the process of unravelling some of his machinations, we find further, uglier things that the man has done in his lifetime. Apparently, Dumbledore has subverted several members of the Aurors, and has altered placement records for Mr Potter. He was apparently placed with abusive Muggles until he left them earlier this summer. (Note that this writer does not blame all Muggles for this. Much as there are bad seeds amongst wizards, there are the same within the Muggle world.)*

*Dumbledore has also apparently used this very paper to damage Mr Potter's reputation. It has been discovered that Ms Rita Skeeter was requested to write a very slanted article by the Headmaster. Most of the population of wizarding Britain has read this article and believes Mr Potter to be a homosexual. Given the truthfulness of the Headmaster being so very uncertain at this time, it is this author's opinion that the Skeeter article should be ignored.*

*On a related topic, Ms Rita Skeeter has been suspended from the Daily Prophet staff indefinitely.*

---

"He's got powerful people in his pockets," Dumbledore grumbled to Arthur and Remus after reading the Daily Prophet. "I fear that I shall have to find a way to provoke Tom into an attack, and hope that Harry will arrive, fight him, and die alongside him. If not, Harry will end up controlling the entire wizarding world in short order. I will not have that! I have worked too hard my entire life to see to it that we do not fall to darkness."

"One question, Albus," Arthur said. "What will happen to you if they don't overturn the gnome leader's petition, and end up declaring the betrothal contract with Ginny null and void? We won't take much by way of damage, being seen as 'being taken in by the master manipulator'," he said in disgust at the idea, "but it could irreparably harm your ability to work easily within the wizarding world."

"Quite honestly, Arthur, once Harry is dead, the history will be written by the victors," Remus said. "With Harry out of the way, we can tell people how Albus was trying to fight Harry's turn to the dark, but how the dark was too seductive to the boy."

"I am also working on bills to place before the new Minister to allow us to overturn the Potter and Black wills," Albus said. "I do not relish those monies going to dark pursuits. Once my position is reinstated, I shall speak to the Wizengamot and convince them as to the logic of these bills."

The other two men nodded. "Albus, I need to be going," Arthur said. "I've got a job at the Ministry, and they're checking things too carefully for my taste right now. If I take too long a lunch hour, they'll investigate me, and where I'm travelling."

"Go, Arthur. And thank Molly for the lunch she prepared for us. It was as delicious as ever."

The balding redhead Apparated away, leaving the werewolf and Dumbledore together. "I'm still your man, Albus," Remus said. "After all you've done for me in my life - hell, you made sure I had a life - I'm yours to order."

"It doesn't bother you that you might be called upon to deliver the stroke to Harry if Tom or I can't for some reason?"

"Of course it does!" Remus shot back hotly. "I'd be as Dark as You Know Who if I could do it without qualms!" He stopped and took a deep breath. "I'm sorry, sir. It doesn't help that I've got this Dark curse that will someday likely kill me. I'm hoping that someone will put me down before I hurt someone. But as far as Harry is concerned, it hurts a lot. He's the last connection to the only real friends that I've ever had in my life, and knowing that he has to die to keep him from falling completely to the Dark is painful. But for me to stand by and wait for him to become a major force for destruction just because he's the son of my friends? That would likely be darker than anything he might do."

"I am sorry for the pain that this will cause you," Albus said softly. "If I knew how to save you from the pain, I would."

Remus waved a hand at the man. "Don't. The fact that I can still feel the pain for the possibility tells me that my curse is still under my control, and not the other way around." Dumbledore simply nodded sagely.



## Betrayed Just Because It's The End Doesn't Mean It's Over

"I think it's war soon," Einar said with a laugh. "At least with the goblins. We've gotten control of your vaults in Gringott's, and we have a team there overseeing the removal of the Black and Potter wealth and property from their grasp. Needless to say, this does not make the goblins very happy with us."

"Is your extraction team likely to be hurt?" Harry asked with worry.

"They're getting combat pay for this," Einar replied. "I'm serious. We sent our best combat extraction team on this mission. When your vaults are removed from their control, easily one-fifth to one quarter of the Galleons in the wizarding world will no longer be under their control."

"Excuse me?" Harry squeaked. "I own twenty to twenty-five percent of Britain's wealth?"

Einar's grin was infectious. "Yes, and once all that lovely gold has been converted to a more usable form, you will be the wealthiest wizard in the world, I believe."

"Well, at least I can keep these ladies in the manner to which they would like to become accustomed," he said with a smile.

"Naked and sated?" Heidi asked with a purr.

"That would certainly save on clothing bills," Einar added with a loud bark of laughter.

When the laughter had died, Harry looked at the group. "It's nearing the end of September now. I would really like to return to Hogwarts at some point, if only because our friends are there. How soon before you think that's possible?" he asked Einar.

"I expect that the first full week of October should be good. Severus Snape is in custody, Albus Dumbledore is on the run, and the goblins are in a fury. The Chang family has been served with papers demanding the return of the bride price that you paid, since their cancellation of it makes it appear that they negotiated with you in bad faith."

"On the good side," Cho said, "now that we're married, they can't say anything about the contract one way or the other. And we finally tied you down long enough to add Heidi to the mix, so we're all happy."

"Now we just have to face Riddle and survive the experience," Harry said, "and then we're all good."

"I have something for you, Harry, that just might help with that," Einar said. "Come with me." The foursome followed the gnomish leader out of the room.

---

Ron grumbled "I finally get my head out of my arse enough to realise the reason for studying, and everything goes to hell. No potions, and all the other classes are for six until we can sort out the teachers."

Lavender cocked her head. "Wait, you *want* to study?"

"I know, I know - who am I and what have I done with the real slacker, Ron Weasley, right?"

She giggled slightly. "Well, you have to admit -"

"I do. It's just that I . . . I miss them, to be honest. I'd like to sit here with them and enjoy their stares of incredulity at me suggesting that we study." He noticed that Lavender was staring at him. "Surprised that I know a word like 'incredulity' and even how to use it, right?" He chuckled. "I've been a drag on them for a while. They're going to need support someday, and I am damned well going to be worth something when it comes to them. If they need me at their backs, whether it's facing V-Voldemort or as support against the sheep in the wizarding world, I want to be someone that they know that they can trust. I've had the Creeveys start to teach me what they can about the Muggle world, in case I need it. I need to contact Bill to see what he can help me with."

She was smiling at him. "Ron?" she asked. "Did you know that you're actually kinda sexy when you're focused?"

He raised his eyebrows. "Me? Sexy? I don't think so. And if you're wondering about how I treat women, I suggest that you talk to your room-mate and her sister."

"Yeah," Parvati said. "You and my date treated Padma and I badly. And no one ever grows up, right? If Lavender hadn't made the move first, I'd be trying to jump in your lap myself right now."

Lavender's eyes met Parvati's, and a moment later the dusky beauty nodded, which seemed to make Lavender turn back to face Ron. "Ron? What's your thoughts on Harry being married to Cho and Hermione? More precisely, the fact that the kiss we saw between Hermione and Cho hints at something more than friendship?"

"It's their lives. I don't have a say."

"Very adult of you," Parvati said with a chuckle. "What she's wondering is if the concept of Cho and Hermione . . . *together* . . . disgusts you."

He blushed to rival his hair. "Ah, no," he finally said. "Disgusts is about as far away as I can think of from what I'm actually thinking." At Parvati's amused eyebrow raise, he said. "Sixteen? Male? Likes girls? You already think I'm an uncouth savage, so I'm safe in saying that it's similar to the reaction most guys - me included - have to thinking about you and your sister naked in the same room. You can't possibly hate me more."

"Hard enough to pound a railroad spike into a six inch board with your penis?" Lavender asked in a purr, breaking into laughter when Ron squeaked in response. She looked around the room for a moment and said, "What does the thought of Parvati and me on a bed together, naked and sweaty, do for you? Or more precisely, to you?"

"Look at his robes," Parvati murmured softly. "I think you've got your answer."

He shook his head. "You're an evil woman, Lavender," he finally said with a laugh. "Now *that* was proper revenge for what I did to Padma and you in fourth year, Parvati."

"What was?" Parvati asked.

"Putting *that* image in my head. You know that I'm probably going to add your sister to the image, being the teenager that I am."

"How about if we put it in your bed as well as your head?" Lavender asked.

