Harry Potter and the Cracked Reservoir
Chapter 1: Unexpected Rituals

Summary: Can Harry control his vast new well of power before it consumes him? H/G, R/Hr

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Thank you to my Beta; Donalddeutsch

The story in multiple parts:

Chapter 1: Unexpected Rituals

He seemed to be floating over a clearing in a dense forest. He looked down on a circle of robed figures facing a central silent person sitting on a raised throne, black cloak covering his face and features. The evil radiating from his being was nearly tangible. The air pulsed with the beat of the chants of the cloaked circle, differing words floating around the clearing making any individual's chant impossible to discern. As one they raised a hand clutching their individual wands. Suddenly the disparate din broke into one sudden incantation spoken simultaneously by the assembled robed attendees.

Harry shot bolt upright from his deep sleep, the dream just a fleeting memory. As he struggled to grasp a hold of the dream he felt the first licks of an inner fire. Suddenly he was left breathless as the fire swelled to fill his entire being.

What the…burns…what's happening to me? Harry screamed in his mind.

Harry's eyes watered with the searing heat of the fire within. He couldn't think. No thoughts, just pain.

Harry struggled to his desk, clutching a piece of parchment from the center drawer. He quickly scratched out a note to the only person that he could think could help him.

Professor Dumbledore,

Dreamed about a ritual. Seemed like Voldemort. Woke up with a fire consuming me inside. Help.

Harry

Hedwig swooped to his shoulder and stuck out her leg, obviously glad to help her agitated master. Harry rolled the letter and attached it to her leg and bade her a speedy trip. She flew out of his open window and soared to the north.

Harry watched for the seconds that he could see her under the full moon before returning to bed, but not sleep.

Some things are to be cherished, especially in hard times. When you are facing the revival of the most evil and, unfortunately, influential dark wizard in your long life, the simplest things must be cherished.

Sleep, the Headmaster of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry mused, is certainly something to be cherished. Disappointedly, this musing took place seconds after being awoken by a heavy tapping on his chamber window. Postal owls are trained to wait until morning, at breakfast time, to deliver mail. This is to promote the uninterrupted sleep of the mail recipients, but apparently this particular post owl did not value the Professor's sleep as much as Dumbledore did himself.

Professor Dumbledore, always a stately, proper man, actually grumbled for a few moments after being awoken, as he swung his legs to the side of his comfortable bed. He had been dreaming of reading in a chair, in front of the fire with a nice comfortable pair of socks. Not a complex or lofty dream, but one of simple pleasures.

The professor opened the window to his chambers to find a white snowy owl flying through and roosting on the footboard of his bed, just feet away. He was alarmed at the identity and appearance of the owl. This was the snowy owl of one of his students, a very special Mister Harry Potter, and the owl seemed to be distressed and eager for the Professor to relieve him of his burden. Most persons, even with a magical background, would be hopeless in discerning the emotional state of an owl, but after a good century and a half of life, Albus Dumbledore had seen owls in many states and this owl radiated concern.

The Professor untied the note and opened it to read its contents. The Professor's concern at the owl's appearance shifted from the owl to the sender of the message. His student, a very special one indeed, was in trouble. The letter, although short, allowed for some guesses to be made, but what could not be mistaken were the marks burned into the thick parchment where his student had rested his fingers. In Albus's experience, only uncontrolled raw magical energy would make marks such as he was seeing.
Most wizards and witches have never experienced the fire burning within their being that came uncontained great magical power, but the Headmaster was not most people. He recognized the symptoms for what it may indeed be, the burns on the paper having given more clue than the short note itself. This could be very dangerous for his pupil and those around without proper intervention.

Professor Dumbledore made immediate plans to retrieve Harry Potter from the residence of his Aunt and Uncle on Privet Drive in Little Winging. With any luck, this would be enough to save the boy yet.

Harry lay exhausted.
The past seven hours had been spent restlessly on the bed, his insides attempting to be barbequed by the explosion of power that an attempted ritual by his number one enemy. For a fifteen-year-old boy, Harry Potter had a long list of enemies, each believing to be his arch nemesis.

Surely his classmate Draco Malfoy believed to be his arch, years of snide remarks, tossed insults and almost duels to their relationship.

Draco’s own father had been against Harry less than a month ago and blamed Harry for landing him in the wizarding prison, Azkaban.

Bellatrix Lestrange certainly was not a fan of his goodness. He had personally fought her in the ministry of magic and she had failed to eradicate him, earning her the displeasure and surely punishment at the hands of her master.

Most in the wizarding world would agree with Tom Marvolo Riddle, a.k.a. Lord Voldemort, that he was indeed Harry Potter’s number one Arch Nemesis.

In Harry’s mind at the moment, however, they would all be wrong. Currently the greatest enemy to Harry’s survival seemed to be his own magical power. It felt like it was eating him up from the inside.

Harry lay on his back with no thought of actually achieving sleep. He was using all of his will to just to keep his eyes from watering and his muscles from cramping.

With the rise of the sun, Harry decided to move around and see if he could take his mind off of his current problem. He grabbed come clean clothes and decided to shower. Maybe a cold one would douse the flames. Of course, when had Harry been so lucky?

By seven in the morning the rest of the house was up and making their way down the stairs. Harry decided that food at this point would be a good thing to distract him. If this malady was to be the end of him, it would not be due to starvation. He could not count on the food at the Dursleys being plentiful, but it would sustain him.

In his years at his aunt and uncle’s house, Harry had never been well fed. They always fed him enough to keep him alive, if not happy. This only served to highlight his dislike of the summer holiday. His time at school was not always objectively the best of times, but he always would rather be there then at his ‘home’.

Harry heard the doorbell and waited for the inevitable follow-up scream.

“Boy!” came the familiar scream of Uncle Vernon. “Get the door!”

Harry left his room and went down the stairs to open the door and see what the day had in store. He opened the door and gasped.

“Professor Dumbledore!” Harry exclaimed in greeting. “That was fast. How did you get my letter that quickly?”

“You have a remarkable owl,” the Headmaster answered. “I would have been here faster, but I had to make some preparations. I have made some inquiries with the usual sources and we should have some results this evening.”

“Yes, sir,” Harry said. “What is your plan?”

“First let me see if my suspicions are correct,” said the Headmaster.

Harry stood before him in the entry of the suburban house as Professor Dumbledore looked him over through his half moon glasses, tutting and mumbling here and there.

“Well, it would seem that my suspicions are correct, but still, we must wait for Poppy’s expert ministrations to confirm my thoughts and to enlighten us as to the root cause. Now, I believe that it is time for you to leave home and come back to Hogwarts,” Dumbledore said. “The solution to this problem of yours will require you to perform magic eventually this summer, whatever the cause, and the Ministry has not granted an exception to the restriction of underage magic for you.”

“You asked Minister Fudge to allow me to do magic outside of school?” Harry inquired, surprised.

“Yes,” Dumbledore explained, “I believed after last year that it would be the best thing to allow you to defend yourself, but alas, it has not yet been allowed…no matter, you are still allowed to perform magic while at Hogwarts, so there we will go.”

“Now, sir?” Harry asked, his exhaustion showing through clearly.

“Yes,” the Headmaster said, “go get ready to leave.”
He left up the stairs to get his trunk and supplies and returned in minutes with his trunk broom and owl cage, a remarkable pace for someone as wrung through as Harry.

"Hedwig hasn't returned yet, sir," Harry said, indicating his owl's empty cage.

"I sent her to the owlery for a rest," the Headmaster said, "and she will still be there when we arrive."

"How are we traveling, sir?" Harry asked, not relishing the idea of another portkey.

"Fawkes will take you to my office and I will follow with your luggage in a moment," Professor Dumbledore said with a small smile through his beard.

"And my aunt and uncle, sir?" Harry asked.

"Allow me to say goodbye to them for you," the kindly Grandfather figure offered.

"Okay," Harry agreed. "Where is Fawkes, sir?"

"Fawkes, I need your help please," Professor Dumbledore made his request to the open air.

"Very helpful birds, phoenixes," Dumbledore said to Harry's bewildered look. "When they are attached to you, they will always help when asked," the Professor said.

Just then a fireball appeared above Dumbledore's shoulder and burned itself out leaving a stunning red and gold bird standing on his shoulder. He reached inside of his robes and withdrew a bright red pellet the size of the end of your finger.

"Phoenix treats. Made from cinnamon, jalapenos and wasabi," the Headmaster said, answering the unasked question on Harry's face. "Fawkes just loves them." And he obviously did, as the phoenix ate the offered treat quickly and then nipped his companion's finger in appreciation, a behavior that Harry was well familiar with from Hedwig.

"Fawkes, please take Harry here to my office," the Professor requested.

The great bird flew to Harry's shoulder with a trill and clasped hard to the flesh through his clothes and burst the entire pair into a quick inferno of flames that disappeared just as fast.

"Boy! Who was it already? Come in here!" came a booming voice from down the hall.

"Oh, my. I guess that this is my next duty."

The headmaster sighed and went to this last task.
Harry Potter and the Cracked Reservoir
Chapter 2: Control Effort

Special thanks to my Beta's; Donalddeutsch, Kat Armstrong and Sparky40sw.

Harry found himself on his feet in his headmaster's office that he was so familiar with. His fire tolerable with the promise of a solution, he looked around the room and noticed that his tirade of the month before hadn't left any evidence, at least none in the physical sense. Emotionally the pain, anger and guilt of that night had given way to remorse and more guilt. Harry had not made the best choices in his short life. Due to a distinct lack of cooperation from the adults to allow him to be informed of things that directly concerned him, he had little desire to run to adults when confronted with problems and this gave him an independent streak without the years of wisdom to guide his decisions.

Over the years of his education in the wizarding world he had tried at the crucial points to seek out responsible adults. When he was eleven, he sought Professor Dumbledore to report the breach of security around the philosopher's stone and was told that it was perfectly safe by Professor McGonagall, without any consideration. He later found that, indeed, all but the final safeguard had been breached.

When he was twelve he sought out the professor charged with the retrieval of his best friend's sister, Ginny, from the Chamber of Secrets only to find him busy fleeing his position and then have the Professor attempt to erase Harry and Ron's memories. He was only saved from it due to a backfire from Ron's broken wand.

In the third year of his magical education he learned that the adults in his life had been lying to him, keeping him in the dark as to the details of his parent's death. Harry learned that the better life that he could have had growing up was dashed when his Godfather was thrown in prison, without a trial, for the betrayal of his parents and the murder of twelve muggles and one wizard. That wizard that so many thought a martyr, killed by Sirius Black, was, himself, revealed to be the Potter family's betrayer and the man who framed his once friend for a life sentence in Azkaban. Harry's chances at a loving home were snatched from his grasp when once again adults were more willing to believe a convoluted story than the testimony of mere children when Harry and his friends tried to tell the Minister of Magic that Sirius was innocent. His Godfather was on the run and he was sent back to the abusive home that he grew up in.

The age of fourteen found him betrayed by a man that they all trusted. No adult and very few of his peers believed that Harry didn't put his name in for a historically deadly competition in which he was years younger than the rest of the competitors. Harry fought and succeeded only to find a plot to raise his greatest enemy. After a miraculous escape he was told by the Minister of Magic himself that Harry was lying about the traumatic events he had just experienced. He was just seeking attention. Few adults understood how he hated attention and fame.

In his fifth year he was vilified and tortured by the very adults that he was meant to trust. At the crucial time, no adults seemed to be in a school full of children to help him to make the decision that ultimately cost his Godfather's life. Professor Dumbledore was nowhere to be found, Professor McGonagall was in St. Mungo's, and Professor Snape was decidedly silent in Harry's aid. He allowed Harry to be carted off into the Forbidden Forest by the very person who had been vilifying and torturing him. Only after their disastrous fight at the Ministry did Harry learn the most important bit of information, specific to him, that had been concealed for these many years. If only he had been informed he could have made better decisions and he would have known that his Godfather was in no danger.

These events were the culmination of causes for Harry's reluctance to placing his fate and future in the hands of adults. He could still manage to trust people, just not the blind trust of a child to its mentors that he once had for some of the professors at Hogwarts.

Harry was pulled from his thoughts with the arrival of his Headmaster by way of portkey.

"Professor, you're back," Harry said.

"Yes, hello Harry," the Professor greeted. "How are you feeling?"

Harry pondered this question for a second.

"First, sir," Harry said, "I am sorry for destroying your office at the end of last term. I had no right to do that."

"Quite alright, Harry," Professor Dumbledore said. "There was nothing that could not be repaired and it was as much as I should have expected and maybe less than I may have deserved. I hope that you are able to better control your temper this year."

"I'll try," Harry promised. "I was wondering if my connection to Voldemort could have been influencing my mood last year?"

"That is a possibility, but I do doubt it," the Professor said. "You did have some cause for anger last year and I have seen many your age that have to learn to cope with their changing bodies and hormones that have had the same problem as you. They all grew out of it, well most anyway. On that note, how do you feel?"

"Well, it feels better now than it did last night when I first woke," Harry said. "It's a burning sensation from the inside. I feel like I'll lose control and be destroyed. Just burn up from the inside. It's so intense that I was nearly in tears last night. What's happening to me?"

"Well, this is just my guess," Dumbledore said, "but I would say that your symptoms sound like you are very powerful indeed. More powerful than any of us have previously guessed. The ritual that you witnessed must have unlocked your power in a rather violent fashion."
Violent, sir?” Harry asked, worried after the fact.

“Not physically violent,” Dumbledore reassured him, “But I may be getting ahead of myself here. Why don’t we go see Madame Pomfrey and let the professional see what is truly wrong.” The Headmaster guided Harry from the office, cautious of any sudden flare-ups of magical energy coming from the boy.

“Well, now,” Madame Pomfrey said to the out of season student. “Let’s see what these tests show us.”

She had him lie on the nearest hospital bed and remain still while she performed test after test on his magical core. Her years of practice gave her the experience to give the perfect twist or flick necessary to diagnose something as picky as a wizard’s magic core.

“Hmm, well Mr. Potter,” she said, “It would seem that Professor Dumbledore is correct in his suspicions. Your magical core has been damaged.”

Harry stalled for time while he thought about what she could mean by scooting himself into a more comfortable sitting position before addressing the matron.

“I don’t understand,” Harry said finally. “What does that mean?”

“Imagine that your body has a sealed clay pot within it,” she painted him a mental picture. “Inside the clay pot is a person’s reserve of magical energy. Now imagine a spigot on that pot to let the contents out. If a person has a spigot, they possibly can be magical. No spigot, no witch or wizard. Nearly all of the time, if there is no spigot the magical reserve inside is very small, but occasionally a muggle will be born with a good sized magical reserve but no way out. These would be the muggles with a heightened sense of perception or some sort of natural enhancement. Now on a witch or wizard, with their spigot, there is only a little bit that can come out at any one time. Do you understand?”

“Yes,” Harry said. “So magic is normally controlled by the size of the spigot to let the magic out?”

“Yes,” she said. “A person’s magic power is determined by the size of the spigot and their magical endurance, how long they last until they tire magically, is determined by how large their reserve is. So, in this example the spigot is the person’s natural regulation of their magical core. In your case, however, your clay pot has been damaged by whatever He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named did to you last night. Most likely a failed power increasing ritual, by my guess,” she said. “What has happened to you is as if your spigot was broken off and the clay pot cracked. Your magical reservoir has no more natural regulation and the hole to let the magic out is larger and more unpredictable as it stands now, Mr. Potter.”

“What will this mean to me,” worried Harry.

“Harry,” Professor Dumbledore said. “What it means is you no longer have a natural barrier to control the flow of magic from your core and the containment for your reservoir, the clay pot in Madame Pomfrey’s description, is damaged, making it more fragile than it was before. If you were to try to cast magic at this moment, most likely it would result in a horribly overpowered spell. A simple accio could make the object travel fast enough to do considerable harm.”

“What will I have to do?” Harry asked in a soft worried tone. “Can I be fixed?”

“With training, yes,” the Professor said, “you will be able to contain your magic by sheer force of will. With discipline you will be able to vary the amount of magic that you make available for any spell. If, however, you are unable to gain control of this magic, it could have dire consequences to both yourself and those around you,” Dumbledore said, to Harry’s distress. “Training is necessary. Lets start with a quick containment method that will last you until we can start training fully tomorrow.”

He guided Harry through a simple meditation technique that, while not adequate for the long term, would help Harry to contain his magic reserves for the night. Harry learned to focus and to breath with controlled rhythm.

“Good, Harry,” the Professor said. “Now, do you feel that this will hold you until tomorrow?”

“I believe so,” Harry said. “Will I be able to perform magic with control?”

“Yes, I must say that you will need to perform magic,” Dumbledore said. “The source within you is so great that quitting will never be an option. The magic in yourself will find an outlet and it would be much better if you were the one to choose the outlet. As for control, that will require practice.”

As he was listening to the Headmaster, a wave of exhaustion swept over him, his head dipping against his wishes.

“Ah, Harry,” the Headmaster continued. “Maybe you should be getting to bed.”

Harry yawned broadly.

“Sure, professor,” Harry said.

“Hold on, Mr. Potter,” Madame Pomfrey said as she bustled from her potions cupboard. “Once you get to sleep, your magic should be more reflexively in control, but getting to sleep may be more difficult. Here is a dose of Dreamless Sleep Potion for tonight,” she gave him a small vial of potion. “And after tonight we will see what treatment you require.”

Harry nodded as he took the vial of potion.

“I will allow you to sleep in your Gryffindor dorm if you would prefer, Mr. Potter,” she offered to his immediate nod. “But I expect you to contact me immediately if you experience discomfort or pain.” Harry nodded again to the matron’s acceptance.
"One more thing," Harry said to the Professor as he got up and put his shirt back on. "Will the ministry grant the request for me to use magic? As much as I like it here, I would hate to think that I'm stuck within these grounds for the next thirteen plus months until I'm a legal adult."

"I will see what I can do," he assured Harry as they left the infirmary. "It would not do to be telling the minister or others about the biggest reason for this. Maybe we can convince him solely on the danger surrounding you for the last year and into the future."

"Thank you pro…" Harry said as a yawn interrupted his words.

"Quite alright," Dumbledore said. "Now make good use of that potion that Madame Pomfrey has given you and get some sleep."

Harry waved goodnight as he proceeded ahead to his familiar dorm and comfortable bed.

"Good morning, professor," Harry greeted Dumbledore the next morning at breakfast.

"Ah, Harry. How did you sleep?" the Headmaster asked.

"Great!" Harry exclaimed. "I think that that's the longest that I've slept outside the hospital wing."

"Good. Eat up," the Professor commanded. "It will be important to keep your energy up to maintain control. I would guess that the dismal way that your relatives have kept you did not help when the ritual assaulted you. Are they still rationing what you and your cousin eat?"

"Me more than my cousin, Professor," Harry said around a bite of eggs before he swallowed, "but I usually manage. My friends were always good for sending me packages when the Dursley's decided that everyone needed to diet when the whale that is my cousin needed to. You know that his school sent a note last year that said that he would have to lose weight because they did not make clothes big enough for him?"

"No," Dumbledore laughed, "he must be quite the monolith of a young man."

"To say the least," Harry said.

Harry was enjoying the new camaraderie between himself and his headmaster. He was glad that they had come to an understanding about their last year. Their relationship was less than good friends but more that a headmaster and student. The fire within his chest still burned him but he did not want to ruin this easy mood too quickly.

"How will you train me to control this?" Harry asked after the plates were cleared of the morning meal.

"First we need to establish full control through advanced meditation," the Professor said, "and then we can move on to using your magic."

"How will using my magic work?" Harry asked. "I have never had to think too greatly on how to use the magic itself, just how to do the spell."

"You will start with low power spells, just like you learned in the first year," the Professor said. "I'll try to find enough spells that you have not learned before to keep you from getting too bored. This may be a good chance to expand your spell knowledge. We need to make sure to split your experience between hexes, charms and transfiguration. We'll keep your education balanced."

"Can I see my friends this summer?" Harry asked.

The Headmaster contemplated this for a second. "Well, as you are already away from the Dursley's house," the Headmaster said, "I do not see anything to stop you from joining your friends after you have full control of your powers."

"Are you going to train me this summer?" asked a hopeful Harry. He could feel his destiny looming over his head and knew that he needed a lot of training to succeed.

"For the first week or so, yes," the Headmaster said with regret.

"After that, sir?" Harry asked, his voice full of worry.

"After that," the Professor said, "you will be able to progress on your own, I imagine. You will need to select your own spells and as you will be quite stuck here, I would recommend discovering new spells in the library."

"Can I have access to the restricted section?" Harry tried.

"For what reason, Harry?" the Professor asked cautiously.

"Well, over the years and all of the special projects that my friends and I have gone through," Harry said, leveling a look at his headmaster so that the man understood what projects he was speaking of, "we have gone through a lot of the unrestricted library. That and I don't think that I will win a duel against the Deatheaters and Riddle solely out of the books in the regular section."

With a hope that Harry would not find a liking for the darker content of the restricted section, the Headmaster said, "I see no problem with that Harry, if you will agree to one thing."

"What, Sir?" Harry asked in a willing manner.
"I would like to have a regular meeting with you," the Professor said, "where you will keep me aware of all of the spells and other things that you are learning or attempting to learn from that section."

"Of course, sir," Harry said. "Thanks for trusting me."

"I would recommend that you not spread knowledge of this privilege to others," the Professor said, "as I am doing this to allow you to prepare yourself for your responsibilities."

"Can Ron and Hermione come with me?" Harry asked.

"They may, Harry," the Professor said. "But let's wait until school starts for that."

"Okay," Harry agreed. "Can we start on containing this power now? It's distracting."

"Yes Harry, let's start," Dumbledore said.

Harry Potter and Professor Albus Dumbledore spent the next two days figuring out how to contain Harry's magic. This was a process of discovery as there was no documentation to tell either professor or student how to proceed, as very few wizards have ever had this problem.

With just the two days of experimentation and practice they managed to invent a method of containment. Harry had to mentally contain his power source as if in a jar or the clay pot metaphor that Madame Pomfrey had referred to. He could then vary the power he presented for a spell to have complete control. Well, in theory he could. With containment and several days of practice, Harry could start to relearn to cast spells.
"Ok, levitation, right…WINGARDIUM LEVIOSA!" swish and flick.

Nothing happened. The seashell Harry was trying to levitate just remained resolute.

“What happened, Professor?” he asked with concern.

“You need to open up your magic reserve to let some out,” the Professor said. “Try the exercises that we have been practicing and let the magic free.”

“Ok,” Harry prepared, “WINGARDIUM LEVIOSA!” swish and flick.

The seashell that Harry had his wand pointed at suddenly disappeared followed by a loud bang.

“Where did it go?” Harry asked, looking around the floor.

The professor looked around, amused. He looked up at the ceiling of the great hall and the twinkle in his eye burned with a new vigor.

“Harry,” the Professor said with ill-concealed mirth in his voice, “perhaps you should try that again with a little less power. Look up.”

Harry looked at the ceiling and snickered. In the ceiling above their heads there was a perfect impression of a seashell in the stone. It was noticeable if you looked at the right spot on the charmed ceiling. It looked as if a hole had been shattered through the daytime sky, leaving a bit of the stone ceiling to show through.

“Oh, sorry about the ceiling, sir,” Harry apologized.

“That is quite alright, Harry,” the Professor said, still looking at the mark in the stone ceiling. “This will give you a chance to research and perform some advanced charms this summer. I am afraid that you will need to do most of the research yourself as in my time here the charm on the ceiling has not needed to be repaired. I will help you perform the charm if you wish.”

“Thanks,” Harry said, feeling it a proper punishment. “What do you want me to do about the actual ceiling? I seem to have damaged it.”

“I think I like it,” the Professor said. “It adds the little bit of flare. Besides, only you and I will be aware of its presence.”

As promised, Harry learned fast. After just a week at Hogwarts over the summer, Harry was able to control his magic level with spells through third year. Tomorrow would find him starting independent study as Professor Dumbledore had Order business to attend to, as well as a few days of his official duties at the Wizengamot. This just left one bombshell for the professor to drop.

“Harry,” the Professor said, “I think that this is the appropriate time to let you know about your godfather’s will.”

Harry swallowed, “His will?”

“Yes,” the Professor confirmed, “Sirius named me executor of his will. Are you ready to hear his wishes?”

Harry felt the grief and guilt rise and visibly calmed himself. He took a deep breath and let it out slowly.

“Okay,” Harry gathered himself, “I think that we should just get it over with.”

“Well, I think it is best if you know what my instructions from him are as executor,” the Professor started. “He told me to make sure that the beneficiaries accepted their inheritance in honor of him. Harry, he would consider it an honor if you and his other heirs will take what he has to give with grace.”

Harry sniffled. The entire business of his godfather’s death had been pushed out of his mind for the past week and a half with the searing pain of uncontrolled power. Harry once again steeled himself for the news.

“I’ll try, sir,” Harry stated.

“Very well, Harry,” Professor Dumbledore said. “His wishes are as follows. He has given the Weasley Family ten thousand galleons per child and fifty thousand galleons for Arthur and Molly.”

“That was nice of him,” Harry said. “I hope that they accept it.”

“They already have,” the Professor said. “I was instructed to not take no for an answer and they respected the wishes of a deceased man.”
Although I don’t think that you will notice much change around the Burrow, as they already live the life that they enjoy.”

“I think you’re right, professor,” Harry said with a smile.

The Professor continued, “Next he has given each of the order members five thousand galleons to, and I quote, ‘aid them in removing that bastard Riddle and his Death Munchers from this earth.’”

“That sounds like Sirius,” Harry said with a sad smile.

“Next, he gave Remus Lupin one-hundred thousand galleons and Number 12 Grimmauld Place.”

“Sir, off on a tangent here,” Harry interrupted, “I have never heard what an average salary for a wizard is. How long can Remus’s money last him?”

“Well, the average wizard, say a defense teacher,” the Professor said, as if the salary was the foremost on his mind, “makes about five thousand galleons a year. That sum that you gave the twins was quite enough to get a good business started for them. Remus will be able to live without trouble for the rest of his life without any monetary concerns.”

“I am glad, sir,” Harry affirmed. “Being a werewolf is hard on him. He is too honorable to take the kind of underhanded jobs that can be found as a werewolf and I have heard that little else is available.”

“Lastly,” Dumbledore said, looking over his glasses in a serious manner, “he has left you the remainder of his inheritance. He has left you more than ten million galleons that the Black family has built up over the generations.”

“Oh, no sir, I can’t…” Harry started to object.

“You can and you will,” Dumbledore said quite firmly. “It has already been done. Don’t forget my instructions. You have to take it to honor him.”

“Oh,” Harry conceded. “Well, if…okay, sir. I guess that you are right.”

“He had instructions for you as well,” the Professor said. “He made me memorize what he wanted for you, more than the money, but what he wants done with it. He wants you to spend a good portion of the money. As he instructed, you should spend the first million before you leave school. He knew that you would need a house once you finished Hogwarts and that could help with that. He also wants you to quote ‘burn all of those elephant clothes that those no good muggles gave you.’ I quite agree with him here. It would amaze you how good it can make you feel to have some nice clothes in your wardrobe. I might suggest asking Miss Ginevra Weasley to assist you in this. You might enjoy it more.”

Harry blushed and sputtered a bit. He was unsure of when it happened, but he had started to think of the fiery redhead at random times and finding himself attracted.

“Harry,” the Professor counseled, “just don’t forget that being a Gryffindor is about more than facing down Voldemort, you have to be brave in front of females as well.”

Harry blushed more at this statement. How did the professor know about his attraction to Ginny? Damned intuitive Headmaster.

“The last of the instructions in the will are that you need to…it’s a bit hard to say,” the Professor pondered, “…oh yes, ‘find the fun’ and your inheritance will help. He said, and I quote again, ‘leave your mark on that school’. Now as headmaster I must interject here, don’t hurt my school,” he pleaded, “I am rather fond of it, just let me know if you are going to do anything permanent to it.”

“Of course, sir,” Harry said. “I have no idea what he would have me do to leave my mark.”

“That is the clincher,” the Professor said. “Do what you want to do. These instructions are just suggestions and are not binding. The money is yours to do with as you please.”

Harry thought about this. He would like to do something to the school to honor the Marauders, something that the pranksters would be proud of. Whatever it is should be a surprise.

“Ok, sir. I’ll think about it,” Harry said.

“The library has more books than spell books and potion manuals,” the Professor said in a fit of careless helpfulness. “Avail yourself of the other sections and I believe that you may learn a bit about the castle itself that should help you.”

“Sir?” Harry asked quizzically, “why, as headmaster, are you giving me suggestions to help me modify your school?”

“Harry, I trust you,” the Headmaster said. “This school gets to be a giant rut without some changes over the years, and maybe by pointing you in the right direction you may improve the school instead of performing a portal charm on all of the dungeon lavatories, as your father and Serius spent a better portion of their sixth year doing.”

“Ok, I will try not to disappoint you, sir,” Harry said with a chuckle.

“I am sure you will do a good job,” the Headmaster said. “And Harry, while we are on the subject of inheritance, you should know that the sum in your current vault that your parents set aside for you was just your schooling allowance.”

“It was?” Harry asked, amazed. “I barely scratched it.”
Yes, well you seem to be a very conservative spender,” the Headmaster assessed. “Perhaps you can loosen the purse strings and enjoy your money, because, when you become a legal adult, you will receive notification of the opening of the Potter vault, which will be a considerable event indeed. I don’t have any idea how much money you have but the Potters were a very old and moneyed family.”

“I hope that that turns out to be a good thing,” Harry said with a bit of anxiety and anticipation.

Over the next week, Harry spent a good amount of time in the library learning new spells and practicing the control of his magic. He happened across a tome of useful spells that were not taught to students for some reason. It was full of cleaning spells and that packing spell that Tonks used last year. There was a spell that would leave you perfectly clean after flooing, a definite necessity. Harry found the spell used by Molly Weasley to clean the dishes and the spells to cook food and chop and peel vegetables.

“These may not be manly spells, but if I need to live on my own, I'll rather need them,” he said to himself.

Harry finally found the tome in the restricted section that dealt with the construction of the castle and all of its enchantments. He quickly looked up the part about the great hall and found that the spell used would not repair a fault, only cast a complete ceiling. Harry was unsure if he were ready for a whole ceiling so he tabled that for a later consideration.

Harry would need a place to practice the spell if he were to do it. The ceiling of the Great hall was too precious to get wrong.

Another section of the book had the spells to carve statues, to change rock from one type to another, to polish stone and to create rooms in the stone bedrock that the castle was standing on. This gave Harry an idea. The Chamber of Secrets must have been carved out of solid stone just as this described. So that would be how the Chamber was made without the rest of the founders finding out about it. Harry needed a place to practice controlling his full power and the Chamber would be perfect for keeping the rest of the students safe and ignorant of his work.

“Hello, Harry,” Dumbledore greeted him.

“Hello, Professor,” Harry greeted him. “How was your week?”

“It has been enlightening,” the Professor said. “The order has been trying to assess what Riddle has been doing since the department of mysteries. So far all we can discover is that he is lying low. Apparently sitting in your mind for even as little time as he did had a detrimental effect on him. He has not been active outside of his lair. I found this piece of intelligence very heartening for our cause. It would seem that Voldemort would think twice before attempting to cohabitate in your mind. Certainly good news if our assumptions are correct.”

“Could he be waiting to see if the Minister will start to ignore his return again?” Harry asked. “Lulling the ministry into a sense of comfort?”

“Excellent point,” the Headmaster said, “perhaps it is a combination of the two. Now, what have you been working on in the past week?”

“Well, I learned a good collection of household spells and other things that I will need to know when I buy my own house,” Harry said.