"I couldn't be that lucky, nor do I deserve to be that lucky, if I'm honest with myself. It's a nice thought, though." He reached down to pick up a school book, but found Parvati placing them nicely in his book bag.

"Let's talk," she said, grabbing one arm.

"Yes, let's," Lavender said, grabbing the other. She steered them to the stairs leading to the boys dormitories.

---

October first came, and with it came the anger of Voldemort. "How did that child manage to do what I have never successfully done," he raged. "He has Albus Dumbledore on the run! And in the process he has managed to remove my spy within the thrice-damned Order of the Phoenix as well! We need to strike, and soon. Perhaps we can hit the Ministry and free Severus, if we can cause a sufficient diversion elsewhere."

"If I may, My Lord?" Lucius Malfoy asked. At Voldemort's nod, he continued. "Hogwarts is too easy and still too obvious a target. My son mentions in letters to me that the Aurors are everywhere on the grounds."

"Are you suggesting where not to attack, or are you showing cowardice, Lucius?" the Dark Lord hissed angrily, pronouncing the elder Malfoy's name as three distinct syllables.

"My apologies, My Lord. I merely wished to show the logic for my suggestion - Diagon Alley. From what my son tells me, everyone seems to think that the Muggle-loving fool has remained in the area awaiting your attempt on the structure. Given a choice, I would never hit there until the Ministry were mine. Were I in your shoes, My Lord!" he added at the end.

"I know that you enjoyed being in power during my absence, Lucius, and that is likely why you made no effort to locate me during my years as a spirit. Do not think that I have forgotten, or that I shall ever forgive the betrayal."

"No, My Lord. I do not deserve such."

"No, you do not. But our goals are the same in this case. Take over the Ministry, and eventually the entire world. Perhaps I will permit you to govern Australia if you please me. Your suggestion of attacking Diagon Alley is a good one, given what you say of the Auror contingent. If we properly stagger the attacks, we can likely have most of the remainder of the Aurors removed from the Ministry before we attack there."

"Yes, My Lord."

"Oh, Lucius?"

"Yes, My Lord?"

"Remind me to cast the Cruciatus on you when we return from the mission, to remind you of your place."

Lucius paled. "Yes, My Lord."

*I do so love doing that to these people. They will actually remind me to do so, under the assumption that I will make it worse if they fail to remind me and I remember it later.* He shook his head. *Sheep. No wonder it's so easy to gain control here. Dumbledore did it through being the vizier, as did Lucius. I prefer a bit more honesty in the process.*

Half an hour later, two teams were ready. Fifty were ready to attack the Alley, while a smaller team of twenty prepared for their assault on the

Ministry. "Today we take our rightful place in the world," Voldemort said as they prepared. "Today, after these assaults, we will own the Ministry, and with it, wizarding Britain." The assembled crew of Death Eaters cheered loudly. "Now go and take your place within the world, where you belong!" Another cheer exploded, and fifty of the assembled men disappeared.

"In fifteen minutes, the rest of us will arrive at the Ministry's Apparation point," Voldemort said. "We gain control of the Ministry before we begin freeing our fellow fighters."

"Yes, My Lord!" they replied in unison.

---

Harry smoothed his robes again. "You look fine," Hermione said.

"Better than fine," Cho added.

"You look good enough to eat," Heidi finished, an evil twinkle in her eyes.

"One-track mind," Hermione said with a laugh.

"Haven't heard you complain yet," Cho replied with a giggle.

"Ladies," Harry said. "Please stop. It would be really bad form to get me to the Ministry just in time to rip your clothes off and have my way with you."

"Why?" Heidi asked in an innocent voice.

"Because they'd put us all in separate cells," he replied. They responded by pouting humorously.

"I know it's necessary," he said after everyone had calmed down, "but I really don't want to go to the Ministry, even if I do supposedly have supporters there."

"I find that I trust Madam Bones," Einar interjected as he entered the room. "She does not let politics get in the way of doing her job. That is a rare find these days."

"And Susan's been raised to be just like her," Hermione said. "I may be jealous of that figure of hers, but I trust her with . . . oh, Harry," she moaned as he walked up behind her and hugged her tightly to him.

"Susan doesn't get me this way, sexy," he said, nibbling her ear. "My sexy little genius does, though."

"We've got to go to the Ministry, Harry," she moaned. "You've got to swear out a . . . why are you doing this to me?"

"Because you're hot and he has trouble keeping his hands off you?" Cho volunteered. "It's an understandable problem, really."

Harry kissed her neck. "No more talk about whether or not some girl has a better figure than you. I'm not married to Susan, or Hannah, or Pansy Parkinson -" he paused for a theatrical shudder, "- I am married to you three."

"I think if it gave her access to us, that Lovegood girl would enjoy being number four," Heidi said.

"That's your choice," Harry said. "If you three think she's worthy, then I'll get to know her better. But nothing more than good friends for now." He sighed. "We keep getting off track. I need to visit the Ministry and swear out the complaints. Let's get going."

They appeared in the Ministry's Floo system and walked over to the bank of elevators, after registering their wands with Eric Munch at the security desk. "Do you ever actually sleep?" Harry asked with some amusement.

"Sleep? What's that?" Munch replied with humour. "Haven't had knowledge of that since I got this job."

"Sorry to hear that, mate," Harry answered him as they made for the lifts.

The doors opened on Level Two and the group stepped off smartly. They were led to Amelia Bones office, where each of them began the process of filing complaints against both Albus Dumbledore and Severus Snape. They'd been there no more than five to seven minutes when alarms went off in the Ministry and an Auror ran in. Simultaneously, Harry grabbed his head.

"Attack in Diagon Alley! Death Eaters! Lots of them!" the Auror yelled.

"Send as many men as you can to -" Madam Bones began.

"No!" Harry yelled. "Aurors, yes, but . . . damn, he's broadcasting but good. Keep more here than you normally would. I think that the Ministry is his second target, if I'm reading him right."

"You have a link to that bastard?" she yelled. "Why wasn't I told?"

Harry stood and barked in her face, "Because it wasn't your damned business!"

"You've a link to our foe. I'm supposed to fight him. It damned well is my business!" She was nearly screaming at him by the end.

"Send Aurors to Diagon Alley, but keep more than normal here," Harry said through clenched teeth. "You can throw me in Azkaban for not being

your secret weapon later."

"This isn't over," she growled as she left the room.

"Oh yes it is," he said softly. " He stood and walked to the door. "Finish those complaints if you want, ladies, but I have no intention of remaining in England for them to be served when this is done. I have the suspicion that today ends the problem with Riddle." He exited the room and walked through the now empty Auror's offices to the hall containing the lifts, Einar and his wives behind him.

About fifteen minutes after the Auror came in screaming about Diagon Alley, Harry winced and stumbled. "They're in the Ministry's Apparation point. Voldie's with them. I'm going to meet him."

"No, Harry!" Hermione said.

"Yes. I'm not going to challenge him to a duel, don't worry. He doesn't fight fair, for one thing. What I will do is use Einar's secret weapon on him and see how he handles that." He opened the door to the stairwell and headed toward the Atrium.

---

It was chaos in the Atrium. The Aurors were pinning down the Death Eaters for a moment, but then Voldemort showed up. He swept his hands apart, sending Aurors flying, and several sickly green bolts flew at the flying defenders. None of the Death Eaters seemed to be as talented with aim as Voldemort was, however.

He strode to Amelia Bones, who was rising to her feet. Gesturing, she slammed against a wall, spread eagle. "Now, my dear Amelia, I believe that it is time to get some information from you. First, what are your defences here at the Ministry?"

"Go to hell," she ground out.

"Lucius? Teach her the error of defying me. I want her alive and conscious enough to answer further questions, however."

"Yes, My Lord," came the voice that Amelia had heard all too many times before.

"Might as well take the mask off, Lucius," she said. "We all know who it is under that mask."

"Unless he orders me to take it off, it remains on, Madam Bones," the elder Malfoy said with an amused tone to his voice. His wand came out of the end of his cane and he lashed at her lazily with it, slicing bloody lines in her arms and face. "Now, would you like to tell him what he wishes to know, or would you rather face the Death of a Thousand Cuts?"

"I'll die before I tell you anything willingly," she growled.

"Quite possibly," was the silky reply. "But not by my hand, unless he orders it." He slashed a few more times, and more gashes appeared in her flesh.

"Now, Amelia," Voldemort said in his silkiest sibilant voice, "I've let Lucius have a little fun with you to make you talk. Would you like to discover what made the Longbottoms insane, or will you talk to me and tell me what I wish to know."

"You're supposedly all-powerful, Riddle -"

His wand jabbed toward her and she screamed for a moment. "DO NOT CALL ME BY THAT NAME!"

"Why not, Tom?" she gasped, followed by another scream as he slashed angrily at her. Flames belched from his wand and burned a line across her body from left shoulder to right hip.

"Kinda what I'd expect from a coward like you," came the voice of Harry Potter from further inside the Ministry. "Is torturing a woman who can't fight back giving you a stiffie, Tommie boy? Or do you keep her restrained because you know that she can kick your scaly worthless ass?"

Voldemort spun. "Potter! You've just earned a slow, painful death for those comments."

"Yeah, yeah, I've heard it before. You failed when I was a baby, you failed my first year, your diary failed second year, and boy did you fail when you got your body back. You didn't even bother trying yourself a few months ago. You tried to get Dumbledore to do the work for you, because you knew that you were too incompetent to do it yourself."

One of the columns in the Atrium exploded as Voldemort fired a bolt of pure energy at it. "Come out and fight me, Potter! I'll strip the flesh from your bones! I'll peel your muscles from your frame! Then I'll let Bellatrix have you! You'll spend months dying!"

There was a loud explosive sound, as if a giant had Apparated into the Ministry, and the back of Bellatrix Lestrange's head disappeared in a spray of blood and brains. "I think you'll have to scoop what's left of her brains back in before she can do anything, but I think that she's down for the count right now, Tom," Harry said.

"Interesting spell you used, Potter," said the dark lord, a startled look on his face for only a moment. "I didn't know that you had it in you to cast such destructive magic. Perhaps you -"

"Oh, spare me," Harry interrupted. "I've used something you don't understand, you half-blooded moron, so you think that you can suddenly convince me to join you? Maybe if you hadn't spent years trying to kill me I'd believe you, but that's a little unlikely now." A moment later, another 'giant Apparation' happened, and another Death Eater looked a bit surprised for the split second he had available as his brains exited through the

suddenly appearing large hole in the back of his skull.

"That's had to hurt," Amelia said as she watched him fall. She noted the small hole in the front of his skull as he fell like a marionette with his strings cut. *Seems as if Potter is using a Muggle firearm.*

She watched with interest as a small red dot appeared on the robes of the man before her. She smirked at Lucius. "Hope your will is made out properly, Lucius," she said.

"You expect to win the day?" he asked incredulously.

"You personally won't," she replied just before the explosion happened again, spraying bits of elder Malfoy across the Death Eaters behind him.

"I have him mast-ARGH!" came a shout from behind one of the columns. A smallish fat man came stumbling out from the column cradling his arm where a hand once was. Potter came out right behind him, kicking the man's knees out from beneath him.

"Oh, you're good," Riddle drawled. "You've killed Bellatrix - which is impressive, by the way - Gibbons, and Lucius, and managed to even undo the help I gave to Pettigrew. But now you're in my territory. I can see you, and if I can see you, I can kill you. AVADA KEDAVRA!" Harry deftly stepped out of the way of the incoming spell and pointed a short dark device in Riddle's direction. "Do expect to be able to harm me with -"

Amelia noticed before the report of the device that there was a red dot right between Riddle's eyes, where the top of his nose would have been, had he a nose. A moment later, there was a small hole in the same spot, and utter silence in the Ministry, save the echo of the gunshot, as the back of Riddle's head exploded outward, and he fell to the ground. No mist or ghost arose from the body, and many of the Death Eaters screamed and clutched their arms, falling painfully to the ground.

Harry merely sheathed the weapon back in its sheath and walked away from the group. "It's safe, girls. You can come out now."

"How did you know?" Cho Chang asked as she came out from behind the corner near the lifts.

"Would any of you actually been willing to sit up there while I was down here being stupidly heroic?"

"Well, no," Hermione Granger replied.

"Well, shall we see how the others fare?" he finally asked as he turned to face Amelia and the others. She had been released from the wall the moment that Voldemort died.

They had gotten Healers into the Ministry at an astonishingly rapid pace, and one of them was putting the finishing touches on Amelia Bones as they approached. "Just make sure you put this cream on until the scars are all gone, and you'll be good as new," the Healer was saying. "And take it easy for the rest of the day, Amelia?"

"You know me too well, Joyce, to ask me to not work. I'll be easy on myself." The Healer nodded, and Amelia Bones turned to face Harry. "It's going to be interesting. You've dealt with the Dark Lord, but in a manner that many are going to complain about."

"They want him back so that he can be fought in a more wizard-y manner, they can resurrect the bastard, but I'm glad he's dead, personally."

"Not a terribly politic thing to say, but certainly an understandable one," she said. "Now we should get back upstairs and finish the complaints you were filing."

"Yes, I think you'd rather not hear what I have to say out in front of reporters and everyone." She narrowed her eyes, but ushered him back toward the lifts.

Once in her office again, she looked at him narrowly. "Now that you're here and alone, what is it that you'd like to say to me?"

"Actually, I thought that you could finish your thoughts about how I should have kept you aware of Voldemort having an in into my head," he said, his arms crossed angrily.

"Yes, let's talk about a valuable resource not being available to the Aurors. Do you know how many attacks could have been stopped if we'd known about that connection?"

"No, and neither do you!" Hermione snapped. "Ignoring the fact that he's his own man despite everything that the wizards have done to make it otherwise, the first time that Riddle had an attack planned and it was thwarted by Harry's knowledge, he'd have stopped using the connection."

"I needed every tool at my command to fight him!" Amelia shouted.

"Well this tool is done," Harry replied. "He's finished being Dumbledore's tool, and he's not about to be yours either." He shook his head. "Amazing how free the wizarding world in Britain is with *other* people's rights. Take the pureblood's toys away, and they'll scream, but yanking from someone else? Go right ahead!" He stared her in the eyes. "I am finishing my schooling at Hogwarts, assuming something else doesn't crop up. From there, it is extremely likely that I will simply leave you to your own devices. I am not part of this world, and it has never made any effort to welcome me and make me part of it. I see no reason why I should bend over backwards to fit in when people like Dumbledore and you both feel that you have the right to decide how I live and die." He spun and stalked from the office, the other three right behind him.

by Rita Skeeter

*The wizarding world sings the praises of Harry James Potter, Defeater of You-Know-Who. And we should party - a madman is finally gone for good.*

*But should we sing the praises of a child who might well take over the mantle of the one he killed?*

*Fact - from his own mouth he has admitted that he had a mental link to the dark lord.*

*Fact - he feels separate from the wizarding world, and blames us for that feeling.*

*Fact - he has been directly involved with the situation that has led to the goblins clamping down on the wizarding money supply.*

*Fact - there was a prophecy that stated that he would win against the old dark lord, but that care should be taken to avoid the next dark lord rising in his place.*

*Think about that. If there was a mental link, then can we help but wonder if perhaps he is merely the newest vessel for You KnowWho. He appears to be waging economic warfare on a people that he states he is not part of, blaming us for that separation.*

*Are we teaching the newest Dark Lord at Hogwarts?*

---

"Is there any reason I should stay?" Harry asked in the common room of the suite he shared with his wives. "I'm looking at the way the school is reacting, and to be honest, with the exception of the Gryffindors, Padma, and Luna, I can't see anyone worthwhile in this school. Remus is giving me looks that are making me nervous, and I'm *really* wishing that the legends about silver being instantly fatal were true right now. The teachers largely seem to be in Dumbledore's court, so I'm getting minimal help from them. Poppy Pomfrey is no longer here, so there really aren't any teachers that I trust here anymore."

"Smart thinking, young master Potter," spoke one of the portraits. "Many a teacher's meeting recently has been taken up with the question of how to rehabilitate Dumbledore's image, and they feel that it will best be done by either discrediting or . . . removing . . . you."

"I take it, from the pause, that the type of removal would involve a very nice, elaborate party in my honour that I wouldn't be there to enjoy? Except maybe as a ghost?"