The Headmaster responded with a poignant, “Pardon me if I find it a little bit sad that a fifteen year old young man has to think about buying his first house and living on his own.”

“Well, this has me in a better mood than the thought of having to return to the abuse of the Dursleys,” Harry said, a bit more upbeat than his companion. “Living alone will be a lot more pleasant than living with people that hate every fiber of your being.”

“I can understand that,” the Headmaster said. “Have you contemplated where you would like to live?”

“I wanted to see what is available near the Weasleys,” Harry said. “They are the closest thing to a feeling of family that I have had. Maybe I can find some empty land next to theirs.”

“That would be a good thing,” Dumbledore said. “With your help we could expand the wards around their house to include a neighboring property.”

“That is a good idea,” Harry said. “I wanted to learn warding and other protection spells. It doesn't seem to be on the curriculum for Hogwarts.”

“That would be a good thing for you to learn. It may not be in the curriculum but it is in the library if you wish to look it up. I will help you with technique on any warding spell that you find. I will also teach you the specific spells that are in use on the Weasleys when the time comes if you are able to secure a house next to them. But also consider, your father's family was, as I said, well off. I am not familiar with all of the Potter properties, but you may want to check into them as well.”

“Thank you, Professor,” Harry said. “I'll have to think about that.”

“In your time in the library, did you learn anything else or find any other interesting text?” the Professor asked.

“Yeah,” Harry said, “I found a book in the Restricted Section that detailed how they built the castle and all of the spells and so forth that the founders and headmasters have used to maintain and protect this castle.”

“Oh, yes, I know that book,” the Headmaster said. “Very informative. Please make sure that it is always returned to the same shelf that you found it at. It has no title and cannot be marked. One of the methods that the founders used to protect its secrets.”

“Why does it have to be so protected?” Harry asked.
"The secrets about this castle’s construction can also be the secret to its destruction either by accident or on purpose," the Headmaster informed him. “Be careful with what you use it for. It can be dangerous.”

“Speaking of which,” Harry segued. “It reminded me about the chamber of secrets and it must have been how it was constructed without anyone knowing. I want to go back down there and see what shape it is in after these years.”

“That sounds acceptable,” the Headmaster said. “What do you think that you want to do with it?”

“When school resumes,” Harry said, “I’m going to need a place to practice my power without anyone knowing and without endangering others. That seemed like the best place to use.”

“It could indeed be a good place,” the Headmaster agreed. “I have a feeling that it was already magically strengthened when Salazar built it. It is admirable that you would consider using it after the horror of what you went through the last time that you entered it.”

“I have faced the horrors of near death in so many places around this school that if I shied away from every place that was traumatic for me, I would have to move to America,” Harry joked. “With how my luck goes, I would end up being a Gypsy, slowly moving across the world with fewer and fewer places available to live.”

“Quite true,” the Headmaster said, appreciating the levity of the statement.
Chapter 4: Chamber Cleansing

Thank you to my Beta’s Sparky40sw, Donalddeutsch and Kat Armstrong.

The next day Harry grabbed his broom and proceeded to Moaning Myrtle’s bathroom.

"Hello, Myrtle. You here?" he asked the apparently empty room.

Harry heard a gurgle from one of the bath stalls. With a sudden splash the ghost in question shot from the stall.

"Harry, is that you?" she asked in a softer than normal voice. "What are you doing here? The summer is not over is it?"

"No, it’s still summer," Harry assured her. "I’m staying here for training and practice some of this summer. I’m going down into the Chamber of Secrets, so if I’m not back in eight hours, would you go to the headmaster’s office and let him or one of the former headmasters know that I am missing down there?" Harry asked of her. "I’ll leave the entrance open for him."

"Sure, Harry," she agreed sweetly. "Don’t forget my offer from last time."

"I remember, Myrtle and thanks," Harry said with a suppressed shudder.

Harry found the tap with the snake and concentrated on it enough to say ‘open’ in parseltongue. Unlike last time, it worked on the first attempt. The entrance to the tunnel opened revealing a slick tube leading into the darkness. Harry mounted his broom and flattened himself to the wooden shaft in preparation for his journey down the dirty tube.

After some consideration, Harry removed his wand from his pocket and cast a cleaning spell at the entrance of the tube.

‘Oh boy, this is going to take a lot of scourify-ing,’ Harry moaned to himself.

Harry sped down the length of twisting and turning tube firing spells left and right. He emerged from the end after more that thirty spells leaving behind a clean stone tunnel and less than clean shoulders where he didn’t get a spell off quite fast enough.

Harry entered the cave from the drain junction that the entrance tube had emptied into. Quickly he came across the cave-in caused be his second year Defense Against the Dark Arts professor. There was a small hole that had been cleared to allow himself and Ginny Weasley to exit the Chamber but no other means for him to travel though. The opening was suitable for a twelve year old but too small for a fifteen year old, even one as small as Harry.

Harry levitated rock after rock to allow enough space for him to get through comfortably but that still left plenty of mess still partially blocking the cave. It was a long walk before he came to the open door that was adorned with snake locks. He had left the door open in his haste to leave the Chamber and get medical attention for himself and Ginny more than three years ago and nothing since had corrected the error. That evening was difficult and not one that he would eagerly repeat, but he knew that he would have many more in front of him in his life that would make that one pale in comparison.

Inside he once again found a large chamber lined with many statues of serpents with a statue of one of the Hogwarts founders. Salazar Slytherin’s visage morphed from the respectable founder into the twisted, evil man that could plot the deaths of muggle born witches and wizards. ‘What could have made this man change so?’ Harry mused that prejudice would do nothing positive for your beauty.

In front of the statue lay the very instrument that caused much of the pain of Harry’s second year, the carcass of the basilisk. Over the three years past, the carcass had dried into a mass of bone, dried flesh and skin sixty feet long. Surely this could have some use.

Standing there, Harry could feel the thousand years of evil that permeated this space. It seemed to suck all of the happiness from him and replace it with a sense of darkness.

Instinctively, Harry cast about for happy thoughts, wanting to stave off the encroaching darkness.

Ok, Happy thought. Flying, no. First day at Hogwarts, good but no. Godfather, no, too sullied of a thought. Family, no not quite right, too general. Suddenly Harry had his thought, Ginny. He didn’t know why thinking of her made him happy, but it worked.

Harry felt his magical core, and, as the Professor had taught him, he opened his protections to increase his magic from the normal slow trickle that he left open normally to a good stream of power, sufficient for a good patronus. The Professor had told him that the only thing remaining was to practice opening and closing his core as he practiced magic. If he practiced, it would become second nature to put the correct amount of power behind a spell.

Harry raised his wand and he bellowed, "EXPECTO PATRONUM."

The white stag erupted from the tip of his wand and pushed back the negative feelings. It stood at Harry’s side cleansing the space around him. Feeling the weight lift, he directed the patronus to move about the Chamber to spread the effect.
Harry spent that afternoon in the library, as had become a habit of his, although more suited to his bushy haired friend than himself. His topics of research included the uses of a Basilisk and how to cleanse dark magic from an area. He believed, on the second topic, that he already had a good method, but didn’t want to rule out a better way without checking first. The patronus seemed to already have made progress on the dark feelings of the Chamber, but would take many more sessions to make a lasting change.

Harry quickly found a potions reference book for ingredients. The entry that he needed read:

**Basilisk Powder:** A very rare ingredient used to strengthen many potions and may be used in developing curatives for various maladies. Its usefulness is not fully known due to the rarity of its source. A Basilisk snake has not been hatched in the past five hundred years.

That was what Harry needed. He found it curious that it seemed to be useful as the powder of the whole, rather than individual pieces as separate ingredients, but shrugged it off as his lack of common potions knowledge. There must be an explanation, but it was one that he could do without. Now all he needed was to find how you turn a Basilisk into Basilisk Powder. At the end of the day he gave up on that question. He would ask Dumbledore if he had any more books that may tell about the manufacture of the powder.

The question of how to cleanse the Chamber of dark magic was answered easily the next morning. It seems that the method that he started with was indeed the best method. He planned to visit the Chamber in the mornings and afternoons and spend as long as he could using his patronus to just hang out and leach away the dark feelings. While he was down there he started to see the possibilities. He looked at the statues of the serpents and decided that he needed to check the castle book and see how you transfigure or morph the solid rock as it said you could so that he could change most of the serpents into the other house mascots. He wanted to end up with this not being such a prejudiced area. The rock of the ceiling and walls was the same mat finish stone the castle sat upon, the entire chamber carved from its depths. He could use the spells from the book to change it to polished quartz or marble with a bit of practice.

Harry looked at the ceiling and noticed that it was nothing to write home about. He wanted something to improve the room, to make it a place that he could spend time in without feeling hemmed in. He decided that this would be the ceiling that he would practice the sky illusion charm he needed in order to repair the great hall.

At the end of the Chamber was the most problematic part of the venture. The evil sculpture of Salazar Slytherin stood in a dominating position with the mouth open revealing the passage for the serpent to its inner lair. Harry would eventually have to do something to the statue and the snake den beyond, but those plans would have to wait for another day as his patronus was reaching the end of its life after thirty minutes. Harry noticed the dimming of the room and the darkness creeping back, both into the room and as a weight on his soul. He sighed. He would be continuing with the treatments for a long time.

“Professor Dumbledore, who will be the new defense teacher?” Harry asked.

“I have not finished securing the services of one yet,” the Headmaster said as he ate his chops. “I have a couple of options available but I do not want to say anything until I have approached one of them with success.”

“Well, anything would be better than the one last year,” Harry said. “I would rather face Tom then have that woman be in any power over me ever again.”

“Well,” Dumbledore said, “I am afraid that you may just have to put your money where your mouth is on that one.”

“Professor, I’m surprised,” Harry said after hearing the Headmaster so casual. “Hermione and I always have to explain muggle saying to Ron. It’s surprising that you know that one.”

“I try to pay attention to the students, both purebloods and muggle born,” the Professor said. “I find it both entertaining and educational. At any rate, Madame Bones of the Magical Law Enforcement Department will be by tomorrow evening to interview you to see if you may have a waiver to practice magic. Minister Fudge has decided that she will make that decision.”

“I’m shocked,” Harry said. “Seems like the minister would want to have that power himself.”

“He thinks,” the Headmaster said with a smirk through his beard, “that if he rejected your application he would find himself in political trouble.”

“Maybe,” Harry said, “course he knows that I would use magic if it were necessary anyway. I won’t be attacked without defending myself for anything.”

“As it should be,” the Professor agreed. “If you are granted this waiver, I would expect you to use it responsibly just as all witches and wizards are expected to. Harry, you have to realize that at the same time your fame will make some feel that you should have more liberties, while others believe you to be already taking such privileges that others do not receive and you have not earned or require. This is something that you require, Harry.”

“Yeah, I’ve already got a taste of public opinions. I don’t think that I like either side of that part of fame. Of course,” Harry joked, waving his fork, “I don’t think that I have seen the positive side of fame. I am sure that there are good things about it, for so many to want it, but I haven’t seen any.”

Dumbledore chuckled, “I am sure that at least a few of your colleagues in school would like the idea of being able to romance as many women as they desire. I think that you would find a great many women would let you exercise your fame.”

“Professor!” Harry exclaimed, aghast. “I can’t believe that you would suggest that. I would never want that. It…a relationship should be more.”
The professor laughed, “I am very pleased that you feel that way. I was, of course, testing you. I had no doubt that you would react as such. With all of the trials that you have gone through, I am sure that you will choose love over temporary pleasure each time.”

“Love,” Harry said quietly, “that’s a hard one, Professor.”

“How?” the Professor asked.

“What is it?” Harry asked philosophically. “I think that I’ll have to figure what love is before I can be in it.”

Dumbledore chuckled again, “I think that you will find that you have the order wrong. You will certainly be in love before you figure out what is happening to you. But don’t worry, you have enough love in your heart to meet any challenge, including ‘until death does us part.’”

“Marriage, yeah,” Harry scoffed, “I think that I’m a millennia away from that ever happening. With my life expectancy, that is a far away dream. I have to survive school first. Heck, I don’t even have any prospects yet.”

“And yet your fame and your inheritance will both make this easier and harder all at once,” the Professor said, ignoring Harry’s assessment of his life expectancy. “There will be many more vying for your attention and that will make it easier to find someone and harder to find the right one.”

“But how will they know about my inheritance?” Harry asked, concerned.

“Well, both the Blacks and the Potters are very powerful, famous families,” the Professor explained. “The monies that you have received in your vault at the beginning of your schooling is only a portion of their total fortune and I am afraid that the content of wills are public knowledge.”

“Does that mean that they will know that I inherited all of that money?” Harry asked.

“They will when they have a reason to look,” the Professor said. “I do not believe that they have sunk so low as to trawl the recorder’s archive of the ministry as of yet.”

“Can you get me what they publish when they do?” Harry requested. “I would like to know what they’re saying about me. I hate it when everyone knows more about me than I do.”

“I will,” the Headmaster said. “I hope that you have not bothered to read any of your biographies. All of them that I have browsed have not been in the least bit accurate.”

“Nope, and no such plans,” Harry said. “Professor, do you know any methods of discovering a person’s loyalty. I think that it may be important in the future.”

“Quite correct, but I have not learned any fool proof methods as yet. There are a few magical arts, but they are rather obscure and difficult.”

“Oh, well, I’ll see what I can find,” Harry said. “Oh, and professor, you might want to know, I have made progress in the Chamber. When I went down there I discovered a feeling of darkness, so I cast a patronus and it seems, on repetition, that this is a good method of removing the darkness. I plan to repeat casting it to remove the darkness and make it usable.”

“What have you thought of doing with the Chamber?”

“I thought that it would be a good chance to practice some transfiguration and charms,” Harry said. “I needed some place to practice the ceiling illusion charm before I try it in the great hall.”

“That sounds like a good idea, Harry,” the Professor said.

“One question, Professor,” Harry said. “How do you turn a basilisk into basilisk powder?”

The Professor considered the answer for a second before he recalled some of his time on alchemy with Nicholas. “Just like all other powders, you have to simply grind it up, but as it needs to be thoroughly mixed so I would recommend a grinding spell.”

“What’s the spell?” Harry asked, moving on to his treacle tart.

“I don’t know one off the top of my head, but I think that I know the book to use,” Dumbledore said. “Find ‘Mining Methods and Magics’ in the restricted section, It should help you. I assume that the basilisk is still down there and that is why you are asking.”

“Yeah,” Harry said with relish, “can you imagine Snape’s face when you give him that much basilisk powder?”

“First, it is Professor Snape and second, you are going to the effort, so I think that you should be the one to give it to him.”

“I guess,” Harry said, not particularly liking the idea of any one-on-one time with the Potions Professor. “I wonder what he will do with it.”

“Well, as an ingredient it has never been around in sufficient quantity to discover its full properties. It is known to be powerful enough to only be needed in pinches,” the Professor said.

“Wow!” Harry said, his desert forgotten.

“In fact,” the Professor said, “just a small quantity would suit our potions master for a long time to come. It may be best to keep the bulk in your own control.”
Chapter 5: Auras and Waivers

Thanks to my Beta’s Donalddeutsch and Kat Armstrong.

Harry spent the next day, when he was not doing the patronus treatment on the Chamber, in the library looking for a method of checking a person’s loyalty. It was exhausting, but it was more important to Harry than anything else at the moment. He wanted it immediately, as a member of the ministry would be coming that night and he wanted to be prepared to either trust or mistrust her before he could decide what to tell her. He could be sure that Dumbledore trusted her but he had also trusted Professors Quirrell, Lockhart and Moody. Those experiences had not been pleasant and he wanted to be as careful as he could.

He had an idea that one’s aura could tell enough for trust or lack there of but he had no aura reading experience and he needed to be sure. He searched the restricted section for many hours before finding the first book on aura reading. He started at the restricted section because he knew that the art was not a standard part of the curriculum. Deep in the back of the section he found an old book on aura reading and he sat straight down to learn as much as possible in the short time before his dinner and the meeting with the head of Magical Law Enforcement. What he was in for was an extended period of blinding headaches for his troubles.

On entering the great hall that evening, he was greeted by Professor Dumbledore and Madame Pomfrey, who were the only residents of the castle at this time of year. At the entrance Harry stopped and tried the techniques that he had been reading about and practicing cold for the last four hours. If he kept this up, he would be investing in a headache potions company. He couldn’t receive much in the way of results without someone else to look at. He could only see a small part of his own aura if he tried to read himself and so he wasn’t able to get much result out of the attempt. Because of this, Harry carried the tome down with him to dinner to make sure that he was interpreting their auras correctly.

Harry saw a bright white outer aura of power around Professor Dumbledore with stripe like patches of red, blue, green and yellow over a faint hue of gold. His aura left an impression with more red then any of the other primary color patches. Madame Pomfrey had a beautiful aura of gold and blue with small patches of red and yellow without the white outer aura or the green patches of the Professor.

Harry greeted the two elders as he turned off his aura perception after just moments. He sat at the table with them and opened the tome to his bookmark to try to interpret what he had seen. He saw that the gold underlining spoke of a good person while the primary colors were just as the school houses, green for cunning, blue for intelligence, yellow for loyalty and red for courage. The outer white corona spoke of great power for white magic. Neither of these persons had been in contact with others so he was not able to see any traces of the auras of others on them or any magic used on them. Harry picked up his goblet of cold pumpkin juice in hopes of quelling his aching head. It was obvious to him that Aura Reading would not be an everyday occurrence for him.

"Well, Harry, are you ready for the conversation with Madame Bones?" asked the Headmaster.

"I think so, Professor," said Harry.

"Good, after greetings I will not be able to guide you in the conversation at all," the Professor advised. "It will be an interview and she will not brook word or sign from anyone in the room but you. If you need to think about your answers, please do and be absolutely truthful in all of your answers. She will know if you are being untruthful."

"Of course, sir," Harry acknowledged.

Madame Bones arrived promptly at seven that evening to find two chairs in front of the Headmaster’s desk with the headmaster himself occupying the chair behind the desk and Harry Potter occupying the chair farthest from the fireplace from which she has just stepped.

"Hello Madame Bones," the Professor said while getting up to greet his guest.

"Hello Professor Dumbledore," Madame Bones greeted the octogenarian. "Hello Mister Potter."

Harry stood and considered the woman for a second before responding. He started the aura reading and shut it off moments later, after he had got an impression of her aura. Just in that time, an ache threatened soundly.

"Hello Madame," Harry said after a pause. "Sorry for the delay. I needed to know if I could trust you."

She looked at the Professor with the question in her eyes and he just shrugged.

"And I assume that since you did not just go running you have decided to trust me," she said.

"Yes, I do," Harry said with confidence.
“Out of curiosity, how did you come to this conclusion?” she asked, “not that I mind.”

“I have recently started to study the reading of auras,” Harry said matter-of-factly. “I noticed that you have a good, loyal, trustworthy aura however there is a black and green orb circling you that is the impression of a person that is cunning and dark.”

“I would guess that some person that you come in contact with on a daily basis is a dark wizard or witch,” offered Professor Dumbledore.

“That’s hardly a surprise,” she said. “I find that there are many that are not as good as they seem. Now, I appreciate you being here, Professor Dumbledore, but I must ask that you not communicate while I interview Mister Potter here.”

“Yes, of course Madame,” the Professor said politely, sitting down at the opposite side of the desk from his pupil and the Head of Magical Law Enforcement.

Madame Bones flicked her wand to turn the two chairs turned to face one another.

“Now, Mister Potter, please have a seat and we will begin,” she instructed.

Harry silently acquiesced and sat in the seat that he was in before she arrived.

“Please, Madame Bones, call me Harry,” he offered. “I know your niece and she thinks a lot of you.”

“Ok, Harry, why is it that you wish to have a waiver to perform magic before you are of legal age?” she asked.

“Two fold, Madame,” Harry answered in an ordered manner, “I want to protect myself from any attacks. Last summer, as you know, dementors were sent to attack me. They were sent to force me to do as I did, and use magic causing the trial. Madame Umbridge was quite unhappy that I was not expelled. I think that she held it against me.”

“Why would Madame Umbridge care if you are found innocent?” she inquired.

“She ordered the dementors to Little Winging,” Harry said. “My cousin has not been the same since. He was nearly kissed. I think that the experience with dementors is easier to handle when you can see the beasts. Something to blame it on, really.”

Dumbledore wore a blank mask so as not to interfere. He was, however, hearing what was happening and filing it later for action.

“Ok,” she temporized, “and do you think that she is going to send any others to attack you?”

“No,” Harry admitted without embarrassment, “but with Tom found out, he will attack me whenever he thinks that I am vulnerable. If I am able to freely defend myself he will not find me as easy of a target. I have had to face Voldemort himself or one of his inner circle each and every year of my magical education and who knows what c… erm rubbish will happen this year.”

Madame Bones did not flinch in the least at the mention of Voldemort’s name. She agreed with Harry’s premise, “Yes, I can see that. What is the other reason?”

“Well,” Harry said, “due to his killing curse against me, he and I have a certain connection. I can tell when he is near and when he is feeling extreme emotions, happy, angry etcetera. Well, a few weeks ago he attempted a ritual that would boost his power if it could be, however he was not boosted at all.” Harry could see Dumbledore in the corner of his eye, but could tell no reaction from the Professor, even though he had express to Harry that this should not be revealed. Harry continued, “Instead I woke up after witnessing the ritual in a dream to find my own power core boosted and burning me from the inside. Luckily, Professor Dumbledore was able to teach me to contain the magic before it could cause harm. The problem is that this forces me to practice magic every day as a relief. As I do not want to spend the next year within these walls, I want to be able to perform magic and visit my friends.”

“Fascinating,” she said, “I agree with the need to use magic and I approve the waiver. Now, you must understand that this does not let you perform magic just anywhere. The other laws that restrict adult’s use of magic apply to you as well. Secrecy laws are paramount to the continuation of this world.”

“Of course, Madame,” Harry said.

Dumbledore sat silently and celebrated in his eyes, which were dancing with twinkles.

“Now, Harry,” Madame Bones said, “we can move on to other matters that have come to light from the last year.”

“Okay,” Harry said warily

“Please let me see your right hand, Harry,” she ordered politely.

Professor Dumbledore was perplexed. He did not know of anything that had happened to Harry that could be evidenced by looking at his hand.

Harry held out his hand palm up hoping to save himself the attention.

“Mister Potter,” Madame Bones said sternly. “I think that you understand what I am referring to and know that that is not what I meant.”

Harry turned his palm to the floor revealing the back of his hand. Madame Bones reached out and grasped his hand as she moved in to look more closely, her monocle in place as she examined the hand.
Professor Dumbledore moved from the back of the desk to the front for a better look. Seeing that Madame Bones was not stopping him from looking he kneeled on the rug to look at the back of his hand.

"Ah, just as I was told," Madame Bones said after her examination. "And the mark is still there after all of these months."

The Professor looked closely and saw a faint scar on the back of his hand spelling out ‘I must not tell lies’.

"Harry," he said outraged, "What is the meaning of this? What happened?"

Harry shrank back slightly from the angry authority. "She made me write that over and over in detention," he said timidly. "Every time that I argued with her she would give me detention and I would write that in my own blood."

"How?" Professor Dumbledore asked.

Madame Bones decided that this was a question that she was better answering.

"In Madame Umbridge’s possession was found a blood quill after she was accused of its use by another student," Madame Bones said. "Do not worry, Harry. If you had sworn anyone to secrecy, it was not them that revealed it. The student’s hand was seen by his mother and she reported it to the ministry."

"Harry, why didn’t you report this to the deputy headmistress or myself?" asked Professor Dumbledore.

"Umbridge obviously had more power than you did," Harry said, "and I didn’t want to get either of you tossed out for speaking against her or her appointment. I also would not give her the satisfaction. I did not let her break me. I did not scream any of the times that she made me do this."

"Now the other matter is how many times she used it," Madame Bones calmly continued. "The other student reported that he had detention once for about four hours. How many times and how long were each detention?"

"Well, I think that I got in trouble three times with her and each detention was about four hours."

"So a total of twelve hours?" she asked officially, blocking her instinct at revulsion.

"No," Harry said. "I kept myself in as much of an informative mindset to block the inherent emotions that went with trying to recall such events. Each time that I got in trouble for saying that Voldemort was back it was a week’s detentions. About fifteen days I would guess. They start to run together so I would have to ask Hermione how many days I did detention with her last year. She would know."

"Sixty hours, oh my," Madame Bones said, her emotional distance wavering. "Ok, no I don’t think that we need to have an exact number here that is good enough."

"Thanks, Madame Bones," Harry said. "What will happen to her? Was that illegal?"

"Yes, very illegal," Madame Bones reassured him. "It is always illegal to torture, especially children. She will be fired from the ministry, never to be put into power again and she will be restricted from contact and power over minors for the rest of her life."

Harry let out a breath, "Good, I was dreading her ever coming into power over me ever again."

"Harry," the Professor started, "How did you keep this from us?"

"I’m used to it," Harry said offhandedly. "Besides do you really want this in front of Madame Bones here? I am sure that she has better things to do besides listen to me complain now that she has asked her questions."

"No, Harry," the Professor said rigidly, "just answer my questions. How can you be used to concealing abuse such as this?"

"Well, I figured that you already knew," Harry said with sudden doubt in his voice. "Your first letters were addressed to ‘The Cupboard Under the Stairs’ after all. I figured that if you knew that I slept in a locked cupboard, then you surely knew what happened to me all of my life. After that letter, they put me in Dudley’s second bedroom."

"Locked in a cupboard? What is this Dumbledore?" raged the seasoned law enforcer.

"I don’t know," the Professor stammered. "The letters are addressed magically from the register. We do not make a habit of examining the addresses. What else happened to you there?"

"Surely Hagrid told you that they tried to beat the magical talent out of me," Harry said now in disbelief. "I was their slave. I am quite good at cooking and cleaning the muggle way and I did quite good in herbology from the start due to my time in the garden at home. It’s no big deal, just what I have to deal with. Besides, they pretty much just ignored me this year after the Order’s threats. Even let me use my owl to send letters."

"I don’t understand," stated Madame Bones, "Why would they not let you send letters and how could they stop you?"

"I don’t want to talk about it," Harry said. "It won’t do any good anyway. I have to go back to them until I am of legal age. They are my guardians."

"Harry…just…please," the Professor said, strained, "answer her questions."

"Well, after my first year my uncle put bars up on my window and locks on my door," Harry said. "I split my food, whatever it was with Hedwig so..."
neither of us would starve, because she couldn't get out to hunt. Luckily I have friends as good as Ron. He pulled the bars off of the window with his father's car when they rescued me."

"Starved?" the Professor asked, not really sure that he wanted to know the answer. "You seemed to always come back to school in fine shape, if a little skinny."

"Oh, that's due to Mrs. Weasley," Harry said with warmth in his voice. "She is always forcing me to eat four and five servings of each meal at her house. Besides, I am always full here at Hogwarts. It all balances out in the end."

"Well, I will have to think about this and find a solution," the Professor said. Madame Bones continued to watch mostly from the sidelines.

"Find a solution to what, Professor?" Harry said, casting a glance to the Head of Magical Law Enforcement. "With the blood protections at Privet Drive I have to stay there anyway for most of the summer. It just is how it is, nothing to find a solution for, as I don't have any more blood relatives to be placed with."

"No, you don't," said the Professor. "But there may be other solutions."

The meeting ended shortly after with Harry seeking a headache potion from Madame Pomfrey before bed, leaving the adults in the office with privacy for a discussion of immediate Wizengamot importance.
Late the next morning the Headmaster of Hogwarts stood calmly outside the front door of the summer home of the Deputy Headmistress of Hogwarts ringing the bell.

“Hello, Albus,” Minerva McGonagall greeted, a little surprised at his early summer visit. “Come in for some tea.”

“Thank you, Minerva,” the Headmaster said graciously.

“What brings you today?” she asked as she poured the tea from her find china set.

“Well, Minerva,” Albus said, feeling the weight of his years, “last night some things came to light in Amelia Bones’s interview with Harry that I wanted to discuss with you.”

“What is wrong, Albus?” she asked, concerned.

“Try not to be mad at him, Minerva,” he urged. “He was trying to protect us from getting fired by getting on Umbridge’s wrong side. Also he said something about not wanting her to break him. He saw telling anyone as being broken or giving in somehow. He withstood it as a test of wills.”

“How is it possible to withstand that much pain without showing it later?” she asked in awe. “He’s still just a child.”

“I don’t believe that Harry has ever been just a child,” the Headmaster said with a sad tone. “Through some checking with his friends and with Mrs. Figg, I have found some disturbing news. To some extent, he was physically abused, maybe rather heavily, before he entered Hogwarts. After his reentry into our world, I am fairly certain that the abuse was serious still, but limited somewhat to the psychological.” The Headmaster took a deep breath in preparation for the most damning of evidence. “Until his letter he lived locked in the cupboard under the stairs at that house. He assumed after he got here that we thought that acceptable and therefore his family’s whole treatment of him, as his letter was addressed to his specific quarters there as they always are. I myself never made a habit of it, but do you read the addresses in the book before or after the letters go out?”

“No, neither of us ever does” she said with utter horror written on her face. “What else were you able to uncover about his childhood?”

“It seems that he was never given enough food. His second year he was given only the minimal ration of cold soup or bread and cheese, which he shared with his owl to keep her from starving. They put bars on his window and locks on his door to prevent him from sending the owl out with letters and that, of course, prevented his owl from hunting.”

“But,” she said, grasping at proverbial straws, “he always comes back just looking a little skinny as I recall.”

“Yes,” he confirmed, “that is after weeks of Molly Weasley feeding him as much as she could stuff down his throat and she cooks the heaviest and most fattening food when he is around so that he will get something on him. I don’t think that she serves even one salad when he is there, she cares for him so.”

“How in the world did he turn out so kind and caring after the treatment that he received?”

“Well,” he answered, “his is surrounded by love and people who love him. He has been taught to be kind and loving.”

“I don’t know,” the Headmaster answered, his shoulders slumped, but with a measure of pride for Harry’s strength of character. “We should just count ourselves lucky as this treatment so mirrors Tom Riddle’s life, right down to his relatives rejecting him because of magic, only Harry had to live with his relatives while they told him he was nothing and a freak because of his magic.”

“Yes, lucky,” Minerva growled. “But it is amazing that he is so brave and selfless.”

“He confessed to me that he does not think that he knows how to love,” the Headmaster said. “He seems to have grown up without love and now does not think he can. I told him that he would fall in love someday and then he would figure out what love is.”

“Well at least this summer he will be able to go back to the Weasley’s earlier. That should bring some joy into his life,” she said with a smile threatening the edges of her lips.

“Quite right,” Albus agreed.
Hey, what is up…

Both twins stepped up to the fire and knelt down to talk to their principal investor.

Fred, George, are you there?" Harry yelled.

Harry’s head was floating in a fireplace in the back room of a store with various brightly colored packages stacked around the room. He heard the door opening and saw one of the twins come through the door.

"Hey, Harry. That you?” he asked then turned and raised his voice, “Hey, Gred, let Samantha get those customers, the boss is in the fire and wants us.”

Both twins stepped up to the fire and knelt down to talk to their principal investor.

"Hey, what is up…"
"oh, silent partner you."

"I have a list of supplies that I need someone to get for me for a project," Harry said.

"Ok, we're your men."

"What do you need?"

"Here's the list," Harry produced a parchment roll from his pocket. "Get the stuff to your shop and I'll get it transported here by portkey."

Harry handed the list out through the fire to one of the twins. They immediately both looked at the list and gaped.

"Harry…"

"this lot won't be cheap."

"That's all right," Harry said with a grin. "I'll firecall Gringotts next and instruct them to allow you two to withdraw the money for this. Don't worry, I'm good for it."

"Ok…"

"sure."