"Precisely. I would recommend that you find a way out of this school before the calender year is up, young master."

"I believe that I shall," Harry replied. "Thank you for the information. You have likely just saved my life."

"That was my intention," the portrait replied with a smile before leaving the frame. The other portraits took the hint and vacated the room.

"Interesting," he said. "The portraits are on my side, apparently. The teachers, on the other hand, aren't. This really makes my decision. I need to contact your parents and have them contact Einar for me. I want the three of us, as many of the Gryffindors as we can manage, Luna, and Padma out of here and into different schooling. Specifically, I want us out of Hogwarts as soon as possible. England will follow shortly, and I'll let wizarding Britain have the government that they so desperately want. They want a Dark Lord? Let 'em have Dumbledore in charge."

---

The group sat on the balcony enjoying the sun. Harry, Ron, and Neville were enjoying the warmth - more precisely, what it led the girls to wear. Or not wear, as the case might be.

Luna was the most dressed of the ladies, wearing a pair of high-leg bikini bottoms. Heidi was the least dressed, wearing nothing but a smile. At three months pregnant, she was just barely beginning to show the tell-tale bulge. Hermione was enjoying the attention she got from walking by in the smallest bikini bottoms that didn't qualify as a thong.

"Have I told you recently how bloody jealous of you I am, Harry?" Ron asked conversationally. "You have the four hottest girls on the planet running around wearing almost nothing, and you're married to three of them. I think the fourth is just waiting for the others to tell you it's okay to touch her."

"We're just waiting for him to ask," Heidi said with a smirk. "And thank you for your assessment of my appearance."

"I just wish Harry shared." He paused. "Well, to be honest, I wish that you girls could find me half as attractive as you find Harry."

Harry never even sat up or uncovered his eyes as he said. "If she's willing, Heidi would probably be your best best to make love to first. She's already pregnant. Maybe you and Nev could double-team her."

"Harry!" Hermione squeaked. "I don't know whether to be shocked, angry, or -"

"I'd go for horny," Luna said. "That Harry can do something about much easier." She bit her lower lip. "I know that it's a much easier state to stay in than the others."

"With the four of you around, I can vouch for that," Harry said. "Since I have the okay from the others, if you're agreeable."

"I've been agreeable about that with you since I was fourteen," Luna said dreamily. For once, it didn't sound spacey or insane or the beginnings of a prophecy - this was the dreamy voice of an aroused woman about to make love. "I've been that way about Cho since I was eleven."

"My first realisation that I liked the way girls are put together was during third year. There was a point when Hermione was in jeans and she bent over. I thought my zipper was going to explode. Managed to hide it, but I noticed girls from that point on."

"You didn't hide it too well," Hermione said with a grin. "That bulge fuelled a few fantasies of mine. I just thought that you were reacting to Parvati, who happened to be wearing a very thin bra that day and was advertising that it was cold in the castle."

"Huh," Harry said, obviously trying to remember that day. "I don't remember Parvati or Lavender or anyone else nearby."

"Are you dreaming about girls again, little brother?" came a female voice from inside. Kaatje Houghtailing walked out into the sunlight in a minuscule bikini, now making her the most dressed woman on the balcony.

He jabbed a thumb toward Heidi. "Doing a little more than dreaming, Katie," he said with a laugh. That was as far as he got, because the balcony was suddenly under spell fire. The shielding on the house held, but there appeared to be quite a bit of spell work to be repelling. The gnomes would be along soon, but they could be gone by the time that happened.

He looked up into the sky and narrowed his eyes. He hadn't had to use the unusual ability to see magic before, but it looked as if it might be necessary. He saw several riding brooms, who seemed to be leading the ones on the ground.

He slid inside and climbed to the small cupola that their beach house had. He had not understood why Luna had insisted on this specific place, but he was beginning to understand it, and if they came out of this clean, had every intention of kissing her so hard that *Neville's* toes curled.

He squinted again and began firing on the broom riders. Since none of the spells that wizards cast moved at the speed of light, he managed to get off three shots at the four fliers, and a fourth shot was speeding toward the last one by the time that the first three hit.

As the first three fell, he quickly Accio'd them toward the house. He doubted they'd still be alive, since he'd used destructive spells, but it might allow them to know where they'd come from.

Dropping quickly to the ground floor again, he saw that the attackers had apparently managed to make it to the balcony area, and the sight of bare breasts apparently had confused them. There was a pile of injured people on the ground, which was soon joined by three more after three loud thumps. The others had either regrouped or disappeared. Hermione was holding her stomach, and Harry could see blood leaking out from between her fingers.

As had happened when she'd been hurt at the Ministry, his brain shut down. All he could see was her lying on the ground, and he began to hyperventilate.

---

They had finished disarming and tying up the captives when two things happened simultaneously - the gnomes appeared, and a final loud thump happened on the balcony. They looked to see Harry flat on his back.

A quick check proved that he had fainted from hyperventilation, verified by him shooting upright a moment after awakening screaming "HERMIONE!"

"I'm all right, love," she murmured to him. "It wasn't as bad as it looked. I took a ricocheted blow from a Cutting Curse. Enough to cut me, but nothing more."

"Oh, thank Merlin," he said shakily. "All I could see was the Ministry, after Dolohov hit you."

"I'm alive, and after this has been cleared up, I'll let everyone you're willing to allow in to check out whether or not my skin is blemished from the cut and subsequent healing."

"Let's see who these individuals are," the gnome captain said. He rolled several of them over, and each one bore the same insignia on their robes.

Each of the individuals in question was an Auror.

---

"How are we going to deal with them?" Harry asked Einar. "It becomes blatant that the British Ministry has no qualms about attacking foreign soil. We were on the French Mediterranean beach when the attack happened."

"Well, I have every intention of taking this international. I believe that we can get an embargo going, which will allow us to carefully wage war on the goblins as well. By the time this is done, Harry, you will be the wealthiest man on the planet, most likely. As it stands right now, I've been converting your gold into property, several of them within Britain and even wizarding Britain. You currently own about ninety-five percent of Diagon and Knockturn Alleys. You might want to look into fireproofing for Knockturn Alley, by the way. It's a fire trap down there."

"Do I own 93 Diagon Alley?" Einar nodded. Harry turned to Ron.

"The twins are about ready to kill someone, and I mean that seriously," he said. "They've stopped talking to Mum and Dad, effectively disowned my sister, and they're talking to Percy again." At Harry's expressive eyebrows, he added, "Perce has never trusted Dumbles. When it seemed like you were Dumbledore's man, he wanted us to distance ourselves from you. Needless to say, he's not the world's best talker. He'd like to talk to you at some point, to see where you stand on things."

"Works for me. Make him come here. See if he can handle four beautiful women wearing almost nothing."

"Five, if you'd like, brother mine," Kaatje added with a laugh.

"If you honestly don't mind? Feel free. I'm not stupid enough to say no to a pretty girl running around topless, even if she is my adopted sister." He turned back to Einar. "If you work it right, you might even get him here on the Ministry's dime."

---

Percy Weasley walked into the house in the French Mediterranean with a sense of worry. He had never gotten along terribly well with Potter, so he didn't think that this was going to go too well. But he had to make an effort.

He blinked repeatedly as a short Asian girl - *Chang, I think?* - walked toward him wearing a sarong around her waist. That appeared to be all she was wearing, since an astonishing amount of leg was visible as she walked.

"Thank you, Mr Weasley," she said with a smile.

He shook his head and blushed. "My apologies, Lady Black. I should not be staring at another man's wife."

"Why not?" Harry asked. "If she doesn't mind you looking - and I'd say coming to greet you dressed like that is probably a hint that she doesn't - then it's merely good manners to enjoy the beauty that is available."

Percy relaxed very slightly inside. *This might be a test, but at least he's not cold to me, or openly angry. this might be the more dangerous mode, though.*

"Come out onto the balcony, Percy," Harry said. "We can talk there, and you can get as comfortable as you want."

He followed Harry onto the balcony, and quickly readjusted his robes. There were five very attractive women on that balcony, and none wore a brassiere of any sort. He found himself staring at Hermione Granger for a long moment, before blushing furiously.

"She has that effect on men," Harry said with a chuckle.

"I still don't know why," she said. "I still think of myself as a stuffy little bookworm."

"With the best body any of us have ever seen," Ron said from the side. "No offence, Cho."

"None taken. What do you think caused the problems in Harry's fifth year? I wanted her as much as I did him, and I couldn't admit it, even to myself."

Percy sat down on the offered chair, and smiled as he did. This was the smile of someone who was in his element. "Thank you, Mr Potter," he said.

Harry grinned. "You've recognised what we're doing, then?"

"I didn't until I sat down. The chair is comfortable, but not quite comfortable enough. It's a standard trick in the political game. Between that and having five very attractive women here - three of whom you are married to, I believe - all in varying states of undress, it was meant to throw me off balance."

"We can talk," Harry said suddenly. He waved his wand at Percy's chair and it morphed slightly, becoming much more comfortable to sit in. "It's up to the ladies if they want to dress."

"I'm comfortable," Luna said, which was quickly echoed by the others.

"What changed?" Percy asked.

"You explained that you knew what we were doing. If this were a truly adversarial meeting, then you would have stored that information and let it colour your decisions. Instead, you told me that you saw what I was trying, which I took to be a sort of peace offering."

"It was intended as such. May I explain myself to you, to explain why I have changed in my attitudes toward you?" At Harry's nod, he began. "As soon as I entered Hogwarts, I was struck by the forcefulness of the Headmaster's personality, as everyone is. But something unnerved me about him. I wasn't sure what, but he simply did not seem to be . . . I have yet to find a good description for what I mean, but would you understand me if I say that he was *too* right? He always seemed to have the solution, and know what was best." He shrugged. "And then you came to school, and he changed again. You became his focus, and I began to notice how the rules seemed to change for you, or you would be forgiven for things that no one else would be."

Percy sat back in the chair and rubbed a hand across his face. "I admit that I was jealous for a time. But then . . . I've only seen proof of it in the last year, but I had the feeling for a long time that Dumbledore felt that he had this grand vision for the wizarding world and that only he could bring the world to where it needed to be. Very much what You Know Who was like, honestly. He seemed to be turning into a Dark Lord, but a Light one, if that makes sense."

"Evil done for Good's sake is still evil," Harry said. "Being willing to let me die at Voldie's hands was part of that."

Hermione got a faraway look that they all recognised by now, and Harry adjusted his clothes to hide the reaction that it always caused. "'Child, all the service thou hast done to Tash, I account as service done to me.' Then by reasons as my great desire for wisdom and understanding I overcame my fear and questioned the Glorious One, and said: 'Lord, is it then true as the Ape said that thou and Tash are one?' The Lion growled so that the earth shook (but his wrath was not against me) and said: 'It is false. Not because he and I are one, but because we are opposites, I take to me the services that thou hast done to him. For I and he are of such different kinds, that no service that is vile can be done to me, and none which



is not vile can be done to him. Therefore if any man swears to me for the oaths' sake it is by me that he has truly sworn though he know it not and it is I who reward him, and if any man do a cruelty in my name then though he says the name 'Aslan' it is Tash whom he serves and it is by Tash that his deed is accepted." She shook her head. "C.S. Lewis. 'The Last Battle'. Lewis and Aslan would agree with you, Harry."

"Eidetic?" Percy asked absently, and smiled as she nodded. "I thought so. You looked as if you were reading it without the book in front of you." He shook his head. "Back to what I had been saying previously. I developed my problems with you because you seemed to be helping Dumbledore with his plans to subjugate our world into his 'loving' tyranny. The name of Potter carries great weight."

"Except when they want to skewer me in the press."

"Even then, Mr Potter," Percy replied. "It is a way to keep you under their thumb, as they see it. If they have you worried about how the press sees you, then they have control over you."

"Why are you here, though?" Hermione asked.

"Because I work for Dumbledore now. He finally acceded to the public's demand that he take the office of Minister, simply because they wanted to keep you from taking control. He is the only wizard that you are afraid of, apparently."

"Ah, so he's come down on the 'Voldemort took me over' side of things?"

"No, but since you live here in France now, it's a simple thing to say. And he knows that you place yourself under British law once again as soon as you set foot on British soil. He has negated all your marriages, planning for you to marry Ginny if you return."

"I'm the next Dark Lord. Why would he want me sullyng a Light-sided pureblood family like yours? Could it be the fact that he can cheat the money out of your family after I'm Ginny's husband and he's had me killed?"

"I don't know the people who raised me," Percy said sadly. "I never saw them as the type to throw a young man to his death. But conversations with them make it clear that Mother, Father, and Ginevra are all aware - and are unhappy about - that you 'must' die." He sneered. "What disgusts me is that they believe that you should be married to Ginny before that happens, in order to keep the money from reverting over to the Dark, with Draco Malfoy."

"I'm not sure exactly what we can do," Harry replied. "I want to stop Dumbledort, because it's just a matter of time before he starts using some other method of extending his control. He'll use something to extend his life, I'm sure." His tone turned deeply sarcastic. "After all, if he dies, then he must leave the world without his uniquely clear vision of the way that the world must be. It will be a hard decision for him to forego 'the next great adventure', but for the good of the wizarding world, I'm sure he'll make that sacrifice."

Percy was scowling by the end. "I don't see anything other than war, unfortunately."

"I do, but it's a last ditch effort," Harry said. "I rather like life, so martyring myself on that man's altar is the last thing I want to do."

"What do you mean?" Hermione asked him, a dangerous look in her eye.

"Putting myself in a position where I get killed by a known Dumble lackey, without defending myself. This is a last-ditch effort, assuming that I don't simply decide to let England self-destruct. Sorry, Percy, but I'm more interested in living with four incredibly sexy women than I am in fixing yet another problem caused by British wizarding racism and complacency."

"I understand." He paused. "Four? I count five."

"The fifth one is Kaatje Houghtailing, the woman that Dumbledore kidnapped? She's sort of a sister to me." He grinned. "A damned good looking one, but a sister."

"Neville Longbottom seems smitten by her," Percy said with a smile.

"You'll note that she seems to return the interest, too," Harry replied.

He finally looked back to Percy with a serious mien. "So how are you going to work dealing with Dumbledort? Obviously you're here to make some attempt to convince me to return to England, and it's going to fail. This will not make Dumbledore happy. But he needs to explain why we ended up defending ourselves from more than eight Aurors, considering that's how many were unconscious or dead after their attack on us."

"He defends himself by saying that you are a wanted criminal and that you will not return to England willingly, and that the Aurors were brave and loyal fighters for the side of Light. You have been charged with the murders of the three that you say were riding the brooms."

Harry thought for a long moment. "Tell him that I am willing to meet with him, but that he and his entourage must meet me in a foreign country. I would suggest The Netherlands or Switzerland myself - specifically The Hague or Geneva, respectively. We'll likely settle for somewhere in France - likely Paris or maybe Nice."

"Why, Harry?" Hermione asked.

"Well, he's got a problem. He needs me back and marrying the people he is trying to force me together with, so that he can cheat those people out of the money and use it for whatever purposes he has for it. Or maybe he will leave it with them - I don't know. But he needs me to return to England to fulfil several of his plans before he has me killed. He's likely to do that with someone that he can throw to the dogs, in case things go badly."

"Probably his closest advisor," Percy mused. "He repealed some of the werewolf laws and hired Remus on board. That alone brought most of the

werewolves into the fold."

"What I want is the meeting to show off just how crazy he is. I want him to explain how he wants me to marry someone when his own government wants me in prison. He also needs to admit that he wants or wanted me dead."

Percy nodded. "And doing it in a non-British environment should help your case. The attitudes of the past are coming back to bite Britain on the arse, if you'll pardon the language."

Heidi threw out a statement. "Mr Weasley, have you ever been checked for Empathy?"

"There are those who would tell you that I have none," he said, looking at Ron.

"I was angry, okay?" Ron said with a shrug. "I'm sorry I said that."

"Actually, it's quite likely that he began to fight it, if it was telling him things he didn't wish to know," Luna said. "That happens with most seers, to be honest."

"Perhaps," Percy said. "But it makes no difference to the job ahead of us."

"I know one of my demands, though," Harry said as Percy started to rise.

"What might that be?" Percy asked.

"Amelia Bones' head on a pike or a platter. I don't appreciate her sending her Aurors after me any more than I appreciated her telling me that she had a right to use me as a weapon or tool. I'd thought she was different, but she was just another power abuser."