"Just make sure that all of the stone and supplies are natural or the project will fail," Harry ordered.

"Of…"

"course."

"Thanks, guys," Harry said gratefully. "Oh and keep this a secret as much as possible. I want to have people guessing all year."

"Sure."

"Just make sure that we know what you are doing."

"If you come to the first quidditch match, I'll tell you about it then," Harry answered as he looked at the large clock in the bright store. "Hey, I got to go if I am going to call Gringotts."

"Okay…"

"Bye."

Harry's project for the next week was designing the collections of stones. At the beginning he needed just two unique designs but that would increase to more than a dozen fairly quickly. He started off with one for the center of the entry hall and one for just inside the Chamber of Secrets. These would be followed during the school year, unless he was able to finish during the summer, with one in front of each classroom in the school and one in the Headmaster's office. The one in the Headmaster's office would be the mediator controlling the others. The Headmaster would be able to shut all of them down or change what mode they are in at any time.

Harry had to come up with a main design that would be the base for the other designs. What leapt in to his mind was the Hogwarts crest. There were enough elements in the original design to make it usable and the students would not think it unusual that school crests were added to the floors.

Harry kept a journal of all of the research and designs that he came up with. He checked several Runic Magic books for the interlinking runes that he'd have to make the entire crest from in order to affect the transportation spell that he needed. He finally found the key to his endeavor in an ancient Atlantian resource book. It seems that Harry's idea was not as unique as he had assumed. Though the Atlantians didn't use runes exactly as he wanted, the book was able to tell him enough background for him to proceed. There would be ten sets of runes that would make up the entire structure repeated over and over, each rune just half an inch tall. His design was starting to look like a huge jigsaw puzzle. The seams would be nearly invisible in the field where the stone variety wouldn't change and would still be hard to see at the edges where differing stones met.

Throughout all of this design and study, Harry kept up his physical and defense training. He had many hours every day to get everything done and tended to work himself into exhaustion after dinner, thus ensuring a full night's sleep. This helped to stave off his frequent nightmares that only made him suffer as his subconscious rehearsed the mistakes and unhappy events of his past. He made a habit of casting silencing spells around his bed at night to prevent the other residents of the castle, though few, from being disturbed if he should cry out from a dream.

Harry was feeling better that he had ever felt in his life. The physical training that he was doing was toning and strengthening his muscles and the three large meals a day that he was eating definitely set this beginning of summer apart from his other summers. As usual he would go to the Weasley's for the last bit of summer, but he was not in a hurry as he had some things that he needed to get done.

"And how was your week, Harry?" Dumbledore asked.
“It was good, Professor,” Harry assured him. “I’ve come up with plans to change the Chamber and finished the main details this week. I was wondering if you could make me a portkey to the Chamber of Secrets so that I can get the material down there from Diagon Alley.”

“What materials are you getting for that?” the Professor curiously asked.

“Some stone and a couple of bars of gold,” Harry minimized.

“Sounds like it will be an interesting transformation,” Dumbledore replied, “but, as I have never been down there, I cannot make a portkey to get there. Portkeys have to be made in the place they are to be sent to or the caster has to be very familiar with the destination to have a successful portkey.”

“Oh,” Harry deflated.

“However, after dinner I would be willing to teach you to make a portkey,” the Professor stated. “I will give you a word of caution. Portkeys created away from Hogwarts are supposed to be regulated. They are allowed here because this is a school where you are supposed to learn to create them, but away from school they are regulated.”

“It didn’t seem like you got any permission for the portkey a couple of months ago that took me back here to your office,” Harry said with a grin. The headmaster twinkled, “Yes, there is a part of the law that allows them in emergency situations and the definition of emergency is up to the caster. Just be responsible with them and be prepared to pay a tariff on any portkeys of your casting the Ministry catches. I believe the last bill I received was for five galleons for an unauthorized portkey.”

“Good to know,” Harry smiled.

Harry spent his time waiting for the materials to arrive by practicing the illusion charm to show the sky on the ceiling that he would need to use to repair the damage caused by his over-enthusiastic levitation charm. The ceiling of the Chamber would be the perfect canvas to practice this art on; with the added bonus that it would make for a good design feature to set the Chamber apart from the dank cave that it used to be.

Two days of ceiling practice later, Harry had all of his materials and started to create the first two crests. Before he could inlay the crest into the Chamber he had to transfigure the rough base stone into a smooth granite floor. He ended up with creamy golden granite after four tries and a half hour of rest.

The next step was to take the crest that he had been working on for the last three days and inlay it into the floor. This required the removal of the exact shape of the crest from the floor to allow for the room. He learned all of the techniques for this from the book detailing the construction of the school. Apparently the spells were used a lot around the school.

From that book he learned to carve the stone into the runes and to magically form the tiny individual pieces into the crest that was more than six feet across. The entire crest and some individual elements inside were bordered in pure twenty-four karat gold. This served to isolate the individual elements of the transportation spell and to hold the entire structure together like stained glass.

The crest for the entry hall was much harder to get in place due to its immense size of more than ten feet on a side. He had to move it in sections after midnight to avoid attention from the few other residents of the castle. He levitated it in front of his broom as he flew out of the chamber through Moaning Myrtle’s loo. Once in the entry hall he set everything down and joined the ten individual pieces into one large crest. He then inlayed it and unified the old floor with the new crest into one smooth floor. With care, there was no vertical change when he got done.

He arrived at breakfast the next morning to two surprised fellow castle residents.

“Good morning, Harry,” Professor Dumbledore said. “Am I safe in assuming that that beautiful crest in the entry is your doing?”

“Oh, you saw it did you?” Harry asked slyly.

“Yes I did,” the Headmaster said, “and I assume that Madame Pomfrey has seen it as well.”

“Yes I did, Mister Potter,” she said with appreciation. “And you have done beautiful work. What is the purpose?”

“Well, I had hoped that I could persuade the two of you to tell everyone that it is just a part of new decorations for the castle,” Harry s pleaded hopefully. “There will be one in front of each classroom, each house and in the library and hospital wing when I’m finished.”

“And what is the real purpose if the crests if that is what we are to tell the others?” asked the healer, letting her intelligence show through.

“Well, no telling,” Harry leaned forward conspiratorially, “but they are a runic transportation system that can instantaneously transport anyone from one crest to its sister crest with a little direction.”

“And what direction is this?” she asked. Albus just sat back and marveled at his favorite student’s hidden brilliance.

Harry answered her, “Each crest has a key figure in it that you have to be picturing perfectly while on another crest and you will be on the crest that you are imagining.”

“Could that not be dangerous Mister Potter?” she asked with concern. She had been around in the last war and shared the fear common to the
“No,” Harry stated with confidence, “I have designed a crest for the Headmaster’s office that controls the others, so that he can shut it down.”

“Sounds acceptable to me, Harry,” the Headmaster weighed back into the conversation. “I assume that since you did this in the middle of the night, you want your involvement in this to be a secret for now?”

“For now and ever, yes,” Harry said. “I’m just leaving my mark on the school and trying to do something unique at the same time.”

“Very well,” he said as Madame Pomfrey nodded her ascent. “How goes the rest of your training? Are you in full control of your power level?”

“Yes, I believe that I am ready to venture back into the great wide world,” Harry said with his chin up and his voice grand. “The only thing that I haven’t practiced is instantly opening up my magic to full power. It takes me about ten seconds to go from complete muggle to full power and the quicker I go up the longer it takes for me to go back down and have full containment.”

“That is as good or better than we could have hoped for,” the Headmaster said. “Good job, Harry.”

“Thanks, Professor,” Harry said with a proud smile.

“I shall start to make arrangements for you to go to the Weasley’s in a couple of days,” The Professor offered.

Harry was so busy that he didn’t realize what the date was. Dumbledore realized this and was planning a little fun with the Weasleys for Harry’s birthday. Harry had never had a birthday party before and his professor wanted to have a surprise party that Harry would remember for the rest of his life.

On July 31st, Dumbledore addressed the assembled people in the Weasley garden, a group of his friends and almost family.

“Ok, everyone gather around this spot. The owl should deliver the surprise in a few minutes. Harry has never had a birthday party before and he has been so busy lately that he probably does not realise what day this is and so this will be a real surprise. Let us yell surprise when he arrives and then bring forward the food and presents.”

“Professor,” said Ginny, “Are you sure that this is a good idea? Harry’s had so many bad surprises, do you think he will react that well to this one?”

“Nonsense. Everyone likes surprise parties, and besides, this is a good surprise,” the jovial Professor said.
Harry Potter and the Cracked Reservoir
Chapter 7: Birthday Surprise

Thank you to my Beta’s Donalddeutsch, Kat Armstrong, Cateagle and Sparky40sw.

Harry sat alone at breakfast eating eggs and sausage; not an unusual occurrence this summer, as he was often left alone when Dumbledore and Madame Pomfrey had other things to do. He looked up from his plate as a single tawny owl flew into the great hall. He didn’t recognize the owl as being from his friends, but it could have been from the post owl office in Diagon Alley or elsewhere.

The bird landed next to Harry’s plate and held out its leg for Harry to unburden it of the letter tied to its leg. The bird took a sip from the goblet as Harry opened the letter and read it silently.

*Happy Birthday Harry*

3…2…1

When Harry read the ‘1’ in his head, he felt the familiar tug behind his navel and shoved his hand into his pocket for his wand. He had been unprepared when he was taken by portkey at the end of his fourth year, which had gotten Cedric Diggory killed due to Harry’s carelessness, and he was going to be prepared this time.

Harry sped toward his destination, being towed by the letter, the incomprehensible colors streaking past him; sullying his perceptions. When he landed with a thump, he barely registered that he landed on grass, just as he did in his fourth year. With the force of his landing, Harry’s glasses fell from his face and his knees buckled; leaving him at a disadvantage, on his knees, surrounded by a blurry sea of wizarding robes.

This registered to him as danger. Last time Harry had had long seconds before a wizard came along and started the torment. This time he was already surrounded. He took action immediately. He shoved his wand straight into the air and closed his eyes and muttered a spell. Most of his attackers were blown back sprawling on their backside, disorientated by the spell.

Harry quickly leapt to his feet and fired in quick succession a stunner at the first person still standing, a petrification spell at the second, ropes at the third and another stunner at the final wizard standing. This combination left his attackers on the ground and momentarily left Harry safe.

Harry groped on the ground and found his glasses. Quickly he put them on. He was prepared to make a break for true safety or at least some shelter where he could make a portkey to escape.

His glasses on, Harry surveyed his surroundings and found that he was not in Riddle’s clutches but in the Weasley’s back yard. There was the familiar walkway, there was the familiar magical house and there were all of his friends and order members on the ground around him.

“Oops,” was all he could say at the mess that surrounded him.

Harry heard the assembled and grounded crowd start to moan and stir.

He noticed the familiar young redhead girl that made his heart leap and then immediately dive as he realized that she was lying on the ground because of him. He rushed over to check on her, praying that she was not hurt.

“Ginny…Ginny, are you all right?” he asked, kneeling beside her and helping her to sit up.

“Harry?” she groaned.

“Yeah, Ginny,” Harry said with regret dripping from his voice, “I am so sorry. I didn’t know that it was you guys. I just felt the tug of a portkey and thought it was Riddle again trying to get me. I am so sorry,” he quickly babbled.

Harry and Ginny both looked up into each other’s eyes and locked, emerald eyes and chocolate brown. They just stared as the others around them righted themselves, unnoticed. Harry reached out and cupped Ginny’s cheek with his palm. She responded by a slight movement into his caress, never breaking eye contact. Her response broke a dam in his chest, notifying him of what he wanted.

Harry moved slightly forward, suddenly knowing what to do, eyes intent on the beauty that he was holding. Ginny tilted her head, reveling in the moment, acknowledging and approving of Harry’s intent. She had wanted this for years but did not pluck up her Gryffindor courage to be straight forward about it, relying on other wiles to get her desires across. Harry’s lips had just brushed the fiery redhead’s when they were startled.

“Harry? What in the hell happened?” asked Ron.

Ron’s inopportune question broke the moment and Harry sat back on his haunches before he got up to his feet with a sigh and helped Ginny from the ground. Harry realized what he had done and backed away quickly. He had kissed Ginny. She was dating Dean and has no interest in Harry anymore and he kissed her, his panic rose in his chest and made him forget that she had moved into the kiss as well.

“Sorry, thought it was something else,” said Harry sheepishly to the group, trying to distract himself from Ginny and what he just did.

Everyone had gotten up and looked at him incredulously.
"What else could it have been?" asked Ron again.

"Well," Harry said, "I've been kidnapped by portkey before and I wasn't going to be taken easily. I hate surprise portkeys."

"With good reason I would say," added Ginny.

"Constant Vigilance, good for you kid," Moody said in a surprisingly pleasant tone.

"Thanks," Harry said with a half smile.

Harry spared a glance at the gathered group as they broke up into smaller clusters enjoying the party. Ron and Hermione were acting shy and stealing glances of each other. When would one of them get a clue and realize that they were a Gryffindor and confront the other? It was obvious to everyone but each other that they each liked the other. The twins seemed to be plotting with conspiratory whispers and glances at the couple. What was their plan in this or did Harry even want to know?

Harry's eyes traveled to the youngest Weasley and his heart did a flip in his chest. She was watching the twins scheme with a smile on her face. To Harry's eyes she seemed angelic when she smiled. The joy on her face was contagious to Harry.

Harry caught himself. What are you doing? he chided himself. She has a boyfriend, remember, Dean, your dorm mate. First rule; don't mess with another guy's girl. Besides, remember what Hermione said, she doesn't feel like that about you any more. It could never work. She needs someone with a future into adulthood. That's not exactly in your cards. Even if you're victorious against Voldemort, who says that you will survive. The odds are not good. Let her be happy with Dean.

Harry shook himself from his unseeing stare and found that Ginny was staring right back and seeing him shake himself she approached.

"What's up, Harry?" she asked. "What's with the thousand yard stare?"

"Just catching myself in useless thoughts," Harry said. "How are you?"

"Great," she said brightly. "Good summer so far."

"How is Dean?" Harry asked.

"Dean?" she asked with a look of bewilderment on her face.

"Dean, your boyfriend?" Harry reminded her, worrying about the bump that she must have taken to the back of her head when she fell.

Ginny laughed deeply in her chest before turning her gleeful face back to Harry.

"Dean and I aren't together," she told him as if it should have been obvious. "I only told Ron to get him off my back and to punish him for being a nosey git."

Harry's world spun. She isn't seeing Dean. Wha… But of course, remember Hermione said that she doesn't like you like that.

"What is it, Harry?" Ginny asked.

Ginny stood in the garden awaiting the arrival of the guest of honor. This is going to be so much fun. Harry has never had a birthday party before. Will he like his surprise party? I hope the Professor is right about surprise parties. Does Harry ever like surprises?

She glanced over at Harry's best friends trading hidden glances and the occasional brush.

When are they going to admit that they like each other and get it over with? Everyone knows. I think that even the Slytherins must be able to see them dance around each other.

Harry is going to be here momentarily, she thought to herself, and I can't wait. I love to look into his emerald eyes. They look like they were cut from pure gemstone. Of course the rest of him is not bad either. He has never had an ounce of fat on him and when he has been practicing he gets that athletic look to him and that is just so yummy.

Stop it Ginny, she admonished herself. He is not interested. Remember what Hermione said. Harry doesn't feel that way about you. He doesn't even see you that way. You are just Ron's little sister and you shouldn't waste your thoughts on someone who doesn't even notice you. But what if he could. Could I make him? No. Harry does what he wants to. No one can make Harry do anything unless he is willing. So many years resisting Riddle has made him quite stubborn to anything forced.

Oh, here he is.

…Bright light…loud bang…

What…what happened? Oh, at least the sky is pretty. Sky? Oh, damn, knocked on my backside again and Harry will see me like this…again. Can't I ever catch a break?
“Oops,” said the standing figure in the center of the mess.

Ginny moaned and tried to sit up.  How did this happen?  Why must I always be embarrassed in front of that delicious man?

“Ginny…Ginny, are you all right?” she heard someone.  They were kneeling next to her.

“Harry?”  My Harry was next to me?  No stop.  He is not your Harry.  He is just Harry.

“Yeah, Ginny, I am so sorry,” she heard him apologize.  “I didn't know that it was you guys.  I just felt the tug of a portkey and thought it was Riddle again trying to get me.  I am so sorry.”

Ginny reopened her eyes and stared into cut emeralds.  She was entranced, locked in to her favorite fantasy.  She didn't notice anything but those wonderful, brilliant eyes.  She felt Harry cup her cheek with his hand and the warm feeling spread from her cheek to her entire body in waves of pleasure.  She was in contact with her dream.  She wanted more.  She leaned her cheek into his caress hoping for more.  She knew that this was pathetic, but it was oh so good, too.  She wanted to never lose sight of those cut emeralds and never lose contact with his strong hands.

The object of her dreams started to move closer.  He was going to kiss her.  She didn't care if Hermione was right.  She wanted this.  Just one kiss.  Just another moment.  His lips touched hers and…

“Harry?  What in the hell happened?” asked Ron.

She could have killed her brother.  Why couldn't he just keep his big mouth closed?  She didn't care how she got here, just that she was here.  Harry sat back and the moment was lost.

“Sorry, thought it was something else,” Harry apologized to his best friend.

“Huh, what?” Harry asked, her question startling him out of his thoughts.

“I asked what was wrong,” she repeated.

“Nothing,” Harry said.  “Just something that Hermione said coming back to me.  I’m sure that it’s right anyway.  She is always right.”

“What?” Ginny prodded.

“Nothing,” Harry said again.

“Harry, tell me this instant,” she insisted.  Hermione had told her something about Harry’s feelings.  What if that wasn’t true?  What if she had told Harry the same thing and that was why he hasn’t done anything?  What if this was all a misunderstanding?

“Oh, well…you see,” Harry squirmed.

“Harry, tell me now,” Ginny commanded in her feisty female Weasley voice.

“Well, you see,” Harry slowly said again.  “I have been thinking about you a lot lately and then you were with Dean and I wanted you to be happy so there was nothing I could do and then there is the danger of being around me and what Hermione said.  She said you didn’t feel that way about me.  That I waited till too late and you had moved on and you no longer had a crush on me and…”

He was cut off when a fiery ball launched herself onto Harry, smashing herself to his lips and cutting off his babble.  Her resolve to win Harry by him just noticing her was over.  She was unsure if it was a success or failure, just that it was over…now!

Harry was in shock.  What just happened?  What is happening?

Harry suddenly didn't care and just started to kiss the fireball back.  He tilted his head and deepened the kiss as he wrapped her in his arms and pulled her as close as he could manage.  He was in heaven.  He started to pour his entire being, his heart and soul into the connection with this heavenly woman.

Air was beginning to become an issue.

Harry needed air but he also needed this connection.

Ginny broke the kiss but still held his shoulders to her.  He felt the same way about her.  He liked her.  Ok, now she was catching her breath.  Maybe that was a bit long, but boy could he kiss.

Tonks was talking to Kingsley about random Auror things when she noticed Ginny approach Harry.  This could be interesting.  The two were perfect for each other.  He was stubborn enough to date a girl with six older brothers and she was strong willed enough to step into the fight with him and to deal with the hoards of women and girls that would look at the famous wizard and desire him as their own.  As a bonus, he looks like his father and she looks like his mother.  Just trade eyes and they were a match.

Tonks thought, Oh, no.  How cute.  Harry’s babbling and nervous.  Half the audience has turned one eye to the couple in the center of the crowd.
Oh, my. That's one way to stop a babble, Tonks thought. Wow, Ginny just launched herself at Harry and attached herself to his lips. Quite a beginning.

Ah, finally, Harry's over his shock and he is kissing her back. Perfect.

Woah, that's some kiss. I wish that I was on the receiving end of a kiss like that. It's tempting to glance at my watch; this is going on so long.

By now the entire crowd was watching the floorshow in the center ring.

At this rate they'll be turning blue before they stop, she thought. This is some show. Where's my popcorn?

The couple in question broke apart but held their embrace.

I just have to applaud such a performance.

Tonks started a soft round of applause and much of the party quickly joined in. She glanced around and everyone was smiling. The best looks were from the six brothers. Each had a glint in his eye but the twins were the worst, with an evil prankster look. *Harry had better be careful.* Tonks could almost see the plans dancing in front of their eyes.

Surely they wouldn't harm someone that their sister liked, and surely not harm their financial backer.

Oh, yes, that story got out. Ron had sent his mother a letter from school a few months ago revealing where the twins received the financial backing for their new store and business. Of course they were successful within months of opening, but it took a lot of money to start a business. Molly had ranted for hours about Harry financing the business. Harry had always been one of her favorite non-Weasley's, but Tonks was glad that he had not been around when the news was revealed. It took her days to cool down and Arthur only barely kept her from sending a howler to Harry over his decision.

Ginny and Harry stood supporting each other, oblivious to their surroundings. In Harry's mind this was just too good to be true. He, however, was smart enough to latch onto anything good and not let go. He was stubborn like that. Besides, his godfather's will told him to have a life and Ginny was what he wanted. If she wanted him as well, then he would grab hold and not let go.

"Ginny, will you go out with me?" he asked, making the situation official.

She answered with another deep kiss and a heartfelt, "Yes!"

"Great, but Ginny," Harry was worried, "this could make you a target and put you in danger." He didn't want her hurt but she was the one to make the decision.

"Harry, I know you and I know your enemies nearly as well as you do," she said with confidence. "I think that you and I know them better than anyone else, even Dumbledore and I understand the risks. But hey, this will put you at more risk too. Are you sure that you want this?"

"More than anything," was Harry's heartfelt reply.

"Good," Ginny said, now confident in her new relationship. "Now from the looks that my youngest brother is giving your back, I think that we need to do a little attitude adjustment on him."

Harry smiled. Being with Ginny could be fun.

"Well, you know," Harry said with a Marauder's smile, "Sirius did leave me a considerable sum for 'entertainment purposes' if need be."

"Good to know," Ginny said, "but if I can convince the twins to do some minor wand work so that neither of us gets expelled for underage magic, then I think that we can kill two birds with one stone."

"'Kill two birds with one stone'?" Harry repeated. "I didn't know that you knew so many muggle sayings. Ron never knows what Hermione or I mean."

"He's just ignorant sometimes," Ginny stated. "Skull's too thick."

"Yeah," Harry agreed about his best friend. "Also, two birds?"

"Hermione," Ginny said, "she needs to learn to stop telling others that the other party is not interested, or something like that. She told me the same thing she told you more than a year ago; that you weren't interested. That's why she thought that I had moved on, I stopped talking about you, but never stopped thinking."

"Ah well then," Harry returned, "lead on McDuff."

She raised her eyebrow, quizzically?

"Muggle literature."

She paused briefly as she thought about that, "Oh, okay, let's talk to the twins."
The twins, A.K.A. Gred and Forge were grinning wildly after promising to help Ginny and Harry anytime with a little pranking.

Ginny told the twins about an obscure, Marauders era, pranking spell which she had been gleefully taught by one of the originals and asked them to perform it on the two Gryffindor Prefects. They were only too happy to use anything from their idols and agreed immediately.

Ron and Hermione were talking off to the side, or at least they were muttering words punctuated with nervous grins and blushing. Of course, Ron just had to add in to the adolescent scene warning glares at his best male friend. This would be the perfect time for a lesson.

Suddenly they were wrapped in a magic mist that drew them together, arms wrapped around each other and glued together, no gap between.

"Hey," Ron screamed, "Wha'z going on?"

"Ron, don't yell," Hermione admonished him. "It hurts my ear."

"But…"

"Yes, I want to know who did this and why," Hermione insisted, "but busting my ear drums is not going to help. Everyone can hear just fine."

"Oh," Ron said in a normal, if a little raised voice, "Who arranged this?" he asked, over enunciating every syllable.

Ginny stepped forward with Harry in tow, their hands interwoven.

"I arranged this," Ginny claimed. "You both need to learn to not meddle with other’s relationships or potential relationships. Hermione, you told both Harry and myself, separately, that the other was not interested. While you ‘thought’ that was accurate at the time, you had no business butting in. Thanks for the help but that almost stopped this before it ever started."

Hermione grimaced.

"And Ron, dear brother," Ginny continued. "You have been glaring at the back of Harry’s head like you wanted to hurt the man who would dare to want to date your little sister. Well, too late now. You seemed to approve of this before it happened with your hints, but you have no say in either of our lives unless we say you do."

"Oh, please," Ron said, "I doubt that the others approve any more than I do. You’re our little sister."

Hermione winced at this. After all, the Weasleys were known to have a temper and the youngest was the example to prove the rule. Scary as she was, not even the twins would consciously cross her.

"Brother, dearest," Ginny said in a cool voice. "The others know better than to mess with me and they know that Harry can’t be intimidated by the likes of them."

"Ok, fine, now let us out," he said, hoping that she was appeased.

"I am afraid that I can’t do that," she said with her chin high. "You two have to figure out how to get out of that. The spell can’t be magic’d open. No words will save you two."

By now Mrs. Weasley had made her way to the front of the audience.

"Ginevra Weasley," Mrs. Weasley bellowed, "please do not tell me that you have been performing magic outside of school."

"No, Mum," she said in her responsible daughter voice, "I know better than to use magic outside of school unless it is life or death. I got responsible adults to help."

Harry laughed and then muttered into her ear, "Responsible?"

Ginny elbowed him lightly in the ribs.

"Fred and George Weasley!" came the Weasley matriarch’s yell as she turned to the twins. The crowd had the decency to wince at this but Fred and George put on their best innocent face and turned to her.

"Yes…"

"…mum?"
Why did you agree to hex your brother and Hermione?” their mother asked.

“We would…”

 “…refuse our dear…”

 “…sister nothing.”

 “She is…”

 “…nothing to be…”

 “…trifled with.”

 “Okay you two, take the hex off them this instant,” Mrs. Weasley insisted.

 “Well…”

 “…as Ginny just…”

 “…told us. The spell cannot be lifted…”

 “…with magic. Only certain other activities…”

 “…that are quite fitting…”

 “…can end this.”

 Ginny motioned to how the couple was linked and a light could almost be seen going off above Mrs. Weasley’s head.

 Harry and Ginny were both surprised when she chuckled.

 “What?” asked Ron, who didn’t seem to be struggling, “How is the spell ended?”

 “Ron…” Hermione said trying to get his attention, as she seemed to figure it out.

 “What do we have to do, Ginny?” Ron asked again.

 “Ron…” Hermione tried again to get his attention.

 “Fred, George, tell me now.”

 “Ron!” Hermione said more forcefully, but Ron still did not notice.

 Harry simply stepped forward and turned his best male friend to face his best female friend. Hermione blushed, tilted her head and then put her lips on the redhead’s lips. Ron was stunned into paralysis.

 Harry reached forward again and tilted Ron’s head the opposite way to Hermione so that their noses wouldn’t collide.

 Ron broke out of his paralysis and returned the kiss with enthusiasm, closing his eyes.

 The entire yard broke into sidesplitting laughter. Fred and George were supporting each other to keep from falling down as the pair continued to kiss.

 Harry got a look on his face and turned to Ginny.

 “Gin, as good as it is that they have settled their…differences, I can’t watch this,” Harry said. He picked up a party hat that had fallen to the ground, turned his back to the audience and turned it into a portkey before placing it on Ron’s head. The kissing couple then disappeared with a pop.

 “Harry, where did you send them?” asked Ginny.

 “Happy birthday, Harry.”

 “Thank you, Professor,” Harry answered.

 “Miss Weasley,” Professor Dumbledore, “that was an excellent hex.”

 “Thank you, sir,” she said.

 “I have not seen it in many a year,” the Professor reminisced. “In fact the last time that I saw it, or I assume that it was what they were talking about, they were stumbling over their words so, was when a certain Mister Black locked a certain Mister Potter and Miss Evans in a closet in their seventh year.”
Harry chuckled, happy that he had recovered somewhat from his deep grief for his Godfather and now could remember the good memories of Sirius when he thought of him not just the bad. He was always glad to add to those good memories.

"Did you not know about the traditional closet use with that spell?" asked the Professor.

"Oh, I knew about it," Ginny said. "I used it on a couple of Hufflepuffs that had been dancing around each other in my year for the better part of two years. I locked them in a closet and didn't unlock it for three hours. They were kissing when I unlocked it."

Harry was shocked, "It took them three hours to figure it out?"

"I don't know how long it took them to figure it out," Ginny said. "I only said that they were kissing when I unlocked it after three hours. They could have figured it out immediately."

"Well, I guess that the tradition is continued, at least," Harry said.

"Why is that, Harry?" asked Dumbledore.

"Oh, I portkeyed them to the hall closet. Mrs. Weasley always locks it when guests are here."

Harry grinned and the Headmaster chuckled.

"That was quite a good spell you performed when you arrived," Professor Dumbledore said.

"Yes, Potter, quite good," Mad Eye Moody said as joined the small group. "Constant Vigilance!" he yelled.

"Where did you find it, Harry?" the Headmaster said, unfazed.

"Earlier this week I found it in some Auror text books," Harry said, not mentioning where he had found the books.

"Very good, Harry," Professor Dumbledore said. "You almost knocked everyone over with your first spell and hexed the remaining before they could get a shield up. Quite an excellent performance."

"Yes, Potter," Mad-eye said. "I was hit with a quite powerful petrification spell."

"Thanks," Harry blushed and then turned to his Headmaster, "Professor Dumbledore, where were you? You weren't in the crowd to greet me with the surprise. Were you hiding because you knew that this would happen?"

"Yeah," Ginny said. "Where were you? You're the one who said that he would love the surprise. Everyone loves surprise parties, you said."

The Headmaster’s eyes sparkled at this revelation.

"Well, Harry," the Professor said, "Miss Weasley did try to convince me that you may not be used to happy surprises, but, alas, I am afraid that I forgot my party hat on the kitchen counter and it would have been improper for me to appear without the proper headwear. I am afraid that I did miss your dramatic entrance."

Moody eyed the Headmaster narrowly before Ginny laughed.

"Of course, sir," Harry replied with a smile, matched by Ginny. "One wouldn't want to be improperly attired for an event such as this seems to be," Harry chuckled as he looked around at all of the party hats worn by everyone but Professor Snape, who looked only like he would have rather spent his morning elsewhere. Harry even felt his own head to find a hat there, which he didn't remember installing.
"The person? Can we work together?" asked Fred.

"Only one person plans it, with help from your significant others if you wish, but all of us will help when necessary with execution as instructed by the planner when asked."

Percy, who was, as a rule, against pranking, had to put his two knuts in, "Ron, we should not be acting so immature toward Harry. We should just accept him and not try to mess this up for Ginevra."

"Oh, pish. Our goal isn’t to break them up," Ron stated. "It’s to initiate our good friend into the family. It’s a family tradition to be pranked. We all have from the time that Bill first pranked Charlie when Charlie was just four years old by making his hair turn pink."

"How did you know about that?" asked a shocked Bill.

"Dad found it hilarious," Ron said, "and told me about it a couple of years ago in the shed. For some reason he was proud of you, Bill."

"Besides, Percy," Charlie added, "we will all agree to make sure that young Harry is not harmed in any permanent way and it would be a good way for you to show that you are truly a Weasley, if you can come up with a true Weasley prank."

"Well," started Percy, "how would we quantify the best prank?"

"Ever the bean-counter, eh Perce?" Charlie said. "Don’t worry; whichever prank has the most effect on Harry will be the winner. We’ll ask him at Christmas, as he’ll probably be invited by mom and she won’t take ‘no’ for an answer with all of us on the isles this year."

"How will he be able to identify which prank is which?" Bill asked.

"Calling cards?" offered Ron, "We could leave calling cards to say who each prank belonged to."