"Actually," Percy said, "she was relieved of duty - cashiered out - when she began to argue against Dumbledore and his attitudes. You must have made an impression, because she publicly blasted him for treating you no better than a weapon or tool to use and throw away." Harry's eyebrows rose at that.

window.parent.CKEDITOR.\_["contentDomReadychapter\_data"]( window );

## **Betrayed**

### **Going Out With a Different Type of Bang**

Shortly after the meeting with Percy, an owl arrived, confirming that the meeting had been set up and was to be held in Nice. So far, Harry's predictions were bang on the nose.

(( ( 0 )))

Harry entered the boardroom in Nice flanked on both sides by a number of people, all but two of them female. The group formed a 'V' with Harry at point. To his left were Hermione, Heidi, Ron, Luna, and Neville. To his right were Cho, Katje, Parvati, Padma, and Lavender.

At the table already were Albus Dumbledore, Remus Lupin, Percy Weasley, Arthur Weasley, and someone nameless, faceless bureaucrat that Harry did not know. Dumbledore looked less than happy, because it was a three sided table, and the third side was being used by Einar Hogunson and his people.

"Is this truly necessary, Harry?" Dumbledore asked before he could even get seated.

"Mr. Potter, if you please." Harry said simply. "Only my close friends and relations are permitted to refer to me as 'Harry'. You are neither, Mr. Dumbledore."

"Show some respect!" Percy complained in his usual uptight manner. "You're speaking to the Minister of Magic!"

"I stand corrected; thank you, Mr. Weasley. I should not allow personal feelings to colour my interactions with your side. Minister Dumbledore, my apologies for not using your title. I would request, however, that you not use my first name, as that implies a level of friendliness that does not, at this time, exist between us."

"I understand, Mr. Potter, and apologise for my own opening familiarity."

"Now that we have the niceties out of the way," Harry said, "I suppose we can get this meeting started. We've a lot to cover."

"Yes," the unknown man said. "Not the least of which is when you'll pay for murdering my Aurors!"

"And you are?" Harry asked.

"Random Folgai, Director of Magical Law Enforcement."

"Well, Mr. Folgai, I assume that you have proof of these alleged 'murders'? As in, you have proof that their deaths were caused by me, with no fault on their part? There was a point when my wives, my guests and I were attacked by people who turned out to be wearing Auror robes and badges, but for all I know, those people were Death Eaters that survived and wished to have me at war with the British Ministry."

"Those were the Aurors I'm talking about, Potter! I-"

"Director Folgai, please." Dumbledore interrupted.

"From our point of view," Harry continued, "we were simply out on the patio of the place when we came under spell fire. Since the assailants didn't identify themselves by using the standard 'We are British Aurors, come out with your wands in plain sight', we had no choice but to assume that we were under attack and offer resistance. And now you tell me that the British Aurors actually invaded another country for some unknown purpose?"

"We were-" Folgai started to say.

"Enough!" Dumbledore bellowed. "Mr. Potter, I would appreciate you not baiting my Chief Auror."

Harry managed to stop his eyes from rolling... although it was a very close thing. "That tone used to work with me back when I was your student, Minister, but I do not accept receipt of your guilt trips anymore. I do not see how stating a basic fact is baiting someone who should be adult enough to know better. The question stands; did Aurors, in fact, enter France on a mission?"

"It isn't as simple as that, Mr. Potter." Dumbledore replied with a chiding tone.

"Actually, the question is a simple one." Einar interjected. "As asked, the question merely asks whether or not the Aurors were in France because of Britain, or on their own time. Will you answer that question?"

Dumbledore scowled. "By the definition you seem to be searching for, it could be said that the Aurors invaded France. They were in France under the direction of the British Ministry of Magic." he finally said.

“Was there any indication given to anyone in France as to their mission?” Einar asked.

“No.” Folgai grumbled.

“So, since no effort was made to contact either myself or anyone in a position of French authority, I can only assume, based on the attack upon myself and my family and friends, that the purpose was at best a kidnapping, and at worst, an assassination,” Harry said.

“We merely wished to speak with you in regard to several issues, such as the fact that you don’t have long before you need to marry for the Black family fortune.” Dumbledore said.

“Ah, yes.” Harry said, reclining slightly in his chair. “Let’s talk about that. We have two betrothal contracts that were properly written, witnessed and enacted. These perfectly valid contracts were *illegally* negated by the British government, at *your* bequest, Minister Dumbledore, when it was discovered that I had decided to choose differently than your wishes.” He met Dumbledore’s eyes. “Let us not forget that I can swear under oath, at the cost of my magic or life, about some of the interesting things that you said to me while you held me captive several months ago. Let us simply say that I do not trust your ‘clarity of vision.’”

“You truly do not understand, Harry.” was the reply, once again in that friendly ‘grandfather’ tone that the man used so well.

“Again, I am ‘Mr. Potter’. You do not have the right to refer to me as ‘Harry’. If I ‘truly do not understand’, explain it to me. Explain to me why your vision meant that I needed to live with relatives who hated me. Explain to me why I was forbidden from visiting Gringotts bank to discuss *my* account. Why was it so bad that I chose my own matches to marry? What *possible* reason could you have for letting me know that you controlled my life and that you intended me to die when I fought Voldemort? Why was it necessary to give me a false prophecy?”

“Did you not hear the prophecy? The *real* one? It states that you are destined to rise as a Dark Lord! I needed to ensure that you could not do that. You just rid us of one... I refuse to allow you to rise in his place!”

Harry nodded thoughtfully. “Curious... especially since the prophecy does not state that *I* will rise in his place, it stated that *a* Dark Lord would rise in his place. From the point of view of an outsider, a point of view I now gleefully hold, it seems like you’ve failed in that self-appointed mission, Minister. There is a Dark Lord in control of Great Britain. You. You control lives, you send people to kidnap and possibly murder those who would ruin your image of Wizarding Britain, and you eradicate laws that you find inconvenient.”

“You dare call such a respected man a Dark Lord?” Remus exploded. “After all he’s done for the Wizarding world?”

Harry’s arched eyebrow was the only response. “Someday, Remus Lupin, you will meet my parents again. I hope that they record for me the blistering they give you.”

Remus’ eyes shot to Dumbledore, who seemed to give the tiniest nod of assent. This moment of non-verbal conversation gave Harry more than enough time to prepare. Remus’ wand came up in a fast, fluid motion, but was cleft in twain by a gnomish axe. The backlash from Remus’ spell being disrupted blew the man back against the wall, quite obviously unconscious.

At this moment, wands and weapons appeared in everyone’s hands, bar Dumbledore. The old man sat in his chair, eyes twinkling as he saw everyone aim at him. He wasn’t concerned. He had no need to be concerned. He was Albus Dumbledore!

“You’ve picked a truly fascinating group of people as your delegation, Minister.” Einar said hotly. “A head Auror who breaks international treaties because someone else asks him to and a member who attempts to attack the very person we are here to speak to. We also have two members of a family who some evidence points at being aware of some of the legal chicanery that has been performed in my foster son’s name.”

“Excuse me?” Arthur asked, sounding confused.

Hogunson turned to Arthur, steepling his fingers together. “You, sir, were one of the parties directly responsible for the marriage contract concerning Mr. Potter and your daughter. This means that you wish said contract to be enforced. I find it curious that when Minister Dumbledore stated that Mr. Potter was leaning towards the Darkness, you have not attempted to *cancel* the marriage contract. Logic suggests that there is more to your desire for the contract to be enforced than merely the love of your daughter.”

Arthur leaned forward slightly. “I trust Albus Dumbledore in all things. He’s stated that a marriage between the Dark ... Harry Potter and Ginevra, a member of an old Light lineage, would bring Harry back from the Darkness to the Light.” He saw Harry scowl. “My apologies... The marriage would bring *Mr. Potter* back.”

Hogunson blinked in shock. “Tell me, Mr. Weasley... when Dumbledore stated that *only* the love of *your* daughter is capable of performing this miracle... you *believed* him?” Einar asked, his voice making his disdain and disbelief more than evident. “Mr. Potter already has the love of several powerful, not to mention ethically outstanding, young women. Do you believe that each of them is incapable of keeping him from ‘the Darkness’?”

“Hermione wasn’t raised in the Wizarding world.” Arthur said. “There are things she has already done to this point that, while they might be commendable, show an amazing lack of foresight or study. Her attempts to free the house elves is an example of this. Minister Dumbledore believes, and I agree with this assessment, that she could accidentally lead him down a path of eventual darkness without ever realizing that she was doing so until far too late.”

“Enough!” Dumbledore barked, his aura becoming evident. “I tire of these trivialities. There is a prophecy and I intend to ensure that the second half of it does not come to pass. Dithering about meaningless issues while Harry builds a power base from which to start a dark reign is not going to be allowed.”

Hermione was the first to notice that the twinkle in Dumbledore’s eyes was just a tiny bit...wrong.

"What is this prophecy that you speak of?" Einar demanded. "You speak as if the first part of it has been fulfilled."

"It has." Harry said. "It was simple; it prophesied that the Dark Lord would fall to the Marked One, but that the people had to be careful to avoid letting another Dark Lord rise in the old one's place."

Einar nodded slowly. "An understandable situation, and I admire your forethought. There's always a vacuum in these sorts of situations. It's possible that one of his lieutenants could rise, or one of the heroes of the light could be turned."

Harry inclined his head at Einar. "Dumbledore is certain that the 'Rising Dark Lord' means me."

"Oh?" Einar asked. "Why so?"

Harry couldn't stop the smirk from claiming his mouth. "Because Albus Dumbledore is *utterly incorruptible*, and has a vision of how the universe should run. He told me so himself the time he locked me in the room off his office. He was very sorry that I had to die for the cause, but it was necessary to prevent a new Dark Lord from rising."

"Now, Harry, why must you lie?" Dumbledore asked, one of his hands slipping under the table.

"Now, *Albus*, why must you use my first name without permission?" Harry shot back. "Would you like me to make a magical oath? I'm willing to stake my life on what I just said. Are you willing to stake your life that I'm lying?"

"I would be interested in that answer, as will everyone else listening in on this, Minister Dumbledore." Einar said into the room. "There are many people I am aware of who are willing to testify to things that they have witnessed. Amelia Bones is one, who reports finding Harry Potter's wand in your possession after Mr. Potter disappeared. This was around the same time that Cho Chang-Potter, Hermione Granger-Potter and Heidi Koenig-Potter made an extremely rapid exit from the school premises, followed within the hour by Healer Poppy Pomfrey, in fear for her life. She can personally testify to you firing spells at her to prevent her from leaving Hogwarts."

Dumbledore shook his head, as though in shock at Hogunson's gullibility. "You see? Already, Harry is turning people from the Light to the Darkness."

"Where's your evidence, Dumbledore?" Einar demanded. "Show me the smallest shred of proof... if you can."

"I have no need." Dumbledore said airily, pulling his hand up, revealing his wand. "I have been alive for a long time, and I have seen three Dark Lords rising... four, if we include Mr. Potter. My experience shows me these things. If I say that Harry's a rising Dark Lord, then that is the truth."

He flourished his wand. "I have already consulted with several experts on what must be done to stop Harry's descent."

"Would all these experts be called 'Albus Dumbledore'?" Harry asked, not bothering to look concerned at the wand in Dumbledore's hand. "Let me see if I can guess... each of your experts, whoever you may be, advised that only the 'love' of Ginny Weasley, a rabid stalker/fan-girl who spent most of the time at Hogwarts staring at me or squeaking, would be able to slow my descent into the 'darkness'. This, coupled with the power of Nymphadora Tonks' love would be able to stop me from sliding down that dark path. Of course, the two of them would have to take over the running of my family finances, since such an evil creature as myself would only use that money to foment rebellion against your 'benevolent' rule. This money would no doubt be distributed to several 'worthy' causes, notably the Weasley family and you, old man."

"Naturally, it'll be necessary to completely bind my magic, making sure I'm not a threat to your 'grand vision'. It'll be for my own good, of course. Can't have me running around making a mess of things, can you? Stage three, after stealing my money and binding my magic will be getting your pet Death Eater to mind-rap me into oblivion, conveniently dying... all in the name of the 'Greater Good', of course."

Dumbledore nodded. "I can see that you understand the necessity of my plans, Harry. Proof that there may still be time for you. I do not believe that your descent can be stopped entirely. Miss Weasley and Miss Tonks will be able to slow the descent, but it is inevitable that you will become Dark... termination is the best thing."

Hermione cleared her throat daintily. "Dumbledore... Harry was being sarcastic. Instead, you've just confirmed what he said; he's not a threat to the world. He's a threat to *you* ... and he must die for that. He managed to save the entire magical brethren from the threat of Voldemort... and allowed an even greater monster to rise in his place."

"That's what I'm trying to prevent!" Dumbledore snapped angrily, glaring at Hermione. "You are just a foolish child. I am Albus Dumbledore!"

"You've lost the plot, old man." Harry said. "We asked you earlier for proof... and instead, you provide us with even more proof of our own. Proof of your ignorance. Your arrogance. You've drawn your wand on foreign nationals while on foreign soil. We could have you arrested for misuse of your authority."

"There are none who'd be foolish enough to try!" Dumbledore snapped. "Random, Arthur, confiscate their wands." He smiled smugly. "Allow me to tell you what will happen now; Miss Granger, Miss Chang and Miss Keonig, I'm going to have you escorted to a holding facility until we can undone whatever damage Mr. Potter has done to you. I believe that you must be under the Imperius curse. As such, I will cancel these silly notions of marriage that you believe you have, and bind Mr. Potter to good, light witches, for the good of everyone. Your individual fortunes will be confiscated in fines for your brutal murder of the Aurors. Mr. Hogunson, you will also be arrested for your links to subversive groups."

Arthur started to move forward, only to find a gnomish spear pointed at him, the tip glowing. Random Folgai was a little dumber, and found himself unconscious as a beam of red shot from another three spears.

"Percival! Assistance!" Albus Dumbledore yelled, glaring hatefully at the gnomes.

"Yes, sir!" he replied, and shot Minister Dumbledore in the back with a Stunner. By the time that Dumbledore was able to shake off the effects, he was in custody of the gnomes, in suppression manacles.

"Your career with the Ministry is over, Mr Weasley!" Dumbledore bellowed.

"You are correct, sir. While I aided in the capture of an ascendant Dark Lord, I have also committed a crime by firing upon an elected official, and when things have settled, I shall place myself under the control of the Aurors. My trial will effectively destroy any chances at further advancement in the Ministry."

"The Ministry was your life, Percy!" Arthur cried out, his own hands clapped in manacles.

Percy managed a weak sneer. "Perhaps... but first and foremost, I am a man of honour, from a family that was traditionally Light. I was naïve before, and ostracised my family, thinking that following Mr Potter was a bad thing. I see now that the truly bad thing was being born to parents who had no scruples. I find myself wondering how Ronald and the twins ever developed the strength of character that they have shown. William and Charles as well."

"You'll never get away with this!" Dumbledore growled. "I can spin the press any way that I need it."

"Oh dear." Cho Chang-Potter said. "Did we forget to mention that?"

"It seems so." Harry said, not bothering to hide his evil grin. "Would you care to share, my love?"

Cho nodded, her smile rising. "It seems to me... that someone... *forgot* to tell the British Minister that this conversation has been going out live across the Wizarding Wireless, and in areas of the world other than Britain, there have even been visuals to go along with it, since other nations have decided not to stagnate, and have the Wizarding equivalent of television in their homes. I suspect *thousands* of witches and wizards are commenting now on what they have seen and heard the British Minister do."

"I suspect that Magical Britain will need to choose a Minister who's willing to work with other nations." Hermione said. "The one currently in custody will be facing gnomish and French justice."

Harry stepped forward, clearing his throat. "Although we've been at loggerheads recently, I think I'd trust someone like Amelia Bones. Listen to her when it comes to choosing a Minister. If she suggests someone, I'd think long and hard about them. She wants what's best for Britain."

Einar chuckled. "You're aware that you just gave a speech that suggests that she'd make an excellent Minister?"

He slapped his forehead with his palm. "I hope they're still broadcasting. Sorry about that, Madam Bones."

---

As expected, Albus Dumbledore went down *hard* in the world courts. It was realised that he was insane, but he also still understood the difference between right and wrong, so he was declared sane enough to stand trial. He continued his attempts to use his powerful past and historical Light siding to prove that he knew what he was doing when he controlled Harry's life. That proof didn't serve him in good stead.