"Well, then, we might as well tell Harry from the beginning," said Charlie.

Hermione decided to join the conversation on this point.

"Of course you have to tell Harry from the beginning. That is the only way that you will be able to survive this."

"What do you mean?" asked one of the twins.

"Harry is one of the most powerful wizards in the world. He has faced Voldemort," the group winced, "more times than any other wizard and through skill and luck has survived to some type of victory each time."

"Hermione, how do you work out that he was victorious against You-Know-Who the last two times?" asked Ron.

"Simple Ron, Voldemort’s goal from the beginning has been to kill Harry and so anytime that they face each other and he walks away he is somewhat victorious," answered Hermione. "Lastly, he is intelligent and the only son of the Marauders; Moony, Padfoot and Prongs, and if I am not mistaken, if there is any pranking journals to be had, he has just inherited the mother-lode."

Ron and the rest nodded, confirming Hermione’s logic on the definition of a victory. They had to concede that surviving was a good accomplishment, in this case.

"Intelligent, Hermione?" asked Percy after a pause.

"Yes," Hermione said, "I study more than twice as much as he does in Defense Against the Dark Arts and he always does better than I do. And on the other subjects he’s not that far behind me. If not for his yearly distractions and near constant headaches from his scar he would probably surpass me in the other subjects as well."

"What about potions?" asked Charlie after he rummaged through what he remembered Ron saying about school. "According to Ron, he doesn’t do too well in there."

"You would not have done well either," Hermione said, "if the teacher had a personal grudge against you and would spill or vanish your potion when you manage to make a good one. Professor Snape constantly hovers over Harry trying to make him mess up. Last year alone he received several zeros when Snape broke his vial when Harry turned them in."

Everyone shuddered. They had all experienced Snape and his teaching methods.

"And he’s still passing the class?" Percy asked.

"Yes," Hermione said, "He’s learned to mostly tune the Professor out when he’s making the potions. Of course he still loses around a hundred points a week for Gryffindor just by being in potions. The very first day of our very first year, Snape took points from Gryffindor for Harry not paying attention when he actually had his head down taking notes of what was being said and because he didn’t already know certain potion ingredients. Snape accused him of skating by on his fame, which at that time he hardly knew existed."

"How could he not know that he’s famous?" asked Bill, as amazed as the rest that Harry could have been ignorant of the society his parents had grown up in and the role he played in it.

"He didn’t grow up in this world, Bill," answered Ron, "In the world he grew up in he was not allowed to ask questions and was told daily that he was..."
worthless and a freak. He thought, until his eleventh birthday, that his parents were killed in a car accident. The-Boy-Who-Lived grew up as little more than a house elf, living in the cupboard under the stairs and cooking the family meals and doing all of the chores."

"He entered the wizarding world thinking himself completely worthless," continued Hermione. "He wasn't depressed about it, it just was. This, gentlemen, is his first ever birthday party. The first real birthday gift he ever received was his owl Hedwig from Hagrid on his eleventh and he had never had an opportunity to give a gift until the first Christmas at Hogwarts."

The thought of such a life depressed the previously jovial mood of the brothers.

"But, mind you, he always picks excellent gifts," Ron said with glee.

"Well, he loves to give," Hermione said on her turn. "I doubt that he ever had any money at all before he got his letter."

"What do you mean?" Bill asked, perplexed. "The Potters were well off."

"But the Dursleys didn't know that and would have taken his entire fortune if they'd had the chance," Ron said, "Have you ever seen his vault? I doubt that he could guess to within a thousand galleons how much money he has."

"Well, Ron," Hermione added, "he's never worried about money. As a kid he never had any to even buy a piece of candy and after his letter he just knew that it had to last for seven years. In the summer before his third year he looked at that Firebolt in the window of that quidditch store but never bought it because he wasn't sure if he would have enough for his school years. Even now that he has inherited from Sirius, I doubt that he will treat himself to much more than his godfather told him to."

"Well," said one of the twins, "I hope Sirius told him to buy a new wardrobe, because, except for wizard robes, he doesn't have anything nice."

"Ginny'll help him with that," Charlie said with confidence.
“Professor,” Harry said, getting his Headmaster’s attention. Ginny was off in conversation with some of the order members when Harry decided he needed to make some arrangements.

“Yes, Harry?” the Professor responded from under his outrageously festive party hat. “How are you enjoying your party?”

“It’s very nice, sir,” Harry said with an honest smile.

“Good, good,” Dumbledore said. “Now what can I help you with?”

“Can we go somewhere private?” Harry requested.

“Certainly,” the Professor said as he looked for somewhere not overrun with guests, “let’s take a walk.”

They left the party headed for the woods at a leisurely stroll.

“Professor, I have a couple of questions,” Harry started. “First, I want to tell my friends about the prophecy and what I’ll have to do.

“Why is that, Harry?” the Professor asked neutrally.

“They’re going to be in danger and deserve to know,” Harry stated as fact. “Plus, they’ll wonder where I’m spending my time when I’m training and why I’m suddenly training so much. I guess that I want them to know the reason that this falls to my shoulders.”

“Of course, Harry,” the Professor acknowledged his reasoning. “But do give them some choice. Ask them if they want to know more information if it could be dangerous for them. If their answer is yes, I have no problem with them knowing. Will you inform them of your recent power issues?”

“I should,” Harry said thoughtfully. “They would get insulted if I don’t keep them informed. While I don’t think that they have a right to have my life be an open book, I do think that they need to know that much.”

“I agree that you should,” Dumbledore replied, “and that no one has a right to all of your secrets, friends or no. And the second question?”

“Can we make arrangements,” Harry asked, “for Ginny and myself to go into muggle London to fulfill the part of Sirius’s will that requested that I burn my old wardrobe and buy a new one?”

“Of course, Harry,” the Professor said. “I’ll make arrangements for you and Miss Weasley to be able to shop on Monday the tenth of August.”

“Thank you, Professor,” Harry said. “Can you take some money out of my vault to buy suitable muggle clothes for the order members that may help so that nothing looks out of the ordinary? Some wizards, or most as it were, don’t seem to grasp the concept of muggle clothing.”

“You are awful trusting that I understand such things,” the Professor mused.

“I always believed that it’s not a difficult thing to understand,” Harry reflected, “it’s just that most wizards refuse to dedicate enough thought to learning about muggle culture and with your penchant for muggle lemon drops, I believe that you may be knowledgeable enough to get it done.”

“Thank you, Harry,” Dumbledore answered. “Have you thought of what you will get Miss Weasley for her birthday? With her birthday the day after your shopping trip, you may not have any time to shop for her.”

“Oh, of course,” Harry stopped walking, “her birthday. Hmm, it slipped my mind. I’m not going to be able to go shopping before the eleventh. Could you do me a favor? Can you also go to Quality Quidditch Supplies and buy the best chaser broom available in the world and send it to me. Also, do they make a case for brooms?” he asked. “Moody’s trunk gave me an idea that you could have a flat box just big enough for the tail and magically expanded to hold the entire broom but outwardly very thin. Do they have that?”

The Professor chuckled at his student’s sudden enthusiasm. Harry was the kind of person that everyone had the urge to please. Subconsciously, a person could tell when joy is a rare thing in life for another and for most there is a want to help. The question is whether the subconscious is listened to or not.

“How about,” the Professor offered, “if I find a suitable box for her new broom and teach you to perform any spells that could help and you can decide what the case needs to be like.”

“Thank You, Professor,” Harry said brightly.

In the days following the party, Harry continued his magical and physical exercises, determined to meet any fight prepared. He managed to find a couple of hours each day while Ginny did homework and the others were…well…otherwise occupied to sneak into the forest behind the Weasley’s
house and practice his power control and the speed that he could access his core. Harry again utilized his broom for reaction training but had to keep his altitude low, as the Burrow didn't have perfect privacy in their orchard where the mock Quidditch pitch was set.

Ginny came out to investigate on one of these times to find him zigzagging through the perimeter trees and was immediately shocked and frightened.

“Harry James Potter!” she yelled loud enough to get his attention.

Unfortunately he couldn’t spare the attention as the broom’s tail clipped a small branch and launched him into a broomless high-speed, low-altitude flight that, while it could have been singularly exhilarating, was not what the human body was designed for. The flight was too short and ended with him skidding across the lush green grass on his back, feet first.

“Omigod, Harry!” she exclaimed as she raced after his still form.

She skidded to a halt on her knees and grasped Harry’s hand in hers. His eyes fluttered open and a smile cracked his lips.

“Ginny,” Harry asked, “why did you have to yell at me?”

“I thought you would be hurt,” she said with tears prickling her eyes.

“I guess that you ended up correct,” he says ironically, “Maybe you’re turning into a seer. But, please, next time wait until I’m not flying through trees to yell at me.”

Ginny looked bashful as she fully realized her mistake.

“Now, what was all of the shouting about?” Harry asked. “Why are you up here?”

“Well, the shouting,” Ginny shuffled on her knees, “I…uh…panicked and…yelled.”

“And why are you up here?” he asked. “I thought that you did homework around now.”

“I finished it all,” she said triumphantly.

“Like ‘Ron’ sort of saying that you finished,” Harry said, “or ‘Percy’ sort of saying that you finished?”

“Oh, Harry,” she slapped his arm, “Ron isn’t that bad.”

“Yes he is,” Harry stated emphatically. “He’s my friend, but he’s the worst procrastinator in the whole school. A game of tiddly-winks would distract him from homework.”

“Well, at least you weren’t hurt,” Ginny said. “Let’s go down and see what the two love birds are doing.”

“But first…” Harry said as he grabbed the back of Ginny’s head for a mind-numbing kiss. He was really enjoying being with Ginny.

Ginny and Harry found Ron and Hermione at the kitchen table studying; none to willingly on Ron’s part. Harry mused inwardly that this new relationship could be good for Ron’s grades.

“Hey, guys,” Harry greeted, “How goes it?”

“Great,” answered Hermione enthusiastically, “Why aren’t you doing your homework?”

“Did it in the Hogwarts library in the first week,” Harry dismissed with wave of his hand.

“Oh,” Hermione said, “of course. You always tend to get your summer homework done early.”

“Yeah,” Harry grinned, “Nothing better to do.”

“What were you doing while we were in here slaving away?” asked Ron, earning a glare from the bushy haired woman next to him.

“I was just flying my broom,” Harry smiled, “when your sister tried to get me killed.”

Ginny huffed, “I did not try to kill you.”

“Ron, see what you think,” Harry argued. “I was weaving through the perimeter trees to your orchard at full speed when she yelled at me, causing me to hit a branch and thus the ground. What do you call that besides trying to kill me? I told her next time to wait until I wasn’t concentrating to yell at me.”

Ron contemplated this, glancing from Harry’s expectant expression of confirmation to Ginny’s glare of warning.

“Leave me out of this one, mate,” Ron said wisely. “With her temper, you should know better than to do anything to anger her when you are dating her.”

Harry glanced at his girlfriend. “Yeah, Ron. Thanks for the support and the warning,” Harry said followed by, “Ow,” as Ginny hit his shoulder.
"That's for flying so dangerously and risking your life," Ginny glared.

"Ginny," Harry replied, "I've been doing it for weeks now; all summer. A broom was the best way to get into the Chamber," Harry continued without thinking.

"The Chamber?" Ginny asked, her voice going high and worried. "You've been back into the Chamber of Secrets?"

"Oh, yeah," Harry said, realizing his mistake. He had not told anyone besides Professor Dumbledore of his practice area. "I needed a practice area during school where I wouldn't be interrupted and wouldn't put anyone in danger if I used a powerful spell," he said, "Come on, let's go somewhere more private so that I can tell you what's been going on with me since the ministry."

The rest looked grave and eager at the same time. Harry knew that they each had reasons to want to know his story, mostly in their caring for him.

They adjourned to the boys' bedroom and found comfortable seats, the girls on each of their boyfriend's beds with them.

Harry cast silencing and locking charms on the room and door.

"Harry, you are not supposed to do magic. You could be expelled," protested Hermione.

"That's part of the story, Hermione," Harry said.

Ron looked excited, "You can do magic? When did they give you a waiver? Why did they?"

"Calm down Ron," Harry asked. "Just listen to the story and then you can ask questions."

He received nods of assent from his audience. Ginny, however didn't look shocked as she had seen him do magic in front of the teachers and they didn't react, so she figured that it was kosher.

"Well," Harry started, "I guess that you all know the basics of what happened at the ministry up until the order arrived." Nods yes. "Well, as you know, after Sirius was stunned and fell through the veil, I tried to follow him through it but Professor Lupin held me back and told me that it was too late and Sirius was dead. I saw Bellatrix run out of the hall before Dumbledore could capture her. I ran after her into the entrance hall where she stopped. I used the cruciatus curse on her and she returned the gesture."

"You used an unforgivable? Are you going to get into trouble?" Ginny was terrified that she would lose Harry to Azkaban.

"No," Harry answered, "Professor Dumbledore says that I won't be punished but he did talk to me about it. Besides, I hardly had any effect with it. Bellatrix said that you have to mean it to make an unforgivable work. You have to want to cause suffering. Well, I taunted her that the prophecy was broken and that Riddle knew about it and then he came and confirmed it. She was knocked out and Riddle started to duel with me. I was hopeless in the duel. If Dumbledore hadn't arrived and animated the fountain statues to intercept the curses, I would not have survived. They dueled for a short time before Riddle invaded my mind and asked Dumbledore to kill me to get to him. In the end the ministry filled up with officials that saw Voldemort as he left with Bellatrix unconscious body."

"Dumbledore sent me to wait in his office with a portkey until he joined me about a half hour later. He started to tell me that it wasn't my fault that Sirius died and I got mad. I yelled and screamed. I threw things. I tried to destroy everything that he had in his office. He didn't seem in the least affected by any of my anger. He said that if I knew any of the truth I should be trying to destroy even more and that he had too many possessions anyway. I sat down for him to tell me why I should be more angry and he told me what he should have told me five years ago. He told me the real reason that Voldemort killed my parents and tried to kill me."

The audience was glued to the story that they had not heard before with rapt attention.

"Oh, Harry," said Ginny with concern. He took her hands in his and continued.

"He told me the prophecy that Voldemort was after when he got me to go to the ministry. See, only the persons that are involved in the prophecies in the ministry may get them from the shelves. Others will be driven into St. Mungos if they try to get a prophecy from the shelves. As you know the prophecy was broken, but it seems that Dumbledore was the original person to hear the prophecy and he still remembered it. He showed it to me in his pensieve.

"It says that a baby will be born to parents that defied the dark lord three times and that this person will have the ability to vanquish him," Harry paraphrased. "It also says that he will mark me, or the baby, as his equal and that neither may live as the other survives.

"So in other words it is either he or I. It will come down to a real battle between him or me and either I will have to be a murderer or a victim."

"Harry," admonished Ginny, "just because you will have to end up killing a person, if you can call him that, it does not mean that you will be a murderer."

Harry eyed her in disbelief.

"Harry," Ginny continued, "Murder would mean that you killed an innocent person. If you kill someone to save yourself or others it is not murder. It would be wrong to not kill someone like him if you have the chance. If you have the means and opportunity to kill him and end his reign you will be saving thousands if not millions of lives. You cannot, seriously, be considering yourself a bad person for having to kill that bastard."

"Killing just sounds like such a horrid thing to do," Harry said. "I feel like it makes me no better than him."
Soldiers have to kill all of the time. This is war, Harry and if you have the chance to take an evil from the world in battle then it is your duty as a good person to save the world. Any of us would take the same opportunity,” Hermione chimed in.

“But you don’t have to,” Harry whispered. “I do.”

Ron stepped up in the conversation at this. “But Harry, we’ll be in the battle at your side and may have to take lives of death eaters to protect ourselves or others.”

“Harry,” added Hermione, “if the side of good is fighting a battle for the knockout and the side of evil is fighting a battle to the death then the side of evil will always win as they’ll gladly take our lives when they wake from our knockout punch.”

“So you’re saying that we need to fight the same battle,” Harry said, bewildered. “You won’t feel guilty about killing another human.”

“We are not saying that,” said Ginny, “Of course we will. Guilt is what makes us humans. The ability to recognize the sanctity of the life of other people is what separates us from animals. Death eaters and Bloody Riddle himself gave up the right to live when they committed themselves to the side of evil and killed innocent people.”

“That makes sense,” Harry straightened his shoulders. “I hadn’t thought of it like that.”

“That’s why people discuss their problems with others,” Ginny said, “for perspective.”

“Thanks, Ginny,” Harry said. “And Ron and Hermione, thank you two as well.”

“You’re welcome, Harry,” Hermione said. “Now continue your story. You haven’t even got to the summer yet.”

“Okay, well,” Harry restarted, “he also told me that the reason that I keep going back to the Dursleys is some ancient blood magic that protects me as long as I can still call their home my home. At least now I know why I was sent there.”

“Yea, well, it doesn’t seem worth it if you ask me,” grumbled Ron.

“So just about a week into the holiday,” Harry told his story, “I was lying in bed asleep when I had a dream of Riddle and his ilk doing a ritual. It turned out to be a power ritual to increase Tom Boy’s magic power, only it seems he was at his maximum or something because when they finished their ritual there was some sort of reaction through my scar connection with the Dark Tosser and I awoke to a burning in my chest like I was going to be consumed in fire. I panicked and sent Hedwig with a letter to Dumbledore asking for help. He came in the morning and took me back to Hogwarts for a check-up. It turns out that Riddle broke the containment on my magic potential so I had to learn to do the magic again. I had to put up a mental barrier to control my magic. That didn’t take long but he let me stay at Hogwarts for the interim until I could come here.”

“That’s horrible Harry. I can’t imagine what it feels like to have your magic burning you up from the inside,” sympathized Hermione.

“But, why were you in the Chamber of Secrets?” asked Ginny nervously.

“Part of the new depths of magic is that I have to practice magic every day and I needed a place where it would be safe to practice high power spells. I have a huge chunk of stone down there so that I can hit it with everything and not bring down the walls. I did a lot of patronus charms to erase the dark magic feeling and transfigured everything so that it’s not so gloomy. I changed the statues so that all of the mascots are represented and destroyed that Salazar Slytherin statue. Hit him with some powerful blasting hexes. Now that was fun,” Harry smiled. “A few hundred cleaning charms and all is better.”

“Oh, okay,” Ginny said quietly, “Harry?”

“Yes?” Harry said as he turned to her in his arms.

“Can I ask a favor?” she whispered.

“Sure, anything,” Harry said with confidence.

“When we get back to school,” Ginny asked, “can you take me down there?”

“Sure I will,” Harry said. “The first full day back is a Saturday and we can go down there after breakfast.”

“Good,” she seemed emboldened, “I’ve been scared of the thought of that horrid place for so long and I want to conquer that fear.”

“Sounds very Gryffindor of you,” Hermione said.

She brightened and smiled to the rest of the room, “Thank you.”

She kissed Harry deeply in appreciation.

“Oh, eewe, yuck.” Ron mock gagged. “I really don’t need to see my little sister doing that.”

“Well, Ron,” Harry said, “Hermione’s the sister that I never had and you’re the brother that I never had; so when I see the two of you, it’s like incest. So just keep that in mind.”

“Oh, Harry, yuck. I didn’t need that idea in my mind,” Ginny said, “enough of this. We’ll all have to see each other because, I don’t know about
Hermione, but I'm getting this whenever I can.” Ginny gave Harry a quick kiss on the lips to illustrate her point.

“Okay,” Harry rattled his head, “If you two are going to be so attached, I am willing to call a truce and get used to seeing...that.”

“Okay,” Ron agreed, “truce.”

“I also talked to the Headmaster about one other thing,” Harry said, “Ginny, would you help me to pick a new wardrobe? Sirius instructed in his Will that I burn all of my old clothes and buy new ones. Well, not necessarily in that order. I do have to have something to wear to the shop. Oh and we will go on August tenth. The Professor is making arrangements.”

“You trust me to pick your entire wardrobe?” Ginny asked with a smile.

“Sure,” Harry said obviously, “of course I do.”

Ginny rocketed into Harry, hugging him with all of her might.

“Ginny,” Harry said in a strained voice, “air is becoming an issue.”

Ginny let go of him and kissed him.

“Thank you for trusting me so deeply.”

Later that day Harry caught up with Ron and Hermione, hoping to talk with them without Ginny around, as she was upstairs reading one of her schoolbooks.

“Ron, Hermione,” he said, “I need to ask a favor.”

“Sure, Harry,” answered Hermione, “What can we do for you?”

“I'd like to send you guys for a day in Diagon Alley,” Harry said, “all expenses paid.”

“Okay, Harry,” Ron started, “What's the catch? You want to pay for a day in Diagon Alley for the two of us, there has to be a catch.”

“You're my friends, can't I just do something nice?” Harry asked innocently, “Okay, just one, I want you to go on the tenth.”

Ron looked perplexed. Hermione, however, knew exactly what the catch meant.

“Sure we will, Harry,” she said. “You want us to spend the day in Diagon Alley on the same day that you and Ginny are in muggle London.”

“Yeah,” Harry said shyly, “I don't figure that Ginny and I will have much chance to go out on dates for a while, considering that half of the order has to go along with us,” he finishes bitterly.

“Sure, Harry,” Hermione said, “But I'm sure that you'll find some good ways to make her feel special while at school without having to leave the castle grounds.”
In the days leading up to the shopping trip, Harry made his own preparations by having the twins withdraw some money for him from his vaults. He needed two sacks of galleons, one for Ron and Hermione and one for his and Ginny’s own shopping trip in Diagon Alley, as well as a stack of muggle pounds for their shopping in muggle London.

He also needed to ask Hermione where he should shop in muggle London where there was an abundance of choices, as opposed to shopping in the British wizarding world, which held a considerable lack of choices or competition. For any particular item, there were no more than a few different stores in the magical world.

“Hermione?” Harry asked when he was able to find his friend alone.

“Yes, Harry?”

“Where’s the best place to find nice clothes in London?” he asked. “I need a place with a wide selection because I don’t know what Ginny and I will like.”

“Sure, um,” she started, “um…what’s your budget like?”

“Well, the Dursleys always told me that clothes were expensive,” he answered, “so I had the twins withdraw a little money for me and convert it to muggle money. It comes to about twenty-thousand pounds.”

“Twenty thousand pounds!?!?” Hermione exclaimed, “That’s an absolute fortune. You could shop at any store in London without trouble.”

“Ok,” Harry asked, “but where?”

“If you want one place with a large selection, I think that you need to go to Harrods,” Hermione said after some consideration. “They’re not the cheapest, but they have a lot of nice clothes. I’ve been there a couple of times, my mum took me there for my dress clothes and I went with my dad when he needed some new suits, and I was able to get a good look around when I was there.”

“Thanks, Hermione.”

Monday, August tenth dawned and for once both Harry and Ron were up by seven o’clock and getting ready for the day.

“So, Ron, you’re up early,” Harry said. “You must be excited.”

“Yeah,” he said, “my first date with Hermione and we get to spend all day in Diagon Alley on it.”

“Yeah, just remember that the purpose of dates,” Harry reminded Ron, “is to make her feel special and happy; that means you can’t spend all day in Quality Quidditch Supply.”

Ron deflated, “Well, can I at least have a good look around?”

“Take her to Flourish and Blotts first and buy her some books that she’s interested in,” Harry advised, “and spend a good amount of time in there. I think that you can spend about half as much time in Quality Quidditch as you do in the bookstore and she’ll probably be happy. But you need something to do in the bookstore so that she doesn’t think that you only care about quidditch.”

“Yeah, but what?” Ron asked. “I don’t think I need any books.”

“Tell you what,” Harry said, “get me a good book on Animagus Transformations. I want to study it at the beginning of this year, before Ginny becomes too bogged down with OWL’s.”

“Okay, I can do that,” Ron agreed. “Hermione can even help me to pick one.”

Harry rummaged around in his trunk and came up with two leather moneybags.

“Here you go Ron,” he said handing one of the bags to his best friend.

“Harry,” Ron protested, “I have money. I don’t need you money to take Hermione out.”

“I know that Ron,” Harry assured him. “I want to pay for today. I like giving to friends and part of the favor that I asked you two was that you let me pay.”

“But…”
Ron, Harry said, "I insist and you know how stubborn I am."

"Okay, fine," Ron huffed.

"Good, there is plenty in there for dress robes and some standard robes for both of you. I think that the Headmaster’ll do another Ball this year and you could be prepared."

"Okay."

"And let Hermione help you pick your dress robes," Harry told him. "That way she can pick ones that will look good with hers."

Harry and Ginny and Ron and Hermione arrived at the Leaky Cauldron and made their separate ways. Ron and Hermione entered Diagon Alley while Harry and Ginny met up with the Order members who would escort them through London.

"Tonks, Professor Lupin, good to see you," greeted Harry.

"Wotcher Harry, Ginny," answered Tonks.

"Harry, Ginny, please call me Remus.," Moony said. "I’m not your professor anymore."

"We’ll try," answered Ginny.

"Hello, thanks for taking the time out to come with us on this shopping trip," Harry greeted the four other order members that were there. He had not met them before but he could be sure that Dumbledore would have competent people for this trip. Of course Harry would have felt secure enough with just Remus and Tonks.

"You all look very nice," Ginny praised. The Order members were wearing dark muggle suits that would be commonly seen on businessmen and women.

"Thanks. I believe that we have young Harry here to thank for that," Tonks answered.

"Your welcome," Harry said. "I didn’t know who would be coming and frankly some wizards are hopeless in blending in with muggles."

"How are we going to get around London and where are we going?" asked Ginny.

"As to how, we have a ministry car outside to take us around today. As to where, I believe that that is up to you two," Tonks said.

"Ok, Harry, where are we going?" Ginny asked her boyfriend.

"Harrods," Harry answered.

"Harrods!" Ginny exclaimed. "Harrods! We get to shop in Harrods! We’ll get so many great clothes for you there."

"Yes, Ginny, Harrods," Harry said. "But it’s not just for me. I’m not going to take you shopping just for me. You get all of the clothes that you want too."

"Harry," Ginny answered naturally, "I don’t need you to buy me clothes. My clothes are fine."

"I know that, Ginny," Harry smiled at her. "I love how you look in anything and I know that you don’t need me to, but I want to."

"But…"

"Aaaa…," Harry cut her off, "no protesting. If I am to be your boyfriend you must learn to accept that I will want to spend money on you and shower you with gifts worthy of you."

Tonks had been observing the couple through all of this. Harry had quite a task in front of him if he were to break through the longstanding Weasley pride, however misplaced it was.

"Better accept, Ginny," said Tonks, "Because if you don’t, I’ll take him for myself. You wouldn’t hear me complaining if my boyfriend enjoyed showering me with gifts, not that that is necessary."

This statement from the young auror changed Ginny’s attitude.

"Ok, I guess that I can allow it," she said as if it would be an imposition before letting her excitement show through.

Ginny was so excited that she was absolutely bouncing on the balls of her feet. She launched herself at Harry and hugged and kissed him appreciatively.

The group exited the tavern and entered the ministry car that awaited them.

The manager of Harrods department store was an experienced man in helping the rich and famous in making use of their wealth. Harrods was a
store that specialized in making the customer happy for a price.

When John Wilson, general manager of Harrods, was told that a limousine had pulled up to the front of the store just after the store opened on this quiet Monday morning, he immediately went to greet the persons unknown. What he saw was six men and women in business suits exit the limo followed by two teenagers in more questionable clothes.

He just assumed the best and approached the group that had entered the store.

“Hello, welcome to Harrods,” he greeted the group as a whole. “How can we help you?”

Harry stepped up to the manager and shook his hand.

“Hello, I and my girlfriend, Ginny, need some clothes,” Harry said with as much class as he could muster in his less than aristocratic clothing. “My old stuff is destined for the burn pile.”

“Very good, you have come to the right place. My name is John and I am the manager here. And you are…”

“Harry.”

“Yes, Harry. I will get someone to work with you two today.” He gestured a salesperson behind him forward. “This is Sarah and she will assist you today. If you need anything ask her, or me, and we will be glad to help you.”

The manager excused himself and Sarah turned to the couple.

“Okay,” she said, using her more natural manner of speech rather than the more sophisticated patois that she was forced to assume when dealing with the older rich and powerful, “and how would you like to start, sir?”

“Please, call me Harry,” he said, “and Ginny here is in charge of choosing what clothes I need.”

“Hello, miss,” Sarah turned to Ginny, “and how should we start?”

“First, call me Ginny,” she said as well, “and second I think that we need to find an outfit and get him changed into something more appropriate before we do the rest of his wardrobe.”

“Well, then, Ginny,” Harry said, “I think that you need something new while you shop today also.”

“Harry, my clothes are not nearly as bad,” Ginny replied with a smile, “but who am I to refuse a new outfit.”

The next several hours of power shopping were punctuated with an amazing light lunch in a Harrods restaurant courtesy of John, the manager. The restaurant facilities contained within Harrods quickly became, for the group, something of note. They were really incredible, however, today was not about lunch, but a new wardrobe or two.

In total, Harry received every little thing that he could need from socks to handkerchiefs. Everything was replaced and Harry was left with brand new clothes hanging on his sleek form like a GQ model. Ginny was similarly outfitted for a night on the town in an elegant restaurant or in a posh club.

“Hey, Tonks,” Harry said when their muggle shopping was concluding at around three in the afternoon.

“Yeah, Harry,” Tonks answered.

“How much longer do we have here?”

“Plenty of time,” the Auror said. “Dumbledore arranged for us to have you back to the Burrow by eight o’clock. Why?”

“Oh, I was just thinking of dinner,” Harry said.

Harry paid for the day’s considerable purchases and thanked the manager and sales attendant. He even managed to get reservations for his group to go to dinner at a nice restaurant before returning to Diagon Alley for the remainder of his shopping.

“So,” said Ginny, “What’s next, kind sir?”

Harry laughed, “Well, how about an early dinner followed by a quick purchase of robes on Diagon Alley and have you home in time for your Mother to check that we have eaten and fuss over us some before bed and your special day tomorrow.”

“Oh, Harry,” she kissed his cheek, “If my special day is any more special than this, I don’t think that I would survive. I just want a calm relaxing day to rest on my birthday.”

“As you wish, now off to dinner.”

“So, Hermione? How was your day with my brother?” Ginny asked when they both were bedded down in Ginny’s room that night.

“It was fabulous,” Hermione gushed. “We went to all of the interesting shops in Diagon Alley and he even bought me a bunch of books in Flourish
and Blotts. He was attentive and gentlemanly all day.”

“What, you weren’t stranded in Quality Quidditch Supply all day?” Ginny feigned shock. “Has Ron broken something in his head?”

“No, but I think that someone must have realigned something for him. I doubt that he would have contained his excitement so well on his own. After Flourish and Blotts, where we spent all morning we only were in the Quidditch store for half an hour. That short of span, after he was so nice, I could stand.”

“So, did you kiss him?” Ginny asked with a sly smile.

Hermione blushed and turned her attention to the bedspread.

“Well, of course you kissed him. What am I thinking?” Ginny mocked, “The question is, did you find any dark corners to snog his brains out?”

“Ginny!” admonished Hermione as her face turned into a tomato in silent admission.

“You did!” Ginny exclaimed, “Well, then, I’m glad that Harry set up our separate days so we could both have special ones.”

“What?” Hermione asked. “How did you know that that was why Ron and I weren’t with you?”

“Harry isn’t that hard to understand,” she said. “Ron’s even easier, but that’s just because of Ron’s complete lack of depth in the romantic field.”

“Hey, your brother’s not that bad,” Hermione protested. “He seemed to know that the perfect time for me was to look at books with him,” she defended her boyfriend, “We even got Harry a book on Animagi Transformations. Ron and I looked through every book that they had on the subject. Apparently Harry asked Ron to find him one as he would be busy with you.”

“Well,” Ginny said, “thank you from him and especially from me too.”

Hermione was deep in thought at the events of the day.

“Ginny?” Hermione started. “You don’t suppose that Harry had asked Ron to get the book so that we would shop for books together, do you?”

“I think that it was even better than that,” Ginny offered. “Harry could’ve been the one to tell Ron to not spend all day in Quality Quidditch. You’re truly lucky if Ron is willing to take advice on how to make your dates better. Should save you endless hours of quidditch talk.”

“Yeah, I hope you’re right,” Hermione agreed. “So, how did your day with the Famous Harry Potter go?”

Ginny blushed. Hermione’s statement reminded her of how girlish she was in her early crush on the famous Harry Potter. She finally found her voice after recovering from the apparent embarrassment.

“It went great! We both have a new wardrobe,” she answered. “Harry has a fully new wardrobe and my closet is now full to bursting. He got me so many nice things and he let me pick out all of his clothes with a little help from Tonks. He just looks so delicious in some of the things that he got. Too bad the Hogwarts robes cover so much.”

“Well, look at it this way,” Hermione offered. “If the other girls don’t get a good look, you’ll have Harry relatively to yourself.”

“What do you mean?” Ginny argued. “He practically has an official fan club.”

“Practically?” Hermione joked. “As I recall you would be considered the president and founder of said club. After all, you formed a crush on him before any other female in this world had laid eyes on him.”

Ginny blushed in embarrassment from not being able to say Hermione was wrong.

“Quiet, you.”

“Yeah,” Hermione joked, “you just wait until the competition mounts for our young Harry James Potter, the richest and most eligible bachelor in all of the magic world.”

“What do you mean richest, what about Malfoy?” Ginny asked.

“I did some checking,” Hermione informed her. “Harry’s inheritance from Sirius was huge and he still has the Potter wealth coming to him when he comes of age. You know what he told me about your little shopping trip the other day?”

“No, what?” Ginny asked.

“He had never been shopping for anything but his school uniform before,” Hermione said, “and he had no idea how much money to bring today.”

“What do you mean?” Ginny asked. “He seemed to have plenty for the day.”

“That’s just my point,” Hermione said. “He had somewhere around four thousand galleons on him for the day’s shopping. You know, casual money.”

“Oh my gosh,” Ginny reacted. “Well, I’m going to have to defend my territory! He’s mine now.”
Harry and Ron were getting ready for bed when Ron asked how the day went for Harry.

"It was great," Harry said. "I don’t even know what all of the clothes that we got are for, but we got a lot."

"Anything for quidditch?" Ron asked.

"Nah," Harry said. "I still have my old uniform from last year. The school provides them and my pads are still good. How was your day?"

Ron slid from his bed and went to the desk in his room. "Good," he said as he moved across the room. "We got these for you," he said, tossing two books to Harry. "Hermione figured that more than one perspective would be best if you are going to start the thing. She said that those two were the best. They looked pretty straightforward to me, but I wouldn’t want to do it."

Harry sat up in his bed and retrieved the second book from where it fell on his comforter. "Why not?" Harry asked.

"Looks too complicated to me," Ron said. "It seems that you have to do hundreds of magic drawings of the animal and I was never any good at drawing."

"Oh," Harry said, a little daunted at the thought of such a difficult task.

"How are you at drawing?"

"Okay, I guess," Harry said. "The Dursley’s never encouraged drawing or any other creativity in their house, but when I was in primary school, we did have some art and drawing. I did alright," he declared with a shrug. "I was able to draw in the cupboard when I was little, but only in the dark late at night with any crayons and paper that I could sneak from Dudley. He never noticed because he always was distracted at the time blowing aliens up in one game or another. Only once or twice did Vernon or Petunia find one of the papers, but they never came in the cupboard, so I could draw on the walls a little. Decoration, you know?"

Ron was inwardly both confused and furious, but only showed his friend understanding for the horrible childhood that Harry had endured and accepted.

"Oh, hey, good news," Ron said to lighten the mood. "Bill spent all of today updating the wards and placing some new ones. He says that we are better protected now and he added some sort of ‘notice me not’ ward around the orchard so that we can play real quidditch without worrying about muggles. Isn’t that great!"

Harry smiled along with Ron at the good news. The Weasley’s would be protected and he could do some dive practice. Harry would be better prepared for quidditch this year than he had ever been before.
Harry woke early the next day, took a hot shower before dressing in some exercise clothes and slipping out of the Burrow to complete his morning exercises before the rest of the house got up. He intended to spend the entire day with Ginny, giving her his undivided attention.

Two hours later, Harry reentered the Burrow through the kitchen to find Molly cooking a breakfast fit for a king, or a queen in this case.

“Good morning, Mrs. Weasley,” Harry greeted the Weasley matriarch.

“Good morning, Harry, dear,” she returned. “What gets you up this early?”

“Well, Ginny said that she wants a quiet birthday,” Harry answered, “so I got all of my morning exercises done early so she could have as much of my attention as she wants.”

“That’s very nice of you, Harry,” Mrs. Weasley smiled.

Harry smiled back at her.

“How was your shopping trip yesterday?” she continued.

“It was wonderful,” Harry said as he took a seat at the scrubbed wood table. “I got a completely new wardrobe and was able to get Ginny some things as well. You know, once I convinced her to accept that I wanted to buy her presents, she seemed to have a wonderful time shopping.”

“Yes, that’s what she said,” Mrs. Weasley said, flipping the bacon. “I wanted to thank you for treating her so wonderfully.”

“She deserves it.”

“Arthur and I have never had much money until recently,” Mrs. Weasley lamented, “and so have had to get by with very little. It is nice to see her have the nicer things.”

“Mrs. Weasley,” Harry started seriously, “yesterday was the first time that I have ever had anything besides ill fitting hand me downs, with the exception of my school uniforms. Ginny and Tonks had to bully me into buying anything but loose, concealing clothing. The point is that I understand what it’s like to not have money, because I never had two coins to rub together before I entered this world. Money’s not important to me. I’ve always envied Ron his family. I would’ve gladly traded all that I had for a tenth of the love that he grew up with.”

“Oh, Harry,” she soothed as she enveloped him in a teary bear hug, “You’ll always have this entire family’s love in return. Even Percy’s now that he has come to his senses.”

Harry hugged her back before they broke apart.

“I just wanted you to understand that I respect you and Mr. Weasley for how you’ve raised such a wonderful group of children,” Harry told her. “Ginny’s amazing and I thank Merlin that she’s in my life. I buy her things because I enjoy it; just seeing the look on her face is heaven for me. I don’t do it to buy her love or to belittle what she received in childhood. She has always been well off in my eyes.”

“You’ve never had to buy her love,” Molly stated. “She gives it freely and I’m glad that you’ve gotten her to accept gifts from you. Sometimes the Weasley pride is a bit strong.”

“Yeah, you’re telling me,” Harry mumbled.

She smiled at the young man that she considered one of her sons.

“Mrs. Weasley?” Harry started again awkwardly. “While we’re talking…um…about the twin’s joke shop; I’m sure that Ron owled you about where they got the money.”

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“Mrs. Weasley?” Harry started again awkwardly. “While we’re talking…um…about the twin’s joke shop; I’m sure that Ron owled you about where they got the money.”

“Yes, Harry,” she said with a sigh, “he did owl me and I must say that I wasn’t pleased at first. I just want to hear your reasons.”

He looked her in the eye squarely. “I gave them the money immediately after the fourth year, on the train ride home,” Harry reminisced. “Just a week before, I witnessed Voldemort returned to life and realized that we’re at war and I figured everyone would need some joy to survive. Maybe with a lighter heart we can win this war, but if we’re all depressed, we wouldn’t last half as long. The Twins contribution, in a large part, will be to provide momentary distraction to the fighters. Although,” Harry told the mother, “they did very well in the Defense Association last year and I’m sure that they’ll make good fighters. They have the skill to defend themselves very well, and being Weasleys, I’m sure that they’ll defend others as well.”

“I just hate to think that they are wasting their lives, leaving school early,” Molly said wantily.

“Mrs. Weasley, many who graduate Hogwarts end up as low level employees or counter help in Diagon Alley,” Harry reasoned. “Your sons,
although they left early, have taken their education and opened their own shop. They are business owners and they employ others. I'm sure that you're proud of them."

"I guess that I am," Molly agreed. "Now get upstairs and get changed for my daughter's birthday breakfast while I finish making it."

Breakfast that morning was a happy affair with the entire family in attendance. All of the adult members of the family had taken their mornings off to dote over the first female Weasley born in several generations. Harry looked around and realized that Ginny seemed to be the center of the family, with all others trying to help her to have a good time.

"Ok," started Harry when all of the family had finished their meals, "When, traditionally, does Ginny get to open presents? Now or does she have to wait until after dinner?"

"Oh, I think that she can do it now," Mr. Weasley said. "Wouldn't want her to have to suffer through waiting."

Harry pulled Ginny's chair closer next to his and put his arm around her and she promptly put her head on his shoulder.

"In that case," Harry said, "allow me."

Harry let build a bit of power before removing his wand and saying the magic words.

"Accio Presents."

Harry concentrated on all of the presents leaving their respective hiding places and floating down the stairs and gently landing in a heap on the table. He treated them all gently in case anything was breakable. The Weasley family just looked on in awe.

"Harry," Mrs. Weasley chided, "You shouldn't perform underage magic."

"Madame Bones," said Mr. Weasley, "has granted him a provisional waiver until a hearing next week at the ministry."

"Hearing?" started Harry, "Oh well, not right now. This is for Ginny. Let's start on the presents," Harry said as he gave her a squeeze.

Ginny ripped and tore with the gusto Harry always associated with Ron on Christmas mornings. I guess that it runs in the family.

She received all manner of books and baubles from her family and happily examined each one before thanking the giver. At the last, as he had planned, lay a colorfully wrapped round, flat package from Harry.

"Oh, Harry," Ginny said. "You got me enough yesterday. You didn't need to get me more."

"Ginny," Harry reasoned, "I thought we established yesterday that I get you things out of want not need. Now don't you think that you should unwrap that?"

She shot him a dazzling smile before tearing into the wrapping. Revealed was a flat box with hinges on one side and a latch on the other.

"Well, go ahead," Harry said. "The box will only ever open for you. No one else can open it and the entire thing has an unbreakable charm on it so that it can't even be bashed open."

The sight was quite funny as she opened the latch quite gingerly. She opened the lid with the box tilted toward her so that she and Harry were the only ones able to see inside. She fairly squealed, dropping the box onto the table, where it closed, and hugged the stuffing out of her boyfriend.

"Ginny," asked Charley, "What is it?"

She released Harry and opened the box. She stuck her entire arm into the box to the other's amazement. The box was less than an inch in depth and still enveloped her entire arm. She withdrew a beautiful ebony handled broom with sleek and strong mahogany tail twigs.

"The Banshee," Harry narrated. "I'm told that it is the best Quidditch Chaser's broom in the world."

With the new charms on the Burrow, the children of Arthur and Molly Weasley had more freedom in one important area of life. Well, important to them.

The new wards placed on the Weasley property by Bill, just the previous day, left them protected, magically, from the view of muggles; allowing them to enjoy Quidditch without their previous height restrictions. They could fly to any altitude that they wished to justify to their mother.

They all knew that if they flew too high, their mum would have a fit for them being dangerous and reckless. She just worried.

Ginevra Molly Weasley, fifteen-year-old witch, was making the most of her birthday and the recently expanded wards over her home by stretching her new broom to its limits. She was flying maneuvers that would have previously left her unconscious on the ground just for the effort and failure of trying them. She was doing loop-the-loops and dives. She was doing barrel rolls and chicanes. She was doing speed runs and sudden stops. Simply, she was having the time of her life.
The only thing that could make the experience better would be to have her new boyfriend close to help.

Harry tried to stay close and give her tips. He tried, but he soon discovered that the new broom he had procured for his girlfriend was truly the best as she pulled away from him and outstripped him at every turn. The only thing that the broom didn’t perform as well at was the sudden adjustments necessary for seeking. It had smoother handling that would make her job as a chaser easier.

Well, at least she had stuck around long enough to absorb the lessons that he had for her on controlling a sport competition broom before she left him goggling.

“Harry…Harry!”

Harry looked to his left from his spot on the grass where he was looking at the most beautiful sight that he had ever seen; a happy woman that he just might love.

Amazing how emotions could change your perspective.

Perhaps one’s hate could also prevent them from seeing the obvious differences between people related to one another. Harry shook himself from the sudden and unwelcome ponderings on the Potions Master.

“Harry, that is truly a fantastic broom!” Ron exclaimed, “Where did you find it? I haven’t seen it in any of my magazines.”

“Well, I was talking to the Headmaster about what I wanted to get Ginny for her birthday,” Harry said, “and he offered to help in getting what I wanted. That broom is a beta release prototype just out of in-company testing from the number one broom maker in south-east Asia, from Hong Kong.”

“Hong Kong!” Ron yelled. “Only you could get the Headmaster of the best school in Europe to buy a broom for you from the other side of the world that’s not even in production yet. You never cease to amaze me.”

“Um…Thanks?” Harry answered unsure.

“Hey, when can I ride it?” Ron asked excitedly.

“Not my permission to give,” Harry said. “You’ll have to ask your sister. Course, I’m not even sure that she’ll let me ride it.”

“Oh, great,” Ron seemed crestfallen suddenly, “she’ll never let anyone use it. She’s awfully possessive and protective of what is hers.”

“Oh well,” Harry said, “I guess that I can understand getting like that when you’re the youngest of seven.”

“Yeah, well,” Ron said with a smirk, “just so that you’re prepared. After all, you are hers now and therefore she’ll be protective and possessive with you once we’re back at Hogwarts. All those girls drooling over you and she’ll be hexing them left and right till they stay away from you.”

“Yeah, fine with me,” Harry smiled. “I’ve found what I want and don’t want the attention anyway.”

Ginny ended the day by thanking everyone for their gifts and then launching herself on Harry for another enthusiastic ‘thank you’.

Harry wondered how many times you could be choked in a day before the lightheadedness would refuse to wear-off.

“Gin,” he called again. When she didn’t respond, Harry lifted the bristly end of the broom and sat beside her on the couch. He waited for her attention, but she was still too distracted with her new toy. Harry could tell that more drastic measures would be necessary. In one fluid motion, Harry cradled the back of Ginny’s neck and tilted her mouth to where he could kiss her properly. He bent over her and planted a solid kiss on her lips, sending all previous thought from Ginny’s mind. She dropped the broom to her lap and polishing rag to the floor. It took her more than half of her available breath to react with more than her own lips and move her hands to Harry’s shoulders to pull him in tighter.

They broke to regain their breath after some truly inspired work on both their parts.

“Not that I mind, Harry,” Ginny said, “but, what was that for?”

“I had tried to get you attention with a more conventional method first,” Harry smirked, “but it seems that I have been replaced by a stick of wood with a feminine name.”

“Nonsense,” Ginny claimed, “I said ‘yeah’. What did you need? Or were you actually just after some snogs?”

“Snogs aren’t bad,” Harry said, “but I wanted to ask you if you wanted to go to the muggle cinema in town?”

Ginny didn’t have to consider it for a moment. “Fabulous,” Ginny said. “I’d love to. The girls in my year told me about them, but I’ve never gone.
What’re we going to see? Are we allowed to even go out? What about protection?”

“Well,” Harry said, reviewing all of the questions in his mind. “I don’t know what’s playing, just that there is a cinema with a few screens at the far side of town. I asked your mum and she said we can go out as long as we have at least one Order member with us, and we just go to Ottery St. Catchpole, but she said she wouldn’t be able to go. So I floo’d Tonks and she’s available in about an hour if we wanted to go to the matinee.”

Ginny thought about it, trying to find any holes Harry had missed so that their afternoon wouldn’t be cut short. “What about Ron and Hermione?” Ginny asked.

“I asked them,” Harry said, “but, apparently Hermione is teaching Ron a lesson about procrastination. Until Ron finishes his homework, there will be no leaving the property and she said she’s limiting other things slightly as well.”

Ginny’s attempt to raise an eyebrow in a stoic inquiry that was ruined by her giggles. Finally she asked, “Do we even want to know what ‘other things’ she is limiting?”

“No,” Harry said with a smile, “and she did say ‘limiting’, not completely stopping, so a definite ‘No!’”

By half past one in the afternoon, Harry and Ginny were waiting patiently for Tonks while they reviewed the booklet that came with Ginny’s new broom. Without a home telephone, they had no chance of finding what movies were playing, not that they would know anything about the movies from the titles.

Ginny was fascinated by the content of the booklet that described the unique features and gave advice on the care and use of the broom, along with an owl address for comments on the pre-release broom and instructions to send the reports owl collect so that she wouldn’t have to pay the owl-post office for an international owl to Hong Kong.

Harry, on the other hand, found the poorly translated technical manual comical. The mixing up of verbs and especially adjectives made him wonder if it was translated from the original language with a defective translation charm or if someone from the company could explain what they meant by the instruction, ‘When in a constricted bend, rotate into the revolution and sink your contour for the paramount competence.’

They were startled out of their reading and talking when the fire flared green, as Tonks tumbled out of the floo. She nearly made it look both purposeful and elegant when she managed a complete roll and sprung to her feet, only to spoil it by over-rotating and catching her toe on the living room rug. Before they could muster a greeting or a ‘thank you’ for taking them to town, Tonks’ trip took her straight at Harry on the couch. She ended up on top of a forcefully reclined Harry, with her lower half across Ginny’s lap.

Harry blushed and fumbled the fully mature witch on his lap causing Ginny to burst into laughter. After several failed attempts to right herself, Tonks finally found the floor in a direct fashion with a solid landing on her back side.

Harry quickly found his feet and helped the errant Auror from the floor while Ginny decided to stop laughing and offer some verbal encouragement. “You know Tonks,” Ginny said as she stood next to Harry and started to play with the soft hairs at the back of his neck, “if you wanted to join us on the couch, you could have asked first. Although, I’m really not sure that Harry could handle the both of us. Not that I would share.”

Harry tried to bat Ginny’s teasing fingers away as he blushed a tomato red. Ginny batted his hand back and latched onto his arm with a smile at Tonks, who fought off the blush from her performance with metamorphic efficiency.

“Whether he could handle us or not,” Tonks teased back, “we would have a lot of fun finding out,” she said boldly. “If you ever figured out how to share that is.”

Harry groaned, “I’m doomed.”

The couple and their escort managed to slip the house without much more teasing and with a good amount of mirth. They made it along the roads to the Ottery St. Catchpole, a town small enough to brag of a three-screen multiplex, the most modern in the area, as the local grocer would tell you. They made it to the theater just in time to see an American action movie that had been playing for more than a month, although neither teen had heard of it nor the television show that it was derived from in the first place, Harry because he had not been allowed to watch much telly and Ginny because any telly’s her father brought home were not in working order long enough to watch.

They left the theater happy after finding the movie entertaining but confusing. Harry liked when Ginny used him for comfort every time she spooked at an explosion on-screen. Ginny enjoyed the whole idea of the movies. Tonks, however, just enjoyed watching the teens use any excuse to cuddle in the darkened theater while she diligently kept watch for any persons entering the building or approaching the couple. The walk back was taken up with Ginny’s questions about the muggle technology that she had witnessed in the movie. Harry answered as many as he could, but had to admit a bit of ignorance as well, owing to his leaving the muggle world when he was eleven after an isolated childhood.

Overall, a good day for all involved.
"Harry," Harry was greeted as he came into the Burrow. "Good morning."

"Good morning, Mr. Weasley," Harry replied.

"You seem well awake for a Saturday morning," Arthur said.

"Yes sir," Harry agreed. "I just got back from my morning workout. It's good for waking you up."

At that moment the door to the kitchen opened, and Mrs. Weasley appeared.

"Good morning, dears," she said, "Are you both ready for some breakfast?"

"Sure," Harry smiled, "thank you Mrs. Weasley."

They both got up, went to the kitchen table and sat for the morning meal.

"Harry?" asked Mr. Weasley, "I've seen you working out every morning that you've been back to the Burrow. What changed? Why the sudden fervor for fitness?"

"Well," Harry started, contemplating what to tell his substitute parents. He did view them as parents; they were the closest that he had ever known. "I'll tell you if you both promise not to try to stop me or overreact."

Seeing the serious demeanor of their almost son they became quite somber themselves.

"Of course, dear," said Mrs. Weasley, "Please tell us, if it's so serious."

"Well, um," said Harry, "Did Professor Dumbledore ever tell you what you were guarding at the Department of Mysteries?"

They looked at each other, having a silent conversation through their eyes.

"He told us that it was a prophecy," Arthur answered, "but that was lost when the sphere was broken during the fight."

Harry took a deep, steadying breath.

"That's true," he said. "The ministry record of the prophecy was lost, along with a bunch of others, but the it's still be remembered by the person that heard it when it was given and other people know the first portion of it."

"What do you mean, dear?" she asked. "Do you know what is in the prophecy? And wouldn't the giver of the prophecy know it also, now that I think about it?"

"The giver of the prophecy, when she gives a true prophecy, does not even know that she gave a prophecy, much less the content," Harry said. "The person who heard the prophecy was none other than Professor Dumbledore."

They were shocked. They had obviously thought that the prophecy was lost.

"I think that you should understand the danger around me," Harry said. "So, if you would like to hear it, I'll tell you, but it could put you and your family in danger. Voldemort," he said, ignoring their flinch, "spent an entire year trying find out what was in the prophecy; so if he finds out that you know it, it may put you in more danger. It's your choice," Harry offered.

Arthur and Molly shared a look; one that only a long married couple could. In that look was as much discussion as they needed to decide to be informed, all without a word spoken.

"I think that we need to know, Harry," Arthur responded. "Our family will be in this fight whether we know the whole story or not. We won't back away from the right thing to do."

"Thank you," Harry said sincerely. "The prophecy was between Voldemort, Harry paused while they flinched, "and me. It was given before I was born. The part that Voldemort," again a flinch, "knows was that a baby would be born at the end of July to parents that had gone against him three times, and that that child would be the one able to vanquish him." By now Harry was just trudging on for the very fact that when he stopped, he wouldn't be able to restart. "This caused him to want to kill me and for more than a year after I was born, he hunted my parents, trying to get them in a position to kill me as a baby. He caught them at Godric's Hollow when Peter Pettigrew betrayed them and me. My father tried to give my mom enough time to get away by standing in Voldemort's way, but this only got my mother to my crib before she was set upon by the bastard. She pleaded for my life, but he just killed her to get to me. Her sacrifice and some ancient blood magic protected me when he cast the curse, leaving me with this scar," Harry said, moving his bangs for a view of his forehead. "What he didn't know is that the last part of the prophecy foretold that
part; it said that he would mark me as his equal and neither of us may live while the other survives. This means that, until one of us is victorious, this will be our focus in life. Now that I know this, I know that I need to prepare," Harry concluded. "There is more, but that is the important part."

The couple sat there in shock.

"Morning."

Harry turned to see the rest of the house's residents come into the kitchen.

"You told them, didn't you, Harry?" Ginny concluded from the looks on her parents' faces.

This snapped Mrs. Weasley out of her stupor.

"You told them!?!"

"Not long ago," Harry said. "But I had to tell them because Ron and Hermione are my best friends and they needed to know what they have gotten themselves in for, I wanted Ginny to know what the danger is and what I have in store for my life, so that if it was too much she could leave me before it started."

"Oh Harry, you know that I could never leave you," Ginny said.

Harry hugged his girlfriend a thankful good morning.

"Thank you, Gin. That means a lot, but if it's ever too much, I'll understand," Harry replied with a downcast face.

Ginny didn't like his demeanor. He, sometimes, lacked self-confidence and it bugged her.

So she hit him in the shoulder.

"Ow," Harry said, "What was that for?"

"That is for thinking that we would abandon you!" she scolded, "We all love you and will stand by you to the end."

"The end," Harry whispered.

"Yes, the end of your destiny but not your life," Ginny argued. "You know what that prophecy tells me?" she asked.

"What?" Harry asked. "It looks pretty bleak to me."

"It tells me that you can win this," Ginny said, drawing Harry into a tight hug. "It tells me that this is your focus now but once you are victorious, you will have finished with your destiny and can have your life to yourself with no obligation to anyone but me. It tells me that we have a long and happy life ahead of us."

Most men would run to the hills after their future was planned like this, but Harry knew where the feeling and planning was coming from. She was not trying to trap him, merely give him a future to look forward to.

But he still couldn't rest with things where they stand.

"Oh?" Harry quipped. "And in this future that you have planned for me, what will I be doing with my time?"

Ginny rose to the challenge with a wry smile on her face.

"Oh, that's simple, honey," Ginny returned. "You will be a statesman, called on to go all over the world and give your opinion to magical governments and give interviews and when you are not doing that you will be the best dad to our thirty-six children."

Harry pulled her over into his lap, wrapping his arms around her waist. She leaned into his chest, happy with the position.

"Thirty-six, Ginny?" Harry smiled. "And what would you do if I only wanted twenty one children, Miss Weasley?"

She giggled, the others just looked on in amazement.

"I guess," she responded, "at that point I will just have to get you drunk and have my way with you, Mister Potter."

"Really, Miss Weasley?" Harry asked. "And what if I don't like the idea of forgetting that due to a drunken amnesia?"

Ron was starting to have enough of his sister and best friend's public displays of affection.

"Oh," Ginny dragged out, "I don't think that it will take that much alcohol to let me have my way with you, Mister Potter."

She kissed him deeply, settling deeper into his lap for the long haul.

"Eew," said Ron, having had enough of the display. "Mom, can you make them stop, we still have to eat here and at this rate I'll lose my appetite."

Harry and Ginny smiled at each other.
“Good job, Ginny,” Harry congratulated her. “It took less time to gross him out this time. I get the lead next time.”

“Ginny, Harry,” Mrs. Weasley scolded absentmindedly as she cooked the eggs, “stop trying to gross your brother out. It’s not fair to him. He doesn’t know how to deal with such…displays.”

“Mo-o-om,” whined Ron.

“Besides, such things are best left for the private, not in front of your brothers,” she continued. “They are being supportive but their support could waiver if you subject them to too much of that.”

“Yeah, what she said,” quipped Ron.

“They’re right, Harry,” said Ginny, “Let’s go find a suitable ‘private’ location so as not to subject Ron to such ‘displays’,” she said while getting up and dragging Harry with her.

“No, Ginny,” Molly said, “sit back down and eat your breakfast.”

“And I don’t like the idea of finding you two all over the house in private moments, or worse not finding you,” Ron stated firmly. “You two can just conduct yourselves where we all know that you are safe.”

“We will if you will,” Harry stated with a challenging smile.

Harry was doing his exercises the next morning in the orchard when he started to think of what Ginny had said about his future. He was currently running between the trees. He found this to be a sufficiently mindless activity to let him think of other topics.

Harry liked the idea of a future. He could have a life once he was rid of his current problems. He could have fun and travel. He could have a family. He could have Ginny.

Harry was jolted out of his reverie when a cold bolt froze his southern regions. Areas below his waist were feeling like he was in the arctic. He was absolutely freezing.

Harry quickly made his way back to the house, entering through the kitchen.

“Good morning, Harry. How was your run?” asked Mrs. Weasley.

“Good until the last, Mrs. Weasley,” Harry said with a pensive look on his face. By now his boxers were back to room temperature.

“What’s wrong, Harry?”

Harry thought for a second.

“I was finishing my run when my shorts turned cold,” Harry told her. “It jolted me out of what I was doing.”

“Did it stop?” she asked.

“Yeah,” Harry confirmed, “I started back here and it wore off.”

Mrs. Weasley pondered the situation.

“Well,” she asked, “what were you doing besides running?”

“I was thinking,” Harry said.

“About what?”

“About what we were talking about yesterday morning,” Harry answered.

“The future?” Mrs. Weasley asked, wiping her hands on her apron.

“Yeah,” Harry admitted, “I guess that I never have contemplated surviving to the future before.”

“Oh, Harry, of course you have a future,” she assure him with a mother’s care.

“I’m starting to realize that now, Mrs. Weasley,” Harry told her. “When you’re a kid, you don’t think about the future. Within a couple of years of being at Hogwarts, the thought of a future was only a remote possibility. By that time I knew that an evil wizard with a lot of power wanted to kill me and it wasn’t until I talked to my friends about the prophecy that I realized that I could have a chance. I like the thought of a future. I like the thought of the future that Ginny spoke about. I like the idea of a life with her.”

“Then that’s a good thing dear,” Mrs. Weasley said with a smile. “She would make you happy and I am sure you will make her happy.”

She turned around from the stove to see Harry with his mouth open and his eyes bugged out.
“What is it, dear?” she asked, concerned.

Harry was just trying to breathe and fanning his hands.

“Did your shorts freeze again?” she asked as delicately as she could.

“Yes,” he screeched out at a very unmanly pitch.

She thought about this momentarily.

“Do me a favor,” Mrs. Weasley commanded, “concentrate on Quidditch, flying and chasing the snitch.”

Harry closed his eyes, obviously picturing the scene that she insisted upon.

His mouth closed as his shorts heated back up.

“Ah, better,” Harry said in relief. “How did you know?”

“Experience,” she said sagely. “Now picture Quidditch still and think about this…do you remember last year’s Quidditch?”

Harry scowled, remembering his ban.

“Yes, that was not the best year for you,” she sympathized. “Now think about who replaced you as seeker and how she did.”

Harry thought about his ban and his replacement, Ginny. She did so well at seeker, she looked so good chasing the snitch.

Harry’s eyes shot open as his boxers hit a new low.

“All right, Harry,” Mrs. Weasley said, “looks like we figured that one out. Now think about something else. How about transfiguration.”

Harry’s mouth changed from a shocked ‘oh’ look to a more satisfied ‘ah’ face.

“Good,” she said, “now while you have that in control, go back upstairs and take a good hot shower and change.”

“Thanks, Mrs. Weasley,” Harry said with genuine appreciation. “How did you do that? You’re very smart.”

“It comes from having six boys. Before the twins committed their first prank, Bill and Charlie were turning Percy’s hair blue.”

Harry chuckled. “Must have horrified him.”

“Yeah, I found it quite funny,” she smiled. “Not that I told them anything of the sort. Can’t have mum approving of such things, now can we?”

“Of course not, Mrs. Weasley,” Harry returned with a smile as well.

“Now, get upstairs and into the hot shower before my daughter makes her way back into your head,” Mrs. Weasley said quickly, shooing Harry from the table.

The first thought that flew into his mind was of his beautiful girlfriend.

Harry got up quickly, his southern region freezing again.

“You just had to say that didn’t you?” Harry asked as he left.

She chuckled as Harry ran up the stairs to his room and the hot shower.

“No, Harry,” she said to herself, “can’t have my son’s having all of the fun now can I?”

Harry found, after shedding his offending undergarment, a card in his underwear drawer from wonderful Percival Ignatius Weasley entitled ‘Frozen Shorts: Try to be careful of your thoughts’.

“Great,” he moaned.
Harry needed some trial and error dressing before he could come down stairs after his hot shower. Percy was more clever than Harry had previously thought to give him credit for. Maybe there was more than a by-the-book rule follower somewhere under Percy’s strict exterior. He entered the kitchen to find their morning meal underway with more partakers than he’d expected. It seems that the entire Weasley clan decided to have Sunday Breakfast at the clan headquarters, aka The Burrow.

"Hello, all," Harry greeted, "to what do we owe this pleasure?"

Fred and George looked at him as if he were speaking Greek.

"He means," offered Bill, "Why is the entire rabble roused this Sunday morning?"

"Again, Huh?" asked Fred, or was it George, Harry never knew.

Charlie chuckled with the rest and cleared the mess up.

"Bill means, that Harry means; Why are we all here?" clarified Charlie, "And to that, the answer is, we decided that while we are all in country, we would all enjoy a Sunday morning breakfast as a family."

"Oh, and it wasn’t to see Percy’s prank in action?" asked their mother with a look in her eye that would have made Doctor Mengele confess to his crimes.

Bill and Charlie withered under her gaze. Fred and George looked like innocent angels. Of course the magically conjured halos were a bit over the top.

"Just as I thought. But that’s fine with me," responded Mrs. Weasley to their non-answer, "I will expect each and every one of you here every Sunday morning until Ron and Ginny go back to school and some visits after that as well."

"Awww, Mo-o-o-om," whined the twins.

"Yes, and I think that Christmas should be here," added Mr. Weasley.

"That’s okay, Dad," answered Charlie, "We already planned it that way so that Harry can declare me the winner of the pranking championship."

"Dream on, dear brother," quipped Bill.

"Sounds wonderful, children," agreed Mrs. Weasley, "and you can just invite all of your Girlfriends as well. I would like to meet them as none of you have bothered to bring them by and I know that you are all…involved."

The bulk of the Weasley males paled at this request.

"How did…"

"…you know…"

"…about Angelina?" asked Fred.

"…about Katie?" asked George.

"I can read all of my boys like books," she answered.

Harry laughed, "Face it guys, you can’t hide anything from your mother."

"And you, Harry," said Ginny, "can’t hide anything from me."

"I’d never dream of it."

They smiled at each other, oblivious to the looks from her brothers.

"Here, Harry," said Mr. Weasley, "let me draw you up another chair so you can join us properly rather than just stand there."

"No need," Ginny said, patting her mouth with her napkin and standing, "Harry can sit in this chair."

Harry moved over and sat in the offered chair, disappointed that Ginny was leaving the table.
And I will sit in my chair,” she said, sitting sideways in his lap. She reached for a plate that Mrs. Weasley was holding out piled high with eggs, toast and bacon. She studiously ignored the rest of the Weasley clan’s expression as she fed her boyfriend while sitting comfortably on his lap.

Mr. and Mrs. Weasley saw no problems with the innocent byplay, as they tried to keep from laughing. They trusted both of them and found the reaction of their sons to be funny.

Percy was the first to react.

“What is it that you think that you are doing?” he scolded. “And, Harry, how is it that you are able to just sit there after the prank that I pulled?”

“Prank?” asked Ginny, ignoring the first question.

Harry retrieved the card he had found in his underwear drawer and handed it to Ginny with an explanation of what his boxers were charmed to do.

“Oh, that must have been uncomfortable,” Ginny said. She looked at the card a second time. “Wait a second,” she held the card up for the rest of the table, “Percival Ignatius Weasley? I thought that your first name was Percy.”

Percy stirred indignantly but Mrs. Weasley was the one to answer.

“Of course it is,” she said.

“Yeah,” Ginny said, “But on the card it says Percival!”

“Percival,” Percy said with his nose up, “is the more dignified, proper version of Percy.”

“Only you, Perce,” Bill said, “would use a longer version of your name than your birth certificate.”

“Please, Bill,” Percy said, “I hate it when you call me by that shortened name. At the very least it is Percy.”

“Anyway,” Harry said in laughter, “yeah, but your mum figured out what thoughts were triggering my shorts to freeze and I just took a hot shower and changed,” answered Harry. “By the way, thanks for the help, Mrs. Weasley.”

“Glad it worked, Harry,” she said in a motherly voice.

“But it was your whole drawer of boxers,” sputtered Percy.

“I know,” Harry stated simply.

“What did you have to not think about?” asked Ginny.

“You,” answered Harry with a smile.

She gave a curt, “Oh.”

Harry whispered quietly into her ear, so that no other could hear, how he defeated it.

“Ohhh,” she said, much longer this time.

“How?” asked Fred.

“How did you defeat the charm? It was one of our best, unbreakable,” added George.

“Boys, boys, boys,” Harry said while looking at the redheads, “I won’t reveal how I defeat any of your pranks, or my full opinion, until Christmas when the judging is to take place. But I must say, good job Percy. It hit me below the belt.”

“Harry?” Mr. Weasley said at the Sunday evening dinner table before the rest of the family joined them for dinner. “Don’t forget your hearing tomorrow morning.”

“Okay, sir,” Harry responded. “How will I get there?”

“You can come to work with me,” Arthur said.

“What’s it about?” Harry asked. “I thought that I already got my waiver.”

“You did,” Mr. Weasley said, “but they want a hearing for some reason and only the Wizengamot knows why.”

Harry thought for a second and then agreed, seeing as it was out of his hands.

“As you are not a defendant, you can bring someone for support,” Mr. Weasley offered. “You could ask Ginny along if you want.”

“Do you think that I should?” Harry asked.
"If it’s about what I think that it is," Mr. Weasley speculated, "I think that you may want someone for emotional support, and you seem to be close to my daughter.”

“Oh,” said Harry, downcast. "If it is about that, then maybe she should come.”

“Good morning, Mister Potter,” Harry was greeted after he sat in the witness chair in front of the adjudicating body. Ginny seated herself next to him in support.

“Please, call me Harry, Madame Bones,” Harry responded.

“Very well, as this is an informal hearing, leeway for comfort is allowed,” she said with a small smile to Harry and the rest of the court, “so please call me Amelia. I want you to feel comfortable during the interview.”

"Okay, Madame…I mean Amelia. What is the hearing about?” Harry asked, looking at Ginny then at the assembly of the Wizengamot.

“This is to rectify some issues,” Madame Bones said, “where I believe that we as a society have failed you in the past.”

“Oh,” Harry said, noticing how this didn’t answer the question.

“Are you sure that you would like to have Miss Weasley here during this?” she asked.

The reason for her vagueness came out to Harry as he understood that she didn’t even wish Ginny to know the subject if he were going to send her out.

“No,” Harry said, “I trust her and want her here.”

“As you wish,” she acquiesced. "In order to not have to bring any other witnesses in on this case, we request that you voluntarily take Veritaserum so that the matters may be solved without any delay.”

“Will these proceedings be private?” Harry asked, concerned.

“They will be public record of their result,” she said, “but not in their content. What you say in this case will be protected.”

“Thank you, Amelia,” Harry said with relief. “Then I will submit to the potion.”

The door at the end of the room opened, admitting an old man in white healer robes to the hearing room.

“Healer Fairclaw will administer the potion,” Madame Bones stated, “and will stay in the room during the effect as medical support.”

“If that’s necessary,” answered Harry, uncomfortable with people knowing any of his secrets, but wanting to cooperate.

“Veritaserum should never be administered without medical aid,” Madame Bones stated, “as it is a sensitive potion with potential side effects.”

“Really,” Harry said a little wide-eyed. “I didn’t know that. What happens if you give too much?”

“A complete emptying of a person’s mind through their babbling mouth, maybe, well probably death if there is enough,” answered the Healer.

“Why do you ask, Harry?” asked Madame Bones.

“Someone once wanted to find something out from me,” Harry recited, “and so they gave me what they thought was an entire vial of Veritaserum, all at once.”

The healer looked horrified. Madame Bones silently counted him lucky.

“Now, can we start?” Harry asked, squeezing Ginny’s hand lightly.

The healer administered three drops of the potion to Harry’s tongue, which Harry swallowed. After several moments, the healer waved his wand above and around Harry’s head.

“It is in place and he is not fighting it,” the Healer officially stated.

“Good,” said Madame Bones, “Harry, the healer must stand behind you for the duration. As a part of the legal use of Veritaserum, he must monitor the potion both for safety and to make sure that you are not fighting it. He will know if you overcome the potion, so please, do not make the effort.”

“I understand,” Harry said in an uncaring voice.

“Okay,” she started, “Harry, please state your full name for the record.”

"Harry James Potter," was his bland response.

“What is the address of your residence?” she asked, chairing the panel.
That's strange," said one Wizengamot member. "Are you sure that the potion is working, Healer Fairclaw?"

"Of course," said the healer, "I just had shrimp for lunch yesterday."

"Thank you, Harry," Madame Bones said, ignoring the byplay amongst the officials in the room, "but no need to go into such detail. I don't even understand most of that. We'll ask you for more details as necessary."

"Okay," Harry replied with glassy eyes.

"Why were you placed at this residence?" the Chairwoman asked.

"My parents were killed after Peter Pettigrew, their secret keeper, betrayed them to his master, Tom Marvolo Riddle, when he was trying to kill me."

This elicited gasps and whispers from the limited audience. "I survived and Albus Percival Wulfric Brian Dumbledore decided that I should be placed with relatives of my mother to maintain the blood magic created by her sacrifice, which would protect me from Voldemort’s followers and living with the Dursley’s would prevent me from growing up arrogant as a famous wizard."

Madame Bones, as the Chairperson of the current Wizengamot Judicial Committee, was the sole interviewer, but in attendance were a fair number of Wizengamot members including the Chief Warlock. Professor Dumbledore winced at his own part in the story.

"And were these blood protections successful?" Amelia asked.

"I don't know of any attempts," Harry said with little inflection in his voice, "but I was never attacked by any deatheaters while in residence there."

"Thank you," she said. "And now I would like to discuss what life was like for you with the Dursley's..."

The questioning went on for over three hours, ending after the detailed biography of Harry’s life in and out of the wizarding world. The questions traveled from the Dursleys to his time at Hogwarts and his encounters with Voldemort. He was questioned on things that he would never have answered while not under the influence of a potion, but true to his word he didn’t resist the truth potion. His answers wove a tale of physical, mental, and emotional abuse from his relatives and danger, distrust and strife from the wizarding world. The silver lining to Harry’s dark cloud of a life in his story was his friends. He would not have survived without them.

Madame Bones ended the session after it seemed that she had gotten every detail for any number of types of hearings, only Harry was never told the goal of this particular one. The only definite effect that they had yet was the silent tears streaming down Ginny's cheeks and her tight grip on Harry's hand.

"Okay. Thank you Mister Potter. We will consider what you have told us during lunch and will meet back here at two o'clock. Ministry Aurors Tonks and Shacklebolt will accompany you during this time if you wish to go anywhere. This is standard procedure when dealing with witnesses during legal interviews. Thank you for your assistance to this committee."

Ginny quickly cleaned herself up before Harry could be administered the antidote and come fully to consciousness, so that she could offer Harry strength in overcoming the memories that had been dredged up.

"You're welcome," Harry said.

"Please administer the antidote, Healer Fairclaw," Amelia instructed.

"So, Harry, Ginny, where would you like to go to lunch?" Tonks asked. "This one is on the Ministry."

"Can we go into muggle London and find somewhere nice to eat?" Harry asked. "I've rarely had lunch in a London restaurant."

Ginny smiled at him. She was seething inside, but knew that seeing her anger at how the world had treated such a wonderful man would not benefit him, just as her tears would not have. It would only make him withdraw.

"Fine by me," Ginny offered.

"Muggle London it is," Tonks said enthusiastically.

They had a pleasant lunch in a French restaurant, not far from the entrance to the Ministry that Kingsley had recommended. The subject of what was covered in the hearing was not addressed; the two aurors were not in the room at the time, and Ginny was not about to talk about anything so painful as Harry’s life had been. She just knew that she needed to make sure that his life was better and happier from this point on and if Harry wanted to talk about it, she would be available.

Ginny felt privileged to have heard so much about her boyfriend, especially as he would not openly volunteer to recap his life’s story. But as he had chosen to let her into his secrets, they could move past that part of his life, at least partially.

"Hello, Harry," Amelia restarted the session after lunch. "Thank you for returning on-time."
“Easy to do when you have an auror escort,” Harry joked.

“True,” she smiled back. “Now, I am sure that you are wondering why we have been having this hearing.”

Harry nodded, knowing that they had concealed it for a good reason, but he had been assured that he was not under any charges, so he cooperated completely.

“We held this hearing due to your lack of magical guardian and the inappropriate nature of your muggle guardians,” Madame Bones informed him. “I have brought this hearing to determine what would be in your best interest for your future. I apologize for not informing you as to the nature of the hearing until now, but this has been found to be the best way to elicit unbiased responses. We would like to hear what you have to say in the matter before we enter our own thoughts into the discussion. Your opinion is obviously important to this hearing.”

“Well,” pondered Harry, “I guess it comes down to is who has the legal responsibility to make decisions on my behalf. The Dursleys hate the magical world, so they wouldn’t make worthy guardians. As I spend most all of my time in the magical world, this is the one that seems to count, so any guardian or decisions need to be made by someone knowledgeable in the wizarding world. Sirius Black was my previous legal guardian, but as you heard and know, he was in Azkaban for a crime that he didn’t commit, and he couldn’t make decisions for me, except for a couple. Even counting him, I don’t think that any adult knows me well enough to make the decisions that will be in my best interest, as they don’t know what I really need. I mean no offense to anyone,” he said looking at the Professor, “but decisions require prior knowledge on the subject and I don’t see me getting to know any adults that well before I’m an adult myself. I’m afraid I don’t know who should be my guardian.”

“What you said is remarkably like what your headmaster has said himself,” she confirmed, “and has been agreed upon by this committee. We have found that the muggle and wizarding world both have done you a great disservice in your treatment and we would like to give you the opportunity to lead you own life. We understand that you have the resources to not need the financial support of a guardian and that, as you said, none know your needs as well as you do. We have decided, with your assent, that you shall be considered an adult from this day forward with all of the rights and responsibilities. This is at your discretion for your decision at this time.”

“Oh,” Harry said evenly.

“Would you like time to consider this?” Madame Bones asked.

“Can I ask something?” Harry said.

“I believe you just did,” Madame Bones said, “but you may ask more questions.”

“Would this mean that I would have to get my own house and that I couldn’t stay with the Weasley’s any more?” Harry asked with a shy, schoolboyness.

Madame Bones was startled at this thought that he would be thrust out into the world alone was his fear.

“No, Harry,” she assured him, “as an adult you would be able to make your own decisions, but you may accept help from any that you wish. This means that if Author and Molly wish you to stay with them, you may.”

“Oh, okay,” Harry said. “Thank you.”

Harry felt his hand being squeezed. He turned his head to look into Ginny’s eye. He shrugged his shoulders. ‘Should I become an adult?’ he conveyed silently. She squeezed his hand to communicate, ‘It’s your choice.’ He raised his eyebrow to her. ‘I want to know what you think.’ She paused, looking up and to the right as one does when they are thinking. She looked him in the eye once more and nodded, completing their silent conversation. ‘Yes, I think that you should.’

Harry was happy for her opinion. The audience was amused at the silent conversation happening between the two. Most couples would be lucky to elicit a single yes or no with a single unasked question, but they had just clearly witnessed a complete conversation being transacted with just facial expressions; one that was clearly understood by both, even if the content wasn’t fully understood by the audience.

“How long have they been dating?” a member of the Wizengamot asked Professor Dumbledore.

Professor Dumbledore was not usually one for joining in the middle of gossip, (listening; sure…starting; an amusement) but he understood the reason for the question.

“A little over two weeks, if I am not mistaken,” the Professor said in a hushed whisper.

“Remarkable.”

Their attention turned once again to the subject at hand.

“Well, Madame Bones…uh…Amelia, I guess that the answer is: Yes I would like to be an adult,” Harry said with some doubt.

“Very well, Harry. Then this court has the privilege of declaring Harry James Potter an adult. The necessary Ministry departments will be informed,” she said officially. She let her face shift to a more maternal one before continuing. “Harry, I encourage you to seek advice and assistance, when needed, as you make a life for yourself. I am sure that you have more friends than you suspect who would be willing and pleased to aid you in your life.”

“Mister Potter, on another related matter, the goblins of Gringotts will wish to talk to you at your convenience now that you are an adult,” said a
“Why is that Mister…” Harry prompted.

“John Wilbanks, I am, among other things, the liaison to Gringotts Bank,” he said, “I am sorry for not telling you sooner, but I was given strict instructions that you should not know of their interest before your decision as they believed that it would influence your decision.”

“Okay…would you be able to tell me what they want?” Harry asked.

“I can,” he said, “Unbeknownst to all but the Goblins, there was a will filed with them for the Potter estate that was not to be executed in full until your reaching adulthood. They will explain the rest, as I am not privy to more information than that.”
True to his instructions, Harry entered Gringotts Wizarding Bank within an hour of his being declared an adult. He was in no hurry, but, as he hadn’t been able to go there reliably in the past couple of years, he didn’t want to put the request off without good reason and this time made the most sense as Harry already had protection in tow.

Harry walked up to an open teller goblin and waited for the goblin to look up.

“How may I help you?” the Goblin asked after he put his quill down and closed the ledger.

“My name is Harry Potter and I believe that I am expected,” Harry stated.

“By whom?” asked the goblin.

“Oh…um…I really don’t know,” Harry admitted, scratching his head, “Would it help that it is about a will?”

“Yes, sir,” the goblin said, snapping his fingers, “A goblin will escort you momentarily.”

Just then a small figure came from behind the counter.

Harry turned and recognized this goblin, at least.

“Hello, Griphook,” he said.

“Hello, Mister Potter,” Griphook said formally, “If you will follow me.”

“Mister Potter,” the executive goblin said after seating his clients, “We are here to execute the remainder of your parent’s will. Like many wills of the older families it has been given to us at Gringotts to see to their wishes. Wills such as these are kept with us to prevent the tampering and machinations of those who would see this as an opportunity.”

Harry was sitting next to Ginny in the office of the branch manager of Gringotts Wizard Bank. Out of respect for his privacy, his escort had stopped outside the office to wait for the conclusion of business.

Harry thought about what the goblin had said about the machinations of others and had to agree. Harry was on better terms with his Headmaster, yet Harry could still recognize the strings that the senior man pulled every day to shape the world into what he saw as a better place. Dumbledore obviously found that the best way to shape the world in the long run was to be the educator of the leaders of tomorrow, his own brand of immortality.

The goblin continued, “As you have just been declared an adult by the wizarding government, the Last Wishes of Lily and James Potter have taken full effect and will now be executed.” He looked at Harry over his half glasses to judge the young man before him. “The will is simple in that you are the only recipient to yet receive your inheritance. All others have received their distributions when the execution of the will was started fifteen years ago.”

The information was slow to sink in. He squeezed Ginny’s hand for comfort. It helped simply that she was there in support.

Once again, after the pause, the goblin continued, “According to the will, you are to receive the contents of your family vault to do with as you please. The total of this inheritance comes to…” he paused to look through a ledger book to the right of his desk, “…yes, here, one-hundred twelve million, three hundred four thousand, four-hundred fifty-six galleons, twelve sickles and ten knuts.”

Harry and Ginny were shocked at this amount. That would be a swimming pool full of galleons, with enough left over for an interesting kinetic sculpture of a golden coin waterfall.

What? At this moment coherent thought wasn’t possible for Harry. Random thought or no thought at all in his stunned silence was all Harry could muster.

Ginny squeezed his hand.

“Harry, you know that I don’t love you for your money, but…Damn…wow!” she exclaimed, “You could buy Ron the Chudley Cannons and still afford the rest of the league with the left over pocket change. Be careful who finds out about your wealth, Harry, I want you all to myself. You could marry half of the wizarding world if they heard of that.”

Harry grinned at her.

“At least it’s only half,” he smiled. “Gives me some hope for the rest.”
It would be all of them if the wizarding laws allowed same sex unions,” Ginny answered sweetly. 

Harry’s face scrunched up in an ‘ewww’ before he spoke. “I guess that we’ll have to keep this quiet then.” 

“I am afraid that that may be a problem,” said the goblin, “We are required by an old law to report the various inheritances and bequests that we oversee to the Ministry of Magic. I am afraid to say that the press will eventually learn of this.” 

“Oh.”

“Harry,” said Ginny softly, “We’ll deal with them together when it’s necessary.”

The goblin excused himself for something. Really, the goblins were more versed in their customer’s needs than humans thought, and his customers needed privacy at that moment.

“Together?” Harry asked, his face incredulous.

“Together,” said Ginny confidently.

Harry now wore a bright smile.

“I like that idea…together.”

Ginny looked at him, suddenly a little hurt.

“You sound like you weren’t sure that I’d be there with you,” she said in a soft voice.

“Well, this morning, after what you heard, I was afraid that, well, you wouldn’t want me because, I’m kinda…sorta, damaged goods.” Harry took a deep breath. “I thought that you’d realize just how screwed up I am and not want to be with me in the long run.”

Ginny was shocked. How could Harry think that she wouldn’t want to be with him because he’d had a hard life?

“Harry,” she said, taking his face in her hands to look him in the eye, “I will always be with you, no matter how good or bad life is or was.”

“But, I thought,” Harry stammered, “with you wanting kids and me…I don’t know that I know how to be a good dad. I don’t want kids to be hurt by me not being a good dad.”

“Don’t you see, Harry? That’s the most important thing to being a good parent, wanting to be a good parent. If that’s the foremost thing on your mind when you make all of your decisions, then you’ll make the best decisions for your family. Besides, if we choose to become parents, we’ll be going down that road together.”

“Oh,” Harry said, mulling what she said over in his mind, “You’re right, I guess. I do want to be a dad. More than anything, really. I don’t have any careers in mind, the only goal I’ve had, if I survived school, was to have a family and give them the childhood that I never had.”

“And you will, Harry,” Ginny tried to convince him.

Harry had a sudden flash of insight, causing his next question, “Ginny, in all seriousness, you’ve had a lot thrust on you today. How are you coping with it? I only learned about having more money when I already had more than enough for a lifetime; you had to learn about the Dursleys for the first time. How are you?”

Ginny’s face softened into one of love and understanding.

“Harry, I love you and will always love you, but, yes, today had a lot in it. A lot for me to contemplate, but don’t think that I’ll conclude that you’re anything but worthy of my love and respect.”

“Oh, thank you,” Harry blinked. “If you need to talk to Hermione or your mother about it, I give you permission. You won’t be breaking my trust.”

She threw her arms around his neck. “Oh, Harry, thank you,” she said, “Maybe there is hope for your understanding women, yet.”

“It’s just taken me five years,” Harry smiled just inches from Ginny’s face, “to get one bit of understanding…that women need to talk to each other.”

“Oh?” she said with a mock glare, “And how did you manage this…understanding?”

“Thank ‘Mione,” Harry said. “For years she has assumed that I was her girlfriend and, like her, needed to talk about everything in my life in detail. She’s a great friend, but guys don’t share their complete feelings. I never told Ron of my feelings for you and he never told me of his feelings for Hermione; that’s the way it’s supposed to be between guys. With Hermione, I shared more of my life than with Ron, but still not my feelings. But because of that, I knew that you would want to talk about it with other women.”

“Oh.”

Harry and Ginny left the bank for home after their talk. They arrived in the early afternoon and thanked Tonks and Kingsley profusely for ‘putting up’ with them for the day. Their minders said it was no problem before they disappeared with a crack. Harry and Ginny went their separate ways to spend time with their respective genders.
While both conversations had a similar goal of passing information about the events of the day between friends, they were severely different in actual content.

"So, mate, what did they want with you?" Ron asked.

"Just the basics," Harry claimed as he shifted his broom from one shoulder to the other. "You know; what happened to me before Hogwarts? What happened since? Plus Veritaserum for authenticity."

"Ewwww. You agreed to take that?" Ron winced. "They did tell you that they couldn't force you, didn't they?" Ron asked as they carried their brooms over their shoulders up the grassy slope.

"Sure they did, but what did I have to hide? They said that the hearing was private from the press," said Harry nonchalantly. "Better you than me, mate," Ron stated. "So... what was the result of the hearing?"

"Huh?"

"Why'd they have a hearing?" Ron asked again. "What did they do?"

"Oh, yeah," Harry said, stalling while rubbing the back of his head shyly, "don't get jealous, but they declared me an adult."

"Oh," Ron said, a little bewildered. "What does that do?"

"It is just like I turned seventeen," Harry said.

"Oh, so no permit needed for your magic use?" Ron asked.

"Guess not."

"Ooh, and you can learn to apparate," Ron was getting excited.

"I guess so," Harry admitted.

"Cool."

"Yeah," Harry said nonchalantly. "I also learned about my adult inheritance that my parents left for me. Turns out that the vault that I had been using was just the tip of the iceberg."

"Huh? Tip of the ice-a-what?" Ron stopped his walk up the hill.

"Tip of the iceberg," Harry repeated. "Surely wizards used ships once upon a time? Icebergs are huge mountains of ice in northern ocean water. Only about ten percent sticks out of the water so if you see a little, there's a lot beneath it."

"Oh, I get it," Ron said. "I just haven't heard that one before."

"O-Kay."

Their talk ended perfectly with them reaching the orchard / Quidditch pitch and their distraction with the wind whipping through their hair.

"Hey Ginny. Kick the boys out?" asked Hermione from the couch where she was reading.

"Yeah," Ginny said. "Just suggested Quidditch."

"So, how did it go today?" Hermione asked as she put her book aside.

"The end was good," Ginny hedged.

"But..." she said, putting her book down.

"Oh, Hermione," she said, as her emotions took over. "Why did Harry's life have to be so bad? He's gone through so much. It's a wonder that he can love anybody."

"How so?"

"Hermione? How much of Harry's life before magic do you know about?" Ginny asked.

"Well, I know about October First, 1981," Hermione claimed, "as you know."

Ginny cut her off, not meaning any malice, "Not the Boy-Who-Lived stuff. What do you know about Harry's life?"

"Oh... I know that his relatives aren't nice to him," Hermione told her. "I know that he lived in a cupboard of some sort until he got his letter. I know..."
“Anything else of the highlights?” Ginny asked.

Hermione scrunched her face up, trying to think of any other general points.

“No. He doesn’t like to talk about it,” she said with a sad heart.

“Well, he did today,” Ginny told her with significance.

Hermione shot him a curious look.

“He agreed to go under Veritaserum,” Ginny said, “and when they asked if I should leave, he squeezed my hand and said no. He was letting me give him the strength for what they had in store.”

Hermione smiled at the thought that her friend finally had someone that he trusted enough to draw strength from. She just didn’t realize that he’d been drawing strength from her and Ron for years just from their support.

“He took it and didn’t fight it,” Ginny continued. “They, of course, had a healer to tell them if he had beat it, but he didn’t fight it at all. I think that the potion allowed him to let it all out without feeling weak. It must numb the mind, because he didn’t seem to fully realize what he was saying. He only seemed to feel better after he got it out.”

“That’s good, Ginny,” Hermione gave her an honest smile. “I hope your knowing his story will help your relationship with him.”

“I hope so too,” Ginny said. “But what happened to him is awful. His relatives, they…they…called him so many names. Worthless. Freak. They told him that he should have just died with his parents. He has heard it so many times that I think he values his life less than he values anyone else’s. He would risk his own life for a stranger without thinking.”

“And that is part of what makes him such a great human being and person,” Hermione answered her.

“Yes, but it’s the why that infuriates me,” Ginny said, the rage building, “He grew up in the cupboard under the stairs. He would be locked in there for days at a time if he were to do anything wrong. But…But…” she said with tears bubbling up in her eyes, “what he supposedly did wrong is stuff like imagining, playing, tracking dirt inside. He would get punished for burning the eggs when he cooked the breakfast for his relatives, which he had to do every day. He was their cook, maid, gardener and all around slave. Only Dobby may have been treated worse; but I’m not sure. He was stomped down in the hopes that the ‘magic could be beaten out of him’. He was not allowed to be curious. Hermione,” she said, tears freely flowing, “they would punish him for asking a question, any question.”

“WHAT?” exclaimed an enraged Hermione, “But how was he to learn if not by asking questions? How was he to build his mind if he were punished for thinking.”

“That’s it, they didn’t want him to learn. They didn’t want an educated nephew. Hermione,” she said, preparing for her next big hit on Hermione’s sensibilities, “They locked him in the cupboard several times without food for getting a higher grade on an assignment than his cousin and once for a whole week for a better report card.”

“Those bloody bastards!” screamed Hermione, clearly steaming, “Okay, Ginny. Now tell me everything that was said so that I may plan precisely for my seventeenth birthday.”

Ginny had never heard Hermione curse before, but she shared Hermione sentiment.

“I claim full rights as a concerned party to be part of your…coming of age festivities,” declared Ginny, formally.
Harry and the rest spent the next week as they had spent much of their free time for the previous ones, Harry practiced magically and physically, Ginny helped him, Hermione read and Ron did anything but work or study. Of course they all found time to be private with their respective partners.

And, of course, sometimes, in a house like the Burrow, people walked in on you and your partner when you were indulging in some of the more guilty pleasures.

Hermione walked in to the living room to find Harry sitting on the couch, his eyes half lidded, and Ginny on the floor with a look of concentration as she worked on something.

Harry was apparently giving Ginny instructions on something.

“That’s it, Ginny,” Harry said in a husky voice, “just back and forth, wait till it’s ready.”

Ginny had both her hands wrapped firmly for best effect.

“Hey, Harry, Ginny,” said Hermione as she came in, “What are you doing?”

Ginny paused her movements.

“Oh,” she said with a blush, “Harry was just showing me how to do this.”

Hermione seemed interested in what they were doing. Harry just leaned his head back on the cushions of the couch, his arms wide along the back.

“Oh, yeah…of course, I can see that… I shouldn’t have asked a stupid question,” she said, blushing.

“Well, what Harry said is that if I move this thing back and forth,” she said, resuming her movements, “until it’s ready and then put the tip in your mouth and give the tip a good tweak it will shoot my mouth full of this good tasting white…stuff,” said Ginny with eager anticipation.

“Uh huh,” agreed Hermione, Harry’s instructions being perfectly accurate, “sounds correct.”

“Oh, Harry!” exclaimed Ginny, “I think that it’s ready.”

Harry smiled at her and nodded his head.

Ginny put her mouth on the tip and tweaked it good. After a bit her mouth was overflowing with white ‘stuff’ before it stopped.

Ginny grinned.

Harry smiled back, “Swallow, Ginny, before it is all down your chin.”

The sight amused Hermione.

Ginny swallowed the contents of her mouth.

“Wow, Harry you’re right, it was good…really good!” exclaimed Ginny, “Can I have more?”

Harry looked down at her, “Maybe you should wait. More later.”

“Oh, okay,” said Ginny. She turned to Hermione, “Have you ever done that yourself, Hermione?”

“Well…” said Hermione, blushing a deep red, “There was this time after the third year when I was at this boy’s house my age near my home. You see; we went to school together before I got into Hogwarts. He showed me how, but I didn’t want to, at first. I just knew that my parents wouldn’t approve, but eventually after he begged I gave in and did it. It tasted so good,” she finished, losing some of her inhibition and redness, “Can I try?”

Ginny looked at the thing in her hand and shrugged, “You have to ask Harry, it is his, after all.”

Hermione turned pleading eyes onto her friend, “Please, Harry, just one taste?”

Harry laughed, “Well, Ginny, it’s up to you. I did tell you that it is all yours.”

Ginny giggled.

“Hmm, all mine,” she said with a possessive grin on her face. “Sure, Hermione, you can have one taste.”
Ginny scooted over on the rug, making room for her friend.
Hermione grabbed it from Ginny.
Always one to share knowledge, Hermione told Ginny of her experience in the subject while she went back and forth with it in her hands.
"When Jeremy showed me, he had me tilt my head back and shoot it into my mouth from a couple of inches away."
She tilted it back and tweaked the end, instantly it let loose a fountain of white, filling Hermione’s mouth and down her chin. Hermione closed her mouth and swallowed.
"Mmmm…Good as I remember," she smiled, almost in a reverie.
Ginny shot her finger out to Hermione’s chin and claimed the remnants from there before sticking it in her mouth, savoring the flavor.
"Ha…that part’s all mine," she said to Hermione.
"So, Hermione," Harry said, huskily, "Why did you blush so when Ginny asked you if you had done it before?"
"Well, my parents don’t know that I did it," Hermione said. "They wouldn’t approve."
"Why not?" asked Harry, "Because you are a ‘proper young lady’?"
Hermione chuckled along with Ginny at Harry’s snobby tone at the last there.
"No," said Hermione, "They’re dentists and all of the sugar is just not allowed. After all, canned whipped cream does have a lot of sugar and, oh, squirting it directly into your mouth, definitely not!" she said and then burst out into laughter. "But, Harry, why did you say that Ginny should wait for more?"
"She gets hyper on too much sugar," Harry said, receiving a slap on the arm from his girlfriend.
Harry grabbed the red and white can of spray whipped cream himself, shook it vigorously before upending it and squirting it directly into his mouth, a big smile on his face.
"Ah, guilty pleasures."

An early morning in the waning summer revealed a lush meadow within the protections afforded the Burrow. Harry stood practicing his magic after his morning jog. He cast spell after spell, levitating a large rock only to blast it into smaller ones before the rock could drop to the ground. Ginny sat behind him against a tree, reading in the morning light.

Ginny had joined Harry after his run, while he was practicing, bringing with her a book and a wicker basket, in addition to the blanket she was sitting on. Harry finished his routine with the numerous English rocks before him turned to gravel. Really, if he were ever imprisoned, he would have the chain-gang boulder crushing work mastered.

"Mornin’, Gin," said Harry, "What gets you up so early?"
She smiled and stood.
"Why, you, silly," she said, reaching up and kissing his cheek.
"Oh?" said Harry, "And what’s in the basket, Miss Little Red Riding Hood?" he asked with a wolfish grin.
"Huh?" responded Ginny, clueless.
"Keep forgetting," Harry said, "Muggle thing. It’s a muggle children’s story."
"Tell me," she commanded, eagerly.

Harry motioned for them to sit down on the blanket. Harry sat on his knees facing her to take the role of storyteller.

"The story of Little Red Riding Hood goes something like this," Harry started, "But…Oh, it’s been a long time since I have heard it, so I may get it wrong."
"I’ll never know," she stated with a smile on her face.

"Yeah, got me there," Harry smirked, "Okay…This small girl was on the way to her grandmother’s house in the wood carrying a basket of food for her grandmother. A sly wolf spotted her and decided to make a snack of her. He approached her silently and then pounced before he noticed the basket of food. This gave him pause. Maybe more than a snack was to be had. He cleared his throat to get her to stop and said, ‘And what is a defenseless little thing like yourself doing in a dangerous wood such as these?’" Harry said in his best deep wolf voice. "She answered, ‘I am taking a basket of food to my grandmother that lives at the end of this lane.’" Harry quoted the girl in a high-pitched lilty voice, “You should be more
Harry paused to make sure that he still had Ginny’s attention.

"Upon reaching her grandma’s house she knocked on the door. She heard a high-pitched voice bid her enter and so she did. Inside she saw her grandma on her bed, only something wasn’t right. ‘My, Grandma, what big eyes you have,’ she said. ‘All the better to see you with,’ replied the figure in a cotton nightgown. ‘And what big ears you have,’ Red continued. ‘All the better to hear you with,’ said her grandma. ‘And what big teeth you have,’ she said. ‘All the better to eat you with,’ said the figure, launching at the small girl. ‘The WOLF! You ate my grandma!’ she screamed at the top of her lungs. ‘And you are next, my sweet dessert,’ he growled menacingly," Harry was using the appropriate voice for each part, using his own for the narrator.

"The wolf," Harry continued, "pounced on her and ate her in one bite, swallowing her whole.”

Ginny gasped holding her hand over her mouth, her rapt attention focused on Harry and the story.

"Just then the door burst open and a woodsman entered, his trusty axe in his hands. He saw the wolf with a bulging belly and raised his axe. He struck the wolf down where he stood, leaving the wolf dead. He used his axe to open the wolf’s belly revealing an alive but distraught little girl,” Harry said, “and that is the story of Little Red Riding Hood.”

Ginny grinned at her boyfriend, "Good story, but are you sure that that is meant for children?” At his nod she went on, "Well, that would probably give them nightmares.”

"Maybe," said Harry, “So…what is in the basket?”

"Well…I thought that we would have a picnic breakfast,” she said while she pulled out bacon, eggs, fruit and toast.

"Mmmm, looks good,” said Harry, his mouth watering.

They ate their breakfast in a comfortable silence.

After stowing the dishes and silverware, Ginny got to what was on her mind.

"Harry?” she asked tentatively.

"Mmh?” Harry answered, drawing his attention to his girlfriend.

"What is our relationship going to be when we go to school in a few days?” Ginny asked.

"Well…” Harry started, "I like what we have. What do you mean?”

"I mean…with all of the pressures on you, and all of your responsibilities, I didn’t know…plus all of those other girls are going to be after you now,” she said, getting to the root of the problem, "I thought that you would want to be free to do…whatever.”

Her eyes were firmly planted on the blanket, examining each thread.

"Ginny,” Harry lightly cupped her chin, raising her eyes to his, “I am happy…no, ecstatic, with the woman that I have with me now. I like you so much that I want to scream it from the rooftops that I am dating Ginny Weasley, the most beautiful and brave woman in the whole school. Nothing compares to you Gin, and I want no other.”

Ginny grinned brightly with tears in her eyes. Harry had said the right thing.

“So we tell every one?” she asked.

“Well, there’s another problem.”

“What?” she asked, her heart sinking.

“The press. They’ll get a hold of this and they won’t leave us alone. Pictures, articles, exposé’s; you may not have much privacy in the end.”

Ginny straightened; her tears dry, with a steely glint in her eye.

“I’m ready for them,” Ginny affirmed. “No one gets between me and my man.”

“Your man, am I?” Harry said with a jocular tilt to the corner of his mouth.

“And don’t forget it, Potter,” Ginny ordered. “You belong to me now and I won’t let you go for anything. And your job is to train hard to kick Moldy-shorts’ ass, all the while loving me and me alone.”

“Sounds like a good plan to me,” Harry smiled and moved a fraction closer.

“Yes,” Ginny said, nodding to her own plan, “you train hard and I’ll make sure that you have plenty of love in your heart to keep that creep out.”

“Then, Miss Weasley,” Harry said, “I give myself to you. I now belong to you.”
“Just remember that,” she said, a smile wide on her face, “You belong to me and you are not allowed to die until I say. Got it?”

Harry had a smile on his face, despite the serious turn in her last sentence, “Got it, Miss.”

They embraced, enjoying the feel of closeness.

“Gin?” Harry got her attention, “I think that the best plan is to not announce it, but just let people figure it out on their own.”

“Yeah,” she agreed. “You never know, that might gain us a whole day.”

“We can hope,” Harry agreed with a laugh.

His dormant fireplace flaring to life with green flame, Remus Lupin was startled from his warn red leather chair, causing him to drop the book in which he had been engrossed and fumble for his wand from his coat sleeve. A familiar head poked from the magical green flames of the fireplace of the rickety cottage that Remus was able to make his home during the warmer summer and early fall months each year. The cottage was not suitable during the inclement months, as the windows never quite sealed and sunlight could be seen between the occasional exposed lath boards beneath the sloughing plaster and pealing wall cloth with faded flowers.

“Harry,” a surprised werewolf said. “Is that you?”

“Yeah, Professor,” Harry confirmed. “Would you mind coming to the Burrow to give Ginny and I your opinion?”

“It’s Remus,” the former Professor corrected, “and, no, I wouldn’t mind. I’ll be there is just a minute.”

“Thanks,” Harry said, as he pulled his head back from Remus’s fire and it disappeared with a small pop.

Remus deftly stepped from the Burrow’s fireplace with poise and nary a speck of soot on his weathered robes; which were easily cleaned fully with a wave of his wand.

Harry shook his head in resignation before Remus could face him or Ginny. Harry had yet to make such a graceful entrance after any sort of magical transportation. The secret was lost to him.

Moony turned and greeted Harry with enthusiasm before striding forward and engulfing him in a pack worthy hug.

“Hello, Professor,” Harry said.

Remus released his friend’s son and turned to Ginny and offered just a heartfelt verbal greeting without smothering her in a hug, to which she smiled and said, “Hello, Professor,” back.

“Both of you,” Remus said in mock exasperation, “I haven’t been your professor for years. Please call me Remus or Moony as Harry’s father used to.”

“We’ll try,” Harry said.

“But first,” Ginny said, “the reason that we asked you here. We need help to make a decision and it’s in one of your earlier expertise.”

Remus looked on to the couple in curiosity.

“Now I’m certainly intrigued,” he said as they all took seats around the living room. “What exactly is one of my earlier expertise? Not that I knew I had even one expertise.”

“We need help in pranking,” Harry said.

“You see,” Ginny continued. “My brothers, may they sleep with one eye open, decided that the proper way to welcome Harry to the family, was with a pranking contest where Harry is the perpetual victim and judge.”

“Yeah,” Harry grumbled, “And we were thrown for a loop when Percy struck so soon.”

Remus smiled, “What did he do and how can I help?” He had a mischievous twinkle to his eye that took years off his appearance.

“Well,” Harry said, “for the time of twenty four hours, Percy hexed all of my underwear to freeze when I had thoughts of a certain nature.”

Remus considered the prank for a moment before asking, “And how did you answer the prank? How did you act?”

“Stopping it wasn’t hard,” Harry said and then explained briefly discovering that all of his boxers were hexed and how he solved the problem without isolating himself from Ginny, both in person and in thought.

“But,” Ginny said, “Harry seems to think that he needs to get revenge right away, and I say that he should wait until it’s all over and get all of them over Christmas holiday.”
Harry shifted in his seat.

"Moony," Harry tried the name out, "how can I just sit here, as I have for the past several days, and not take pranking revenge?"

"Well," Remus reminisced, "back in the days of the Marauder’s time in school, we were involved in several pranking wars through the years. Sirius’s philosophy was to prank them back hard and fast, but your father was always the one to want to plan things out and set elaborate pranks. My job was to make the pranks work. When they were planned out, we had time to find the right magic and make it work and last. Unfortunately, when Padfoot was in charge of the answer, it had a tendency to misfire in some way. Only our luck and quick reflexes saved us from ourselves sometimes."

"So?" Harry asked for a conclusion.

"Harry," Moony said, "if you wait to take your revenge until after the judging is over, you can make them stew in their juices and lull them into a false sense of security. Revenge is, after all, a dish best served cold."

Ginny took Harry's hand in comfort, but her smile was one of triumph at Harry's mentor agreeing with her.

"An that way, Harry," Remus added, "you have time to make it a true Marauder’s style prank that takes them days to figure out. Look for something with staying power, but something that won't hurt."

Harry agreed eventually and then sat with his girlfriend and father figure, contemplating what could be done that would match those sentiments. Eventually Mrs. Weasley insisted that they all needed a good meal and invited Remus for dinner. Her gaze clearly told him that she thought he was clearly not getting enough nourishment and would not be told no.
“So, Ron,” said Harry, “How’s it going with Hermione?”

Ron and Harry were sitting in the living room playing chess the night before the Hogwarts Express. Ron was, of course, winning.

“Pretty good,” Ron responded. “We do the normal couple things…you know…kissing…"

“Yeah, I got that.”

“But, anyway,” said Ron nervously, “I worry that we don’t have that much in common. She likes to read and study and I…don’t.”

“Ron,” advised Harry, “You need to make an effort. Find something that you are interested in reading while she is in the library. Do your homework early for once.”

“But, Harry, that just seems wrong,” Ron said with disgust, “the whole ‘homework early’ thing.”

“It really makes no difference if you take an hour to do an essay the first night or an hour the last night, you’ll be taking the same time,” Harry told him. “You’ll just make Hermione happier and a happy girlfriend should be your goal.”

“Yeah, I guess,” Ron said half heartedly.

“Ron,” admonished Harry, “Do you like seeing your girlfriend happy?”

“Yeah,” said Ron shyly, rubbing his hand through his hair, “that is a pretty cool thing for me to make her smile. I feel like the world got brighter when she smiles and it feels good to know that I made it happen. But…”

“But…”

“But we argue so often,” Ron complained. “How can she be happy if we argue? I don’t understand.”

“Well…” started Harry, trying to figure it out in his own head. “Look at it this way. She is intelligent…”

“Got that right,” said Ron proudly.

“And you are stubborn…” prompted Harry.

Ron grumbled.

“Not a bad thing…necessarily,” Harry tried. “It’s just that when the two come together, you just get a spirited debate. And you are both…passionate about what you take on, so that just adds to it.”

“Hmm,” considered Ron, “Yeah, I guess you’re right.”

“Just remember, Ron,” Harry reminded his friend, “Don’t use your big guns in an argument. Make sure that you don’t say anything that insults her or can’t be taken back.”

Ron nodded.

“Make sure that you can kiss and make up,” Harry said.

Ron smiled.

“And you and Ginny?” Ron asked, torn between being a good brother and a good friend.

“Oh, it’s good,” Harry said. “Our relationship is different than you and Hermione. Different problems, different rewards.”

“Yeah, mate. Gotcha,” said Ron, “By the way, what classes are you taking this year?”

“Potions, Transfiguration, Charms and Defense. You?”

“Transfiguration, Charms, History of Magic, Herbology, Care of Magical Creatures and Divination. Same as last year but I missed on Potions.”

“Try not to sound so pleased,” Harry smiled. “Why Divination?”

“Mum,” Ron explained, “she wouldn’t let me drop it after my ‘E’.”
“Oh,” Harry acknowledged.

“What about you?” Ron asked. “How are you only taking four classes?”

“Oh, I’m doing a lot of…independent study,” Harry said carefully. “After last year, I know that I need training, so I’m taking it in my own hands.”

“Hope we have a good Defense teacher this year,” Ron said in earnest. “Otherwise, you’re going to have a terrible year.”

“Yeah, let’s hope,” agreed Harry, “Hey, look…we better go pack or the girls will be mad at us tomorrow morning.”

“Yes,” a resigned Ron said.

Harry was hopeful. If Ron could pack early, perhaps he could do his homework when Hermione wanted.

The morning of September the First was as frantic as previous years. Despite everyone packing the night before, they were still running all over trying to find the last minute stuff.

“Ron, get down here. The cars will be here shortly,” Mrs. Weasley screamed up the stairs.

Ron came running down the stairs at a dangerous speed, his Chudley Cannons shirt clutched tightly in his hand, followed by Harry and the girls.

“Oh, good,” Mrs. Weasley said, “Harry, dear, did you find what you were looking for?”

“No, Mrs. Weasley,” he responded.

“What were you looking for?” she asked.

“Three pair of my socks and my Gryffindor T-Shirt from last year,” said Harry.

Ron’s head came up immediately.

“Socks?” asked Ron suspicious.

“Yes,” confirmed Harry, “What do you know?”

Ron turned to Ginny who had the decency to blush and lower her head.

“I don’t know,” Ron said, “Ginny, what do I know?”

Harry turned to his girlfriend, “Gin?”

“What?” she asked innocently, but wilted under his glare, “Okay, I have your shirt. It’s in my trunk.”

“Why is that, Gin?” Harry asked. “It can’t fit you.”

“Well…” she said shyly, “I…like to sleep in it.”

Harry blushed, “Oh, okay, fine. I have others.”

“Thank you, Harry,” she said, suddenly bright and cheery as she hugged him.

Mrs. Weasley came back into the living room to usher them out to the waiting cars.

“Come on you lot,” she told the teenagers. “The cars are waiting.”

They made it to the station at the usual Weasley Clan time of fifteen minutes before departure. They all found a compartment at the back of the train as normal, where they all stowed their trunks before Ron and Hermione had to leave for the prefect meeting. Harry sat quietly with Ginny leaning into his chest for a couple of minutes before she broke the silence.

“Harry, how are we going to find time together this year?” Ginny asked, “You have your training and I have my OWL’s. We won’t be together at all.”

“Gin, we’ll have to work at it, but I don’t see a problem,” Harry said, “You help me during my training and I will help you to study for your OWL’s.”

“Oh, Harry,” she said sarcastically, “how romantic.”

“Laugh it up, Ginevra,” Harry teased. “I’ll show you romantic.”

“Ginevra…Why I aught’a…” she said, launching herself onto Harry to tickle him relentlessly.

Ron and Hermione came back to the compartment after the long prefect meeting tired. They entered to find their friends and sibling in an…
interesting position.

“Harry Potter…get your hands off of my sister!” yelled Ron.

They sprung apart at the volume.

“What? We didn’t do anything!” Harry claimed quickly.

Ron eyed him suspiciously.

“Ron!” admonished Ginny, “We didn’t do anything wrong. We were just kissing.”

Ron looked skeptical.

“Sure, that’s all you were doing now.”

“Ronald Billius Weasley!” Ginny shouted in a fair impression of her mother. “If you don’t leave Harry and me alone, I will make sure that I return the favor.”

“Yeah, right,” said Ron, “Ginny, you’re my little sister. It’s my job to protect you. Besides, what can you do?”

An evil glint came to her eye.

Softly she answered him. “Simple Ron. Until you realize that I am a person unto myself and can look after myself, Harry will be lending me his map and cloak and wherever you and Hermione, sorry Hermione, have…privacy, I will make sure that you are interrupted in the most embarrassing way I can.”

Ron looked from Ginny to Harry, scared. “Harry you wouldn’t. We’re your best friends. You wouldn’t do this to us, would you?”

“Ron,” said Harry, “I’m sure that Hermione can understand, and until you do, just remember…I, and therefore, Ginny are the only ones that can hide from the map.”

“But…But…But…” stammered Ron.

“Ron,” said Hermione, “Just leave it.”

“Hmmph,” was all of Ron’s response.

“Well, if it isn’t the Scarhead, the Weasel, the Mudblood and the Pothead Devotee,” came a whining drawl from the door of the compartment. “Thought that you wouldn’t have showed your face with the Dark Lord wanting your necks.”

Draco Malfoy stood outside the open door to the compartment with his two goons and a scowl on his face.

“Gregory, Vincent, why do you follow this sycophant around like guard dogs?” Harry asked in an engaging voice. “Is it a family tradition? Or do your fathers worry about his mouth getting his body into more trouble than he can handle. Can’t say that I blame them. He didn’t learn his lesson a few months ago, but I hope that you two won’t be dragged down by his lack of common sense.”

Malfoy was livid. ‘How dare this half blood muggle lover insult me, the Malfoy heir? His blood will stain my boots as I walk victoriously next to the Dark Lord off the last battlefield.’ Malfoy screamed in his head.

His companions, however, had a look of confusion on their faces. Oh, well, lost cause.

“Potter, if you don’t hold your tongue,” Malfoy declared, “you won’t live long enough to meet your end by the dark lord.”

“I would have thought that you would have known that Voldemort wants to kill me himself to prove that a child doesn’t scare him,” Harry said. “Funny, I may or may not scare him, but he still has…performance problems. Fifteen years of attempted murder and he still hasn’t been successful. Yay me.”

“You’re living on borrowed time, Potter,” Malfoy answered.

“Whatsoever,” Harry said dismissively.

He waved his wand a few times, causing the door to the compartment to slam shut and lock. The final wave let Malfoy hear from the hallway the next statement.

“So, I wonder who will be the Quidditch Captain this year?” Harry asked his friends.

Another wave of the wand and the compartment was private.

“Probably you, Harry,” answered Ron.

“Frankly, I don’t want it,” Harry declared.

“Why?” Ron asked.
“Takes too much time,” Harry answered, “and, as a seeker, I don’t watch the game much. Even during the World Cup before our fourth year, I, pretty much, just watched the seekers. Now you would be perfect for it.”

“Really?” asked Ron.

“Yeah. As keeper, you’re watching the game and you have a lot of interest in the plays and strategy. Me,” chuckled Harry, “my only strategy is to catch the snitch. As long as you let me do that honestly, I’m in favor of you taking it.”

“Thanks,” he said, beaming. Hermione sat next to him, smiling at her boyfriend’s good fortune to have such a good friend.

“Fact, I think that I will go up to McGonagall and recommend you tonight,” Harry decided, “if you don’t mind.”

“Mind?” Ron exclaimed. “That’s great! There is so much that I want to do. Oh, and I can hold tryouts right away. And…”

“He means, Thank you, Harry,” said Hermione with a thankful smile on her face as well.

With a warm greeting for Hagrid, everyone’s favorite half giant (Well, everyone’s except for Rubeus Hagrid himself, he liked a certain French Headmistress better) the group was on their way to the great hall for dinner.

They exited the carriages and proceeded inside only to run into Hermione’s back as she stopped stock still staring at the entrance hall floor.

“What is it, Hermione?” asked Ginny.

“It’s…it’s…beautiful,” Hermione said in awe. “Look at it.”

They all spread out shoulder to shoulder to look at the object of her appreciation.

“Wow,” said Ginny, “You’re right, it is beautiful.”

“Wonder why they did it?” puzzled Ron.

“Probably just wanted to dress up the school,” Harry said, feigning ignorance, “After all they haven’t changed it in all of the time that we’ve been here.”

“Harry,” said Hermione, going into library mode, “There haven’t been any modifications of this scale to the school in more than a century, and that was to install flush toilets.”

“Hogwarts: A History?” Ginny asked.

“Well,” said Ron, “I would say that flush toilets were a necessary and significant modification, and, no Hermione, I don’t want to hear about various methods predating them during, or before, dinner,” he said jokingly.

“Okay, promptly after dinner, then,” Hermione said with an evil smirk.

Harry looked at Ron cautiously, “Ginny, would you go grab Rosary Beads and a sword, preferably sharp, immediately.”

Ginny edged behind Harry, hanging on his shoulder, “Why, Harry?” she asked, playing along.

“Ron just said two four syllable words followed by a five syllable word. I can’t remember if this means that he is possessed and I’ll have to exorcise a demon from him or if this is a sign of the apocalypse.”

The confusion that crossed Ron’s face was enough to make the two burst into laughter. Ginny used her position, hanging on Harry’s shoulder to her advantage, holding herself up in her gales of laughter.

Hermione looked torn between coming to her boyfriend’s defense and busting out in laughter. Seeing as how she could not honestly refute the claim without sounding hollow she compromised by hiding her giggles behind her hand.

“Hey,” Ron defended himself, “I’ll have you know that I know plenty of big words.”

Harry recovered himself to continue the tease, “Ron, spells don’t count as big words.”

Ron held his finger up and his mouth open as if to counter this but Ginny beat him to the punch. “Yeah, but it’s not like he knows plenty of those either.”

Ron’s jaw snapped shut and he decided to attempt the ancient art of the death glare only to be disappointed with the complete lack of sizzling and people entirely failing to run for the hills.

Harry was glad that he remembered to leave the crests in the ‘off’ position; he didn’t want to think about all of the hundreds of children currently walking across it disappearing to places around the castle. He still had several places to add the crests to and he had to figure out if he was going to add them outdoors for Herbology and Care of Magical Creatures. He figured that no one would figure out how to use the crests anytime soon,
but he wanted it complete anyway.

Harry was jolted out of his musings when Hermione asked him a question and he had to ask her to repeat it.

"I asked," repeated Hermione, "Do you know what the crest in the entry hall is for? You were here over the summer, after all."

Harry tried not to lie to Hermione, "They were put in at night Hermione, and I get the feeling that whomever put them in didn’t want to be known. I suspect that Dumbledore is aware of who did it, though."

"They?" asked Ron.

"Yeah," Harry said, "there are more throughout the castle. I saw one in front of Professor McGonagall’s classroom and one in the hall by the library."

Well, he didn’t lie. He had seen one there, right after he put it there and ever since.

"I wonder if they’re more than a decoration," mused Ginny.

"Hey," Harry said for a distraction, "there’s McGonagall. The sorting’s starting."

The sorting and feast went as expected and only after a well-appreciated feast did the Headmaster stand to make his announcements. The Gryffindors noticed a figure in a concealing robe to the right of McGonagall that had every student curious. Throughout dinner the whispered conversations and overt glances were directed at what could only be the new Defense teacher.

"Now that everyone is well fed and watered, I would like to welcome the new students and welcome back the returning students," the Headmaster said to the droopy-eyed audience. "I have a few standard start of term announcements. First of all, the Forbidden forest is off limits to all students. Some students," he said while making eye contact with some select Gryffindors, "have found need to enter the forest each year of their tenure and I hope that this pattern is broken," he said with a smile through his beard, "Secondly, the caretaker, Mister Filch, has requested that I, once again, inform you that magic is not to be used in the hallways between classes, as this usually results in something for him to clean or repair."

"I always wondered why it was Filch that had the Headmaster say that," said Ron in a low voice.

The Headmaster smiled as if he had heard the comment during his pause.

"Third, the list of contraband items can be found on the caretaker’s door and adjoining wall as Professor Flitwick insisted that each item be specifically listed instead of just the entire inventory of Zonko’s and Weasley Wizard Weezes. Anyone curious as to whether you are violating school rules, may view the list there."

Many of the Gryffindors smirked at the Headmaster’s seeming to not care about catching any such contraband.

"Finally, as is a recent tradition, I would like to introduce our new Defense Against The Dark Arts teacher, Professor Nym…"

Dumbledore was cut off with a well-timed silencing spell.

"Tonks?" clarified Ginny, in a whisper to the trio, “She must have been ready with that Silencio. Only the Headmaster would dare to introduce her like that.”

Professor Dumbledore retrieved his wand quickly and cast the counter-curse to free his speech.

"As I was saying," said the Professor with a glance and smirk to the hooded figure, “On loan from the Auror division of the Department of Magical Law Enforcement, we have Professor Tonks.”

The young professor stood at Dumbledore’s urging and lowered her hood to reveal what was a surprise to most in the hall, except for the four Gryffindors who had met her in the recent past. Standing there was Tonks sporting her trademark bubblegum-pink hair and violet eyes. She’d gone for pale, alabaster skin today to make a good impression on the student body.

"Now if the prefects will escort the first year students to their appropriate dorms, you may all enjoy a fine rest as we have a rare treat, the first day of classes will not be for three days as tomorrow is Saturday. I would suggest to the new first years, that you find an older student to show you around the school. You are all dismissed," said the Headmaster, "Oh, and Harry, if I could see you up here."

Harry looked up from his seat and nodded to the Headmaster.

"Well, guys," Harry said to his friends, “looks like we have differing duties to attend to. Ginny, care to come with me?"

Ginny looked up at him, almost a surprised look in her eyes to be invited to speak join Harry in speaking with the Professor, even though she had not been asked to the table with him. She did, however, nod and smile before getting up to follow Harry to the head table.
“Hello Professor Dumbledore, Professor McGonagall,” Harry said, giving his attention to the transfiguration professor. He continued, “I wanted to discuss the captaincy with you, Professor.”

The Headmaster’s eyes twinkled at the hands of Harry and Ginny, unabashedly clasped in front of the authority figures.

“Hello Mister Potter, Miss Weasley,” greeted the stern Deputy-Headmistress.

“Good evening, Harry, Miss Weasley,” smiled the Headmaster.

“And what are your ideas on the captaincy of our house team, Mister Potter?” asked Professor McGonagall.

“I believe it should be Ron, Ma’am,” Harry replied politely.

“And I thought that you might want the job,” she said with a smile, “Give me the reasons for Mr. Weasley to have it.”

“Well, as keeper,” Harry reasoned, “he watches over the whole game better than any other position, he is a true fanatic about Quidditch, he has fierce loyalty for the Chudley Cannons and he has an excellent strategic mind.”

“Alright, I understand all of your arguments but the Cannons part,” she returned. “Explain.”

“He doesn’t give up when the chips are down,” Harry explained. “The Cannons are not what you would call a winning team, yet he never loses confidence that their next win is just around the corner. He would not give up and would project a confidence to the team around him.”

“Well, that sounds like a good argument,” McGonagall said. “Would you ask Mister Weasley to come to my office tomorrow at ten to discuss this.”

“Certainly,” said Ginny, beaming. She was proud of her brother and loved her boyfriend even more for giving Ron this opportunity.

“Harry,” Professor Dumbledore said, moving the conversation to why Harry had been called up in the first place, “I was wondering if you have any plans for your excellent club again this year.”

“Nothing solid, sir,” said Harry. “It did help me and a few others to learn better, but I really wanted to give the new DADA teacher a chance before going behind her back on this.”

“Harry,” said the Headmaster with a truly dangerous twinkle in his eyes, “I would like you to discuss it with Professor Nymphadora over the weekend, as I believe her to not be opposed to the idea.”

“I will, sir,” Harry said with his own dangerous glint, “But on another note, sir, I pray to not lose our Headmaster early to an untimely death.”

“How is it that this has come up?” asked Professor McGonagall.

“Well, if he says that name aloud again, Professor Tonks just might make an example of him and then make sure that her first name is feared more than Moldieshorts’s own.”

Professor Dumbledore smiled at the new name for an old dark lord.

“Sometimes we must have fun with our friends,” the Headmaster said. “Surely you understand that.”

“Of course, Professor,” said Harry, “Why, beautiful Ginny here informed me weeks ago that her brothers have invented a new family activity since I’m now dating Ginny.”

“Oh?” the Headmaster queried.

“Yep,” Harry affirmed, “they’re all pranking me to find out who the best prankster is. Not only am I the victim but also the judge.”

“Oh?” said Professor McGonagall, “And have any of these…pranks happened yet?”

“Yeah,” chuckled Harry.

Ginny smiled, “Percy came back to the family, much to my mother’s delight, and showed he was a Weasley by making Harry’s boxer shorts ice cold for the day.”

“And how did you conquer that, Mister Potter?” his Professor asked.

“Well, in the muggle world they would say that I went ‘commando’,” Harry said shyly and blushed a deep red.
The Professor, not familiar with this term, raised her eyebrows.

Harry leaned in to the professor and stammered, "I…well…I uh…went without, you see."

Ginny had apparently heard this as well as she got shy and did her impression of a tomato.

*Oh my,* thought Ginny, *I didn't need that visual in my head again. But…mmm…might as well enjoy it while it's there.*

“Ginny,” Harry said bending down next to her ear as she sat on a sofa in the common room Saturday morning. He kissed her cheek before continuing, “Wanna go for a walk?”

She smiled at him, “Sure, Mister Potter. But don’t think that you can get away with that little kiss.”

Harry raised his eyebrows in alarm. Ron and Hermione in the love seat, looked up at their friends and siblings with curiosity.

“I, after all, expect more of you, mister,” she said sternly, “both in quantity and quality,” she finished with a smirk that was…oh too fun.

Harry responded, “Well quantity I plan to rectify, but I am afraid that for quality, I will need to engage a tutor.”

Ginny smiled.

“Do you think that I could get that Hufflepuff girl, Anne Paramore, to help?” Harry asked, risking his life with the fiery redhead.

She huffed and got a dangerous glint in her eye, “You’ll do no such thing. You’re mine and I’ll do all of the tutoring that you’ll need.”

Harry laughed, getting the desired results. He then gulped at the smoldering look in Ginny’s eyes.

“Besides,” Ginny said, “practice makes perfect.”

And Harry’s new evil twinkle was back.

“Oh, you are such a task master,” Harry lamented.

Later that Saturday, after they returned from their walk and had lunch, Harry was, once again, able to catch Ginny alone.

“Ginny, we need to talk,” Harry told her without preamble. “I want to tell you some things because I don’t want secrets between us.”

“Okay, Harry,” Ginny replied, a little nervous.

“We can tell some to Ron and Hermione,” Harry told her, “if you feel that they should know, but in truth, I want us to have some things just to ourselves.”

Ginny smiled at him as they walked down the empty corridor near the transfiguration classroom.

“Over the summer,” Harry said, “I did a lot of learning in unconventional magics, most things not helpful in the final battle, but good to know,” he told her, “One of the things that I learned included a little bit of rune magic. I am not saying that I am now an expert, heck I don’t know as much as a fourth year Ancient Runes student. What I have learned is just specialized. You see, I found a book that dealt with the combining of runes in construction of objects.”

“Well, Harry,” Ginny answered, “as a fifth year Ancient Runes student, maybe I can understand what you have learned.”

Harry hugged her around the shoulder from the side as they continued to walk.

“Let’s go to the library so that I can show you what I’m talking about,” Harry said, leading her up the correct staircase.

“Harry this is amazing,” Ginny exclaimed. “You took these books and extrapolated a design for the seals?”

He nodded.

“You made the seals,” she clarified.

He nodded again, with a grin.

“The seals are for more than just decoration,” she continued.

He beamed at her.

“What are they for?” she asked, perplexed.
"Keep going, you're doing good," Harry said, eager for her to figure it out as he had.

She concentrated on the designs in his notebook. They were a lot easier to figure out there because the different runic groups were isolated in his notes, where they were nearly invisible on the seals themselves.

"Well, this grouping has to do with a connection to the other seals," she said with a frown of concentration.

She ran her finger along the next group represented on the page.

"And this group, according to this, can detect intent of someone touching it," she said with a proud smile, "And this next one controls everything using the intent and input from somewhere else. Oh, you have a controlling seal somewhere, don't you? What ever this does, you can control it."

"Yes, I can, but I also gave that control to the Headmasters. The control seal is in his office," he said with glee, "Now, the last grouping, what does it do? What do the seals do that they need to be controlled?"

She looked closely at the grouping. She then flipped back and forth amongst the books littering the tabletop.

"Give me a minute," she requested.

"Take all of the time you need. This is quite fun," he said with a smile. "You know, I love looking at you when you're learning. You're just so beautiful when you concentrate."

She looked up at him with a smile of thanks on her face.

"Enough of that mister," she said batting his arm, "Just admire quietly while I figure this out."

"No, this can't be correct," she said with an incredulous face fifteen minutes later. "This isn't one of the established methods. This is impossible."

"I liked to think of it as improbable," Harry said with a smirk, "Impossible means that it can't be done. Improbable just means that it hasn't been done before."

"Oh, improbable is it?" Ginny teased. "So you've invented a runic fixed position transportation system and installed it in this school?"

"I have," he said, "with purpose."

She smiled a flirt at him, "and what, pray tell is this 'purpose'?"

"I needed to have a better way to enter the Chamber of Secrets," Harry told her gently. "The old way is so much of a hassle."

"Oh, so it is more of a hassle than inventing a whole new magic and building how many huge seals?" Ginny scoffed.

"Well, I had to have something to occupy my mind over the summer," Harry reasoned. "I was alone here for twenty-four hours a day and I only sleep for about eight at the long end and exercise and flying only takes a couple of hours a day so that leaves fourteen for practicing magic and reading new books of magic. I was here for what, five weeks? Six? And all of that time I didn't even have you as my girlfriend so I couldn't write to you to distract myself."

"You are truly amazing, Harry," she said, "Who else would go to such lengths to be lazy. And you could have written to me just as friends."

"Hey, missy," Harry joked back, "I will have you know that there is a long tradition of difficult inventions to further the lazy tendencies of humans. I am merely carrying on the tradition."

"Tradition of laziness, huh?" she chided.

"Yeah," Harry defended, "most all inventions are geared to making our lives easier, therefore, they are invented to promote laziness."

"Whatever," Ginny said, "let's put all of this away and go explore your new invention."

"Ginny, are you sure that you want to do this?" Harry asked as they stood on a crest. "You don't have to go down to the Chamber if you don't want to."

Ginny took a deep breath, steadying her resolve.

"No, I want to do this. I need to do this," she said with conviction, "Please, Harry. I need you to help me with this."

Harry melted at her pleading face. He could refuse her nothing.

"Of course I'll help you, Ginny," Harry reassured her, "We have to be touching or you won't come down with me," he said, offering his hand to hold.

She, instead, threw her arms around his neck and held him close.

Despite his surprise they disappeared without a sound.
“Ginny, open your eyes,” Harry said.

Ginny stood, her face buried in Harry’s shoulder, clutching him tightly.

“Ginny…”

She slowly released the clutching force that she was squeezing herself to him with. She pulled back and looked directly into Harry’s eyes, taking strength from the emerald depths.

After a few moments she slowly turned and looked around the Chamber, surprise instantly evident in her eyes.

“Wow, Harry!” she exclaimed. “I don’t remember much, but Harry…this isn’t the Chamber. You’ve taken us to the wrong spot.”

Harry chuckled.

“No, Ginny,” he said, “I just changed it a lot over the summer. I erased Salazar and Tom’s evil work and turned it into a place that, when I leave, can be used by the school. I erased the darkness.”


“About a hundred hours of my patronus trotting around and banishing the dark feelings and then a lot of practical transfiguration, rough stone into marble and granite, snake statues into lion, raven and badger, and then a special treat I learned when studying magic.”

Harry pointed up to the ceiling. Ginny, in turn, looked up and gasped.

“Harry, it’s beautiful,” Ginny said, “How?”

Harry beamed at the approval she was giving him.

“When I was learning to control my new magic outburst, the first thing that I did was a Wingardium Leviosa which sent the object rocketing up to the ceiling where it broke through the illusion of the sky and made an impression in the stone roof of the Great Hall. Professor Dumbledore showed me where to find the spell that would fix it,” he said, proudly. “Well, not fix it, but I had to cast a whole new one.”

Ginny looked at Harry in amazement. After a few seconds a smile crept over her face and she threw her arms around his chest and gave him a bear hug.

“Oh, Harry,” she said into his chest, “I’m so proud of you. You did so much over the summer.”

“Thanks,” Harry said, “that means a lot coming from you.”

He hugged her back, giving her an appreciative squeeze.

“Harry, what did it look like before?” she asked, dread in her voice. “You know…when you rescued me.”

“Well, if you want I can cast a glamour to show you,” he said, “…if it won’t disturb you.”

She looked, once again, into his emerald eyes, drawing strength from their depths.

“Please,” she asked of him.

Harry took out his wand and whispered the incantation, concentrating on his memory of the Chamber before its miraculous transformation. A room the size of the Chamber required more power than normal to be pushed through the spell, but that wasn’t a problem for Harry with his new powers.

Ginny watched as the image of the chamber rolled from the area around them to the very end, all of the previous cheer erased.

Gone were the bright sunshine lit granite floors, replaced by dark rough-hewn rock.

Gone were the school mascot statues. In their place were all original viper statues. Even the Slytherin mascot was transformed into the evil viper visage repeated incessantly.

Returned was the monument of the school founder with the evil plan to transform the school into his dream.

By now Ginny’s courage had been bolstered enough to allow her to appreciate the work that Harry had done.

“Wow, Harry,” said Ginny, “You’re getting really good at charms. Will you have to recast the ceiling or did you just cover it up.”

“It’s just covered. Have you seen enough?” Harry asked with a smile.

“Yeah,” agreed Ginny. “This place gives me the creeps.”

“And we didn’t even have the dark magic permeating the walls to add to the feeling,” Harry said, giving her a hug.
Harry, Ginny, Ron and Hermione sat for breakfast on the first Sunday of the school year in an unusual situation, a day with nothing to do.

“Mr. Weasley,” called Professor McGonagall, “Would you come to my office after your breakfast, please? And Miss Granger, you may join him if you please.”

“Yes, ma’am.”

Ron smiled at Harry as their Head of House walked away.

“Harry, you must’a talked to her. You don’t suppose that she wants me to be Captain do you?” asked Ron.

“Oh, blast. I forgot to tell you. I was supposed to send you yesterday,” Harry gulped. “Yeah, mate. She seemed to be convinced. She probably wants Hermione to go to make sure that the threats about your grades are given the weight that they need.”

Ron looked on with an unknowing baffled air.

“Threats, Ron,” said Harry, “that if your grades don’t all stay at least acceptable, you will be removed as captain.”

Ron gulped.

“She wouldn’t,” he said in a scared voice.

“She would,” said Harry with a nod from Hermione.

“And I will help you,” said Hermione.

“And Ron,” said Ginny, “When she is nagging you to do your homework, just remember that she’s doing it to keep you on the Quidditch team.”

Ron smiled.

“I don’t nag,” huffed Hermione.

“Yes you do,” smiled Harry, “But that’s a part of the you that we all love.”

“Thanks Harry,” smiled Hermione, “And what do you two have planned?”

“Well,” said Harry, “I haven’t asked Ginny yet, but I was thinking of rounding up all of the first years and giving them a tour of the castle with the good shortcuts and the traps to avoid. What do you think, Gin?”

Ginny smiled, “Sounds like a lovely idea. Maybe we can get the headmaster to come to lunch with us and the first years so that he can be introduced to them, make him more accessible.”

“You talking about the Gryffindor first years?” Ron asked, “or are you going to include the Ravenclaw and Hufflepuff.”

“All of them, Ron,” said Harry, “Even the Slytherins.”

“Why,” asked Ron, a little heated, “They’re Slytherin,” he argued as if that were enough.

“Ron, they’re just students,” Harry stated, “and will be until they do something to convince me that they deserve contempt. Ambition isn’t a mortal sin.”

“Whatever.”

“Professor Tonks?” Harry asked while knocking on the office door.

Inside he could hear her moving around and then…

CRASH…as a group of tinny things fall to the ground and cursing commences.

“Just a second,” came a voice, after the invectives ceased.

Harry and Ginny waited until the door opened, revealing a pink haired woman in a Weird Sisters tee shirt and calf length skirt.
Harry looked and smiled, “Nice outfit.”
She eyed him suspiciously. “What’s that supposed to mean?”
“What?” Harry said as Ginny giggled. “I can’t give you a simple complement?”
She harrumphed. “You just sounded sarcastic, that’s all.”
He smiled, “Well, I’ve never seen you in a skirt before. It took me by surprise.”
She looked indignant, “I wear skirts. You saw me in a skirt last year when we escorted the lot of you to King’s Cross.”
For a moment Harry and Ginny both looked like they had no idea, then Ginny broke out into a grin.
“Oh, yeah!” she said, “When you were that old lady on lookout.”
Harry brightened with realization, “Yeah, in that granny skirt.”
“Hey!” yelled Tonks as she hit his arm in earnest.
Harry smiled to her as he rubbed his tricep.
“Anyway,” said Tonks, “What can I do you two for?”
“Oh,” Harry said as he and Ginny took the proffered chairs in the large office. “Professor Dumbledore asked us if we would start the Defense Association again this year.”
“Of course you should have your club,” Tonks said. “The members of your club got the best OWL scores this last year. I’m in favor of it.”
“Okay, thanks,” Harry answered, “I told him that I thought not as we had a real teacher this year. But I guess that if you’re in favor, I will.”
Tonks beamed the brightest smile at him.
“Hey,” Ginny said jokingly as she took him upper arm possessively. “Keep your eyes to yourself. I’m the only one that gets to smile at him like that.”
Harry chuckled. He had long ago (days, in fact) accepted that Ginny would be possessive of him, jokingly and otherwise.
Tonks smirked, “Then tell him not to use his charm on young women and pay them compliments.”
“Hey, now,” Harry joked, his hands up to halt nonexistent hostilities. “No fighting. Where were all of the women fighting over me last year?”
Ginny smiled, “Simple, dear; no one likes moody and angry.”
“Yeah,” Tonks said, “With you happy, Ginny’ll have to fight them off with a stick,” Tonks grinned. “And the less genuine ones that aren’t won over by the happy Harry will when they read tomorrow’s Witch Weekly with their annual Who’s Who issue.”
“Huh?”
Ginny had to laugh at his ignorance.
“Harry,” Ginny said, “Each year you get higher and higher on their Who’s Who in the Wizarding World. This year I bet that you make the top five.”
“Oh,” Harry said on a downbeat.
“And that’s why,” said Tonks, “everyone will know a lot more about you, because they do a biography on each of the top five with in-depth research. It’ll come out that you’re among the richest wizards in the wizarding world. Just think,” she smirked, “you got all of this attention before people knew that not only were you famous, but also rich.”
Harry groaned.
“Oh,” Ginny said on her own downbeat.

The Headmaster was in his office trying, once again, to carry on a conversation with his phoenix, unsuccessfully, when he was startled out of his activities by a castle-wide announcement.

“Attention all first year students,” the voice announced.

Funny, thought the Professor, that voice sounds familiar.

“A tour of the castle and grounds is being offered to familiarize all first years with the classrooms and hallways of this castle. An expert will reveal handy shortcuts and will warn of common traps. This will be followed by a private lunch for the first years with Albus Percival Wulfric Brian Dumbledore, Order of Merlin, First Class; Grand Sorcerer; Supreme Mugwump of the International Confederation of Wizards; Chief Warlock of the Wizengamot and Headmaster to Hogwarts school of Witchcraft and Wizardry.”
The Professor chuckled at his full title being used, but had to wonder where his copy of the invitation was. 

"It is asked that all first years attend for their own ease in transitioning to Hogwarts life. Please gather in the main entry hall at ten this morning."

Just then a white snowy owl swooped in through his open window.

"Ah, Hedwig," said the headmaster, "Doesn't miss a beat, does he?"

Professor Dumbledore showed up, as requested, before the Room of Requirement at one in the afternoon. He was amused at the invitation. What a lovely idea Harry had. Having lunch specifically with the incoming first year was a unique idea. Why hadn’t he thought of that before? He really enjoyed children at the age of eleven. In most, you could see the innocent sparkle of curiosity in their young eyes.

He was stuck in his own eccentric ways after a century and a half of life. The answer to that was new blood that brought with it new ideas. Evidence of the Headmaster’s eccentricity was found in how he spent his free time, this morning in particular.

He had spent his morning in a conversation with an ancient building.

That’s correct, a building.

Not just any building, but Hogwarts herself, the living magic and smooth stone that was first assembled a millennia ago by the era’s greatest witches and wizards.

But no one besides Headmaster Dumbledore knew that the castle was sentient.

Well, no one but the former headmasters, and they were all dead so that’s enough of that.

Anyway, our illustrious Headmaster spent his morning talking to a spontaneous combustion-prone peacock and a millennia old castle.

Normally he would have played chess against the castle, the thing was down right deadly with rooks, but he wanted to know how Harry was able to use the castle to make his announcement. Even with a good and powerful Sonorus charm, you couldn’t reach through the labyrinth of passageways, classrooms and closed doors that made up the castle. It would have to cooperate with you.

So, after his interesting and enlightening morning, he found himself outside the Room of Requirements, about to attend lunch with the first year students at a sixth year student’s request, oh, and probably with a fifth year student behind his actions to some extent.

He pushed open the fine wood door to reveal a well-appointed room that was dominated by a giant round table with no less than forty students sitting around it. He noticed that each chair was stately but identical and no place was given dominance at the table. Furthermore, several empty chairs were available, leaving no pair of students to be automatically advantaged by his seating choice.

Harry and Ginny were sitting happily, as was obvious to the aged professor, in the middle of the largest mass of occupied seats around the table. He heard the scraping of a chair as Harry stood in greeting. The chatter of first years ceased as Harry got up and everyone noticed the Professor.

"Professor Dumbledore," Harry said in a bright greeting, "Good of you to have us to lunch. We arrived early from the tour and were waiting for our host."

Dumbledore smiled and diamonds danced in his eyes. Harry was making it out to seem that Dumbledore had orchestrated the day. Good for him, but Dumbledore could not let it slide for the entire day; mischief just ran too deep in his veins.

"Ah, yes, Harry," said the Headmaster, "good to see you." He smiled, "Good afternoon, Miss Weasley. How is your day progressing?"

Harry smirked at the old man. He had just been minorly outmaneuvered. The Headmaster, by calling him by his first name and Ginny by her surname, had elevated Harry to more than just a rank and file student; they might just see him as a leader, due to the Headmaster’s shown respect.

"Well, sir," she said, "we all had a very pleasant walk this morning."

Ah, Harry thought, can always count on Ginny to come to his aid; the tour was no big deal, certainly not a leadership function. It was just a pleasant walk.

Unbidden, Professor Dumbledore picked a seat across from Harry and Ginny, around thirty feet away across the doughnut shaped table.

The Professor noticed the lack of lunch before them and looked at Harry with a smirk. Harry gave a discrete nod.

"Why not, thought the Professor."

"Hello, everyone," he said, "I don’t know about you, but I say lets eat."

With that the table filled with a lunchtime feast. Not the usual heavy feast reserved for special occasions in the great hall, but cold cuts, rolls, ice cold pumpkin juice, salads and crisps; the perfect food for children at lunchtime.

The Headmaster happily reached to the dishes in front of him, starting with a large bowl of potato salad, complete with sliced hardboiled egg on top and a sprinkle of paprika. He then passed the bowl to the right, when he noticed that his dining companions were not suffering the usual ailments of
eleven year olds at adult sized tables of having to deal with their plates at throat level. He looked down and chuckled when he noticed that his chair was a good four inches shorter than his dining companions. A quick glance at the upperclasspersons across the dining area revealed this to be true for them as well.

"That was quite interesting Harry, Miss Weasley," said Professor Dumbledore.

Harry smiled at the Professor. The Headmaster always managed to make things interesting. The ‘lunch’ had started with good food, courtesy of the house elves, and proceeded to a healthy discussion. This later discussion, after the first years had left, was the payment for the afternoon.

"Please, Professor," said Ginny. "You call Harry, Harry. Call me Ginny."

The Professor smiled widely and nodded his head tilted to the side in assent.

"I believe that you had a goal with this afternoon," the Professor said. "I am curious as to what it was."

Harry smiled at Ginny. She nodded and smiled in return.

"Well, Professor," Harry answered, "Ginny and I saw a problem. In your dealings with me, you have admitted to being blinded. We found that you had many problems and made several mistakes. We thought that this might help you and, eventually, the students."

"Please explain," the Professor said with a smile. He was never adverse to learning.

"Okay, sir," said Harry, "Just understand that we're not angry at you. We think that we understand some of the mistakes that you made and want to help you in rectifying them in the future."

The Professor smiled. It was good to know that Harry was over his anger toward the old headmaster. He had to also like that Harry referred to ‘we’. ‘We’ leads to happiness.

Harry closed his eyes tight and lowered his chin, steeling himself to the coming events.

Ginny continued for him, "Professor, please recall. A student educated at Hogwarts that was raised without love. He was sent to those that did not love him; in fact they hated him and abused him regularly. He grew up without knowledge of the wizarding world that he belonged in and not until his eleventh birthday did he find out that he belonged somewhere. And, Professor, once he got to the wizarding world, he found out that the world that he had been denied for the first years of his life was so much better, for him, then the world that he grew up in. After he found out that the wizarding world seemed safe for him and that Hogwarts could be home, he was denied said home and sent back to his abusive caregivers by the people that he trusted until the wizarding world was ready for him to return. He felt no one cared," Ginny went on. "Do you recognize this student?"

The Professor sat quietly during this description, paying close attention to the redhead speaking throughout.

He responded immediately upon the ending question, "Of course, Ginny," he said. "Tom Marvolo Riddle."

"No, Professor," Ginny said. "Close, but I said student, not former student."

The Professor was stumped, although he would never use such slang, "Really? To whom are you referring?"

Ginny took her gaze from the aged professor and looked at the young man at her side. She took her hand from his and drew him into a hug around the shoulders. He raised his head for the first time since the description began and looked at the Headmaster.

"Me."

The Professor’s mental gears screeched to a halt. He was broken. Was what they said true? The description was nearly perfect for Tom, but for the one thing, semantics really, that Ginny had pointed out. Was Harry really raised nearly identically to Tom? Was the description really about Harry?

For the first time he let himself think of what he had learned at the hearing. He let his mistakes sink in.

"You know," Harry said again, startling the Headmaster out of his self questioning, "the one mistake that the Dursley’s made if I were to be turned into a dark lord, was in not telling me that my father hated me enough to send me away to live with those who hated me. Had I not grown up with the glimmer of hope that my parents once loved me, I don’t know how I would have turned out. Growing up, I had no idea if they ever loved me or not, but at least I had that hope that they did, unlike Tom. He grew up knowing that his father hated him," Harry said with certainty. "But we could debate nature versus nurture all day, or what it would take for nurture to overcome nature, but that won’t accomplish anything."

The Headmaster was crestfallen, his shoulders slumped.

"What..." the normally jolly man asked, "What can I do now? What is your purpose in telling me this?"

Harry and Ginny stood and placed themselves in front of the Professor.

"Sir," Harry said.

Dumbledore looked up.
"You can get to know your students and be there for them to relate problems to," Harry offered. "You can protect them for many years to come."

"You’re a good man," Ginny said. "You’re the best leader of the light. You’re a devoted guardian of the wizarding world. You’re a great Headmaster. And you could be a good protector once again."

"Just be there and listen," Harry continued. "Follow up and check on your students."

"Offer them a way out," Ginny concluded.

The Headmaster straightened.

"You’re not angry at me?" he asked.

"No," Harry said simply. "You’re a human. You make mistakes. All of us make mistakes. We all make assumptions based on our own wishes for the world. The only lasting change that will not go away is that you have lost your pedestal in our eyes."

"We hadn’t planned this to be this elaborate, but this is the result that we wanted," Ginny said. "We just wanted to open your eyes and show you a new avenue for you to go down."

Professor Dumbledore brought his shoulders back.

"And what you did today will help in this?" he asked.

Harry and Ginny looked into each other’s eyes. Ginny nodded minutely.

"Yes, sir," Harry said. "Yesterday, you were a legend, the most powerful wizard in the world, the man who sits at the head table and commands the attention of the world. No child seeks the ear of a legend to discuss their problems."

Ginny continued, "But today, you are the man who will sit with his students and discuss the everyday things, the likes and dislikes, the good and the bad; the problems."

"So," Professor Dumbledore said with a chuckle, "You two found a problem and came up with a solution," he smiled. "In one day, you may have changed how this school is headed," he paused. "Thank you."

"No problem, sir," Harry said. "We are going to kill Moldieshorts," Harry hugged Ginny tight to his side. "And we wanted to make sure that no more dark lords came into existence afterward. I may just have a future."

The Headmaster smiled brightly through his beard.

"And is there any other advice that you can give me?" Dumbledore asked.

"Yeah," Harry said, "Now that you ask... Next time you want to protect the only child that can kill a dark lord, remember, the best protection is training. Put them in a loving home and train them from when they can hold a wand and they would be invincible and incorruptible."

The Headmaster, not wanting to debate the topic, hedged, "Well, let us hope that your theory is not needed again."
“Come on Harry,” whined Ron, “How can you not be hungry? You just spent an entire day as a great dragon.”

“Thanks to Charlie,” grumbled Harry, grudgingly.

“Yeah, thanks to Charlie,” agreed Ron, smiling.

“Yeah, a whole day as the Care of Magical Creatures creature was bad, and Charlie had to get Dumbledore to schedule every creatures class to be able to see the special creature for the day,” complained Harry. “And all that for a prank. Who ever knew that Charlie was so…creative?”

“But Harry,” added Hermione, “It was a good learning experience and I, for one, enjoyed it.”

“Hmmph,” pouted Harry.

“At least most of the students didn’t know who you were,” said Ginny.

“At least you did,” added Harry, breaking a smile.

“But, how can you just sit there?” Ron asked. “I know that I would be starving.”

“Ron,” interjected Harry, “You’re always starving.”

Hermione and Ginny giggled.

“Hey, I’m a growing boy,” Ron protested.

More giggles.

“Hmmph,” said Ron at being the butt of giggles.

Harry still had not replied to the question of his appetite, but did wear a wide, knowing grin on his face.

“I think that I know why,” answered Charlie as he sat down to dinner. He had decided to stay the remainder of the day after assisting in a special day of Care of Magical Creatures class with a mostly docile male dragon, procured special for the day’s classes.

“Why?” asked Ron.

“Well,” Charlie said while he cut his chops, “I happen to know that during Ginny’s ride during the lunch break a herd of wild highland sheep went missing.”

Ginny looked shocked.

“How did you know? Harry, I swear, I didn’t tell,” claimed Ginny, wide-eyed.

“Actually, Hermione,” offered Ginny, “It was quite good.”

The group looked at her like she was crazy.

“Oh, um,” temporized Ginny, “Harry used one of his talons to tear a tender piece off for me.”

They started to look less turned off of the idea until…

“You just have to ignore the burnt wool smell,” Ginny added.

Well, except for Ron. Nothing could turn Ron from his meal.
The following day being Saturday and still early in the school term, Harry and Ginny were able to spend the bulk of the day with their animagus research material (read: muggle animal physiology books). They were both patently excited to be studying the animagus transformation. Nothing better than a good first week at school followed by time with your love interest.

Ever since they had learned of their natural forms, with the help of Professor McGonagall, they had been using free time to gain the instinctual understanding of their animal forms.

According to the Professor, in order to transform, they must have built a section of their mind that will contain the model of their animal. The only thing that they need do to transform after their initial transformation would be to call up that part of their brain that held their animal.

In order to affect their initial transformation, they needed someone to cast the spell on them when they are concentrating on the form. While it was possible to enact the changing spell on yourself, it was also infinitely easier to have someone to perform the spell for you.

At the beginning of the school year they had found their forms to be a falcon for Ginny and a black panther for Harry. Professor McGonagall had been very helpful in procuring, from London, the necessary anatomy and physiology books to build the required knowledge base.

So here they sat with sheaves of parchment that would hopefully soon hold their detailed sketches of each area of the animal’s body, inside and out. Just in the first week of working on the project, they had made a good dent in the drawings necessary to build their animals.

“Harry, how long did Sirius say it took for them to learn how to become an animagus?” Ginny asked.

She had been feeling that this was going faster than her conversations with the grim animagus had led her to believe that it should.

“A couple of years, I think,” Harry said absently.

“Yeah, that’s what I remember him saying,” Ginny confirmed. “Isn’t this going faster than it should?”

“Dun’no,” Harry responded. “I’m just happy that it is. At this rate we should be ready before Christmas break.”

“Why did it take them so much longer than it’s taking us?” Ginny continued.

“They didn’t have professor McGonagall’s help,” Harry stated. “Experience means everything.”

At the end of the second week at school, Harry was exhausted and moving on autopilot. Thank goodness that he could move directly from the Chamber to the hallway in front of the Gryffindor tower. He managed another four crests in addition to his exercise, practice and study regimen. Unique customized school crests set solidly into their stone floors now adorned all of the hallways belonging to the active branches of study at Hogwarts.

“Hey, Harry,” exclaimed Ron, “where’ve you been all day?”

Harry had just stepped into the common room with his book bag slung over his shoulder. He was exhausted from a day in the caves below the school. Most people, of course, didn’t know they existed and only he and his girlfriend had been recent visitors there; well, except for Harry’s number one enemy fifty years prior, but they didn’t like to think of him when it wasn’t necessary. Ron and Professor Lockhart had only been to the mouth of the caves at the end of a drainage nexus, not within the cave system itself. It almost seemed to be a private place, and the fact that Harry controlled the only entrances to the area made it his choice as to when the general populace should learn of them. This moment, with at least twenty Gryffindor members in attendance, was not the time. Harry used the chamber as a practice area for his greater power training, which could do great damage and always drained him to the bone, but unexpected visitors could be hurt before Harry could curb the magic.

“Training, Ron,” he said, glancing around to the others in the room to convey his point.

In a rare moment of insight his friend understood Harry’s reluctance to reveal more. Harry had told him that it was not supposed to be common knowledge that he was in extra training. For the most part he contented himself with not telling his housemates where he was at all hours of the day.

“Oh, yeah, sorry about that,” Ron apologized.

Ginny poked her head around the edge of the couch that she was occupying, out of Harry’s vision, to see that it was her boyfriend that was coming her way.

“Harry,” cheered Ginny, “come here, you must be exhausted. I saved you a spot.”

Ron looked at Ginny sprawled on the couch and snorted. She had stretched out earlier, taking up the entire couch and wouldn’t budge for those few that asked. Saved a spot, indeed. A right lioness she could be.

Harry dragged himself to her, bending down to give her a peck on the lips. She eased herself up, allowing him to slip behind her, and snuggled back into his embrace as she lay back down. Ginny sighed in contentment as they both relaxed bonelessly.

Even with his relaxed schedule of official classes, Harry worked himself harder than any other member of Gryffindor house; even Hermione worked less hours, now that she had other distractions. Not to say that she let any of her studies go lax, but she seemed to understand the value of free time better now.
Ginny, with his training schedule, when do you and Harry ever get any time together?” Hermione asked.

Ginny glanced back at her boyfriend to see his eyes closed. She felt his steady, slow breathing and knew that he was asleep.

“That’s simple, Hermione,” Ginny answered. “I’ve been helping him study and research things that he needs to learn, we research our transfiguration together, I go with him occasionally when he is training, and yet he still finds time to treat me special. He is such a romantic.”

“Harry, a romantic?” asked Hermione in shock.

“Yeah, we’ve gone out to dinner under the stars, he took me on a picnic lunch, he’s voluntarily taking dance lessons with me, and, sometimes, he just surprises me between classes with a rose and a snog between classes. I never see him come and he disappears before I can get a word in edgewise,” she said wistfully.

Ron heard this and looked on disbelieving.

“A snog in the hallways, how is that romantic?” asked Ron.

“Oh, it’s just so surprising, spontaneous, and sudden and the rose is just so perfect,” she babbled. “He enchants all of them so that they last forever. I have a vase beside my bed for them all. Every time that I look at them I just think of how passionate he is and how considerate. You know that he casts a cushioning charm on the wall, he is just so considerate,” Ginny said like a girl in love.

Ron however was turning green at the sum of his sister’s words. And yet he still didn’t engage his brain enough to realize that, maybe, ignorance would be bliss.

“But, why would he cast a cushioning charm on the wall?” asked the green Ron.

“Ron!” said his own girlfriend, “isn’t it obvious? The walls are stone and they would hurt when he…um…when she…Ginny, help me out here,” she said as she started to get flummoxed and embarrassed.

Ron was still clueless and Ginny was blushing something fierce.

But that didn’t stop her from twisting her brother’s tail.

“Well, you see Ron,” she said as if she were talking to a child about birds-and-bees-ish sort of things, “When a man loves a woman, he likes to surprise her and throw her up against the wall and kiss her until she can’t form coherent thoughts or make her knees function properly. Since the wall is hard, and he cares about her welfare, he makes sure that she is comfortable and not hurt. Then, when he’s done, he gives her a rose so that she knows that it was not just a fantasy running amok with delusions in her mind alone,” Ron was definitely looking pallid and seemed to regret every question he had ever asked his sister in his entire life. “Of course the full body flush and the bruised lips would be enough for some, but he wants to make it extra special.”

Hermione was trying to decide between her own embarrassment and humor at Ron’s green appearance.

“Oh, poor Hermione,” Ginny said in a mock sympathetic voice, “it seems that your boyfriend doesn’t know about these things. Maybe you could get him to ask Harry for some advice.”

Humor won out for Hermione as Ron’s jaw fell open. Harry just slept on, ignorant of his girlfriend’s antics.

Later that evening Ron stole away to the owlery to send a missive to his brothers. Each got an identical letter.

Brothers Weasley;

I have just come from a most unpleasant evening. Our dear sister felt it necessary to twist my tail, leaving me quite green around the gills. While telling us how romantic her lovely boyfriend was she let it slip that he was in the habit of casting a cushioning charm on the walls of Hogwarts and surprising our dear little sister by throwing her up against the wall and snogging her until, and I quote, “she can’t form coherent thoughts or make her knees function properly.” He then gives her an everlasting rose (a rose charmed by himself to last forever, that is) and