Both Dumbledore and Snape went on trial, and Snape proved once again that he knew how to protect the most important person in his life, because he detailed every single meeting and conversation that he and Dumbledore had ever had. In the long run, for his help he was sentenced to Azkaban for fifty years, rather than the Dementor's Kiss that Albus Dumbledore received.

Five years under the tender mercies of Azkaban's guards had him wishing he'd shared Albus' fate.

Minerva McGonagall was so horrified at what she had done in Albus' name, thinking that he had the right of things, that she quit teaching at Hogwarts and largely became a hermit. After a *long* time, Harry forgave her, but only after she admitted that she, like so many others, had fallen prey to the mythos of Albus Dumbledore. She never again taught a student, however.

The international incident that destroyed Dumbledore's mythos also destroyed the traditional line between Dark and Light. Such a historically Light wizard turning so Dark made many wonder why the line existed in the first place. Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry rapidly became a much friendlier place, with several of the older professors retiring in shame, or making powerful magical vows to change.

The heaviest price paid, however, was for the goblins of Gringotts. They had chosen their side in the Wizarding conflict... and had chosen badly. Dumbledore's trial smoothly led to the truth of their involvement, causing them to close their doors. Unfortunately, this resulted in the destruction of Gringotts, as the witches and wizards of Britain literally pulled down the building. British goblins were driven so far underground that it was unlikely that they would be seen again before another thousand years had passed. They had gold and gems and jewellery, but they were worthless to them now, since goblins would most likely be killed on sight.

Madam Pomfrey retired from Hogwarts after Harry and the others had finished school. She had simply had enough. The combined Potter-Black families snapped her up quickly as their personal Healer, since they trusted no-one else in the beginning. Having no living relations other than her sister, she was 'adopted' into the family of her choice, choosing Black, as a further way to help lighten the image of the traditionally Dark family. Her sister followed suit, and Aunts Poppy and Maggie were favourites amongst all the children born to Harry's extended family.

Neville and Katje married on his twentieth birthday, and proceeded to increase the Longbottom family size in a rather Weasley manner. Interestingly, this seemed to be the impetus for the healing that Frank and Alice Longbottom finally underwent. Neville and Katje visited quite often, and when her belly began to swell for the first time, it was noted that Frank and Alice seemed to connect more with the world. By the time that she entered St. Mungo's to give birth, Alice had been allowed to explore the hospital somewhat, albeit with an escort. As Neville walked to meet her

carrying their son, Franklin Longbottom, she focused completely and smiled, taking young Franklin from her son. "My grandson..." she had cooed to everyone's surprise, since she had not spoken sanely in years. Even during her walks, she had merely hummed. Frank's recovery followed soon after. The prospect of new happy memories had managed to percolate through the pain-filled fog and healed them.

Remus was eventually able to repair a small amount of the relationship with Harry, but they would never be close in Harry's lifetime, given his open betrayal. He had attempted suicide, but Harry had prevented it and soundly berated him. Not a single physical blow was struck, because the verbal blows were far more effective. He was called a coward and liar, and told that escaping his punishment was what people expected. What truly struck him was the comment that upon his death, he'd meet James, Lily, and Sirius once more. He lived another thirty years, but when death came to him, he was begging for more time. The shame of what he'd done was overwhelming, leaving him as a man too afraid to live but too scared to die. On that day, Harry was there, shaking his head in sorrow at what might have been.

Tonks disappeared from his life. She had been an avid supporter of Dumbledore, and this had destroyed any chances she had at the Ministry once Amelia Bones took office. No trace of her was ever found again. It was believed that she ran to the United States to start a new life. There were hints that her disappearance may have been more sinister, however. None of the hints were ever proven to be more than simply hints.

Harry's wives topped out at three, since Luna insisted on being 'the other woman'. The fact that she was 'the other woman' for Harry *and* his wives was unimportant; she felt that it added spice to their lives. Privately, she admitted that given the way she was raised, being married would have lessened her enjoyment of her family, while 'being naughty' and committing technical adultery with the four of them somehow gave her rather explosive orgasms. It was an open secret that she was also sleeping with Ron, Parvati, and Lavender. Harry pretended to look the other way, but the recordings that 'somehow' showed up occasionally made them all quite aware of the relationship. Her relationship with Neville was oddly strengthened by this as well.

Cho, of all people, startled the group by being something of an exhibitionist. Once she was secure in the fact that she was truly loved, her real personality came out, leading to some very interesting situations. The Aurors developed a tendency to 'not notice' Harry and his wives any longer, since they had long ago been embarrassed by trying to arrest Cho for some of her more interesting attempts at getting pregnant. By interesting, the average wizard and witch came to understand the word 'interesting' to mean 'entertainingly public'. Obfuscation charms were Harry's friend in regard to keep his own specific measurements private, but Cho had no such cares.

Her public escapades dropped sharply on the day that her parents called Harry and requested a meeting, where they apologised profusely for their actions, admitting that they had trusted Albus Dumbledore too much. It took a lot of time and discussion, notably between Cho's father and Harry. The stigma of paying back the betrayer's price would not leave their family line for the next ten generations. Since the normal resolution of this would be for Harry to kill the patriarch and claim the rest of the family as spoils, Harry considered it remarkable generosity on his part when he punched Cho's father and told him to get out. The relationship between daughter and parents only healed when they made it clear that they considered all Harry's children their grandchildren, and asked Cho if she would consent to becoming a member of the family once more.

The public escapades did not end, however – they merely lessened. She had discovered that the fear of being caught gave her powerful orgasms, as did being watched during lovemaking. In that regard, Luna turned into her most enthusiastic lover.

Heidi, already an astute manager of money, was taken under the wing of Einar, turning her into an economic powerhouse on her own. She managed to turn Harry's impressive holdings into one of the greatest fortunes on the planet, although only those who had a true understanding of where the money went ever figured that out.

Hermione became a spell researcher after finally finishing Hogwarts. The problems with Dumbledore's interference led to Harry, Cho, and herself all being forced to finish their schooling a year behind when they would have, and Hermione took full advantage of this. The group of them could be found in the library at most hours, and it was only Madam Pince who kept Hermione from moving in. Her and Harry's tendency to get her slightly aroused and then leave, promising the rest if she came back to their quarters. She helped Harry fulfil Cho's fantasy about the Quidditch showers as well in February of that year, and they all treated that as the conception date of Harry's first child with Cho. Hermione's first child was conceived in the library, during the week of their NEWTs, when the library was full of students. It was in full view of the students, but Harry's spell work was impeccable by this point, and none ever noticed. Hermione, however, kept that memory in reserve, in case she was ever called upon to fight the Dementors again. It was the most powerful positive memory she possessed.

The Weasleys were roundly humiliated in the press for their part in Harry's life, and Harry was forced to step forward in order to point out that Ron and the twins had been behind him all the time, and that Charlie and Bill had never made a move against him. He supported Percy as well. "Largely, if you'll note, it's the parents and the youngest child. All the rest seem to have turned into worthwhile adults. I know I trust Ron at my back. I trust the twins back there, but I'll be checking for a 'Kick Me' sign too."

Magical Britain, thanks to their sheep-style nature, received international censure from the rest of the world. It became more and more apparent to them as time went on that, although they were British and 'British was best', the rest of the world was rather important too. With Amelia Bones steering the ship of state, they found themselves being dragged out of the Victorian Era and hurtling towards the twentieth century. It would take time, but they were finally learning.

----

Harry lay on his back on the beach, watching his children laugh, splash and shout at each other. Hermione leaned on his left, while Cho was on his right, Heidi gently smoothing his brow. Luna was happily hiding under a blanket, using her mouth as only she could. The fact that all four were utterly without clothing was icing on the cake for Harry, since all four had kept their figures through multiple children.

"What are you thinking, Harry?" Hermione asked, noting the slightly absent look on his face. "Assuming you *can* think, that is," she said dreamily, having experienced Luna's talents more than once.

"I was just thinking about how this... *all* of this started out because of Betrayal. It Started One Summer, and now I have a huge, beautiful family. It just

reminds me of something I read in a book once.”

“Oh?”

“Yeah... ‘All was well’.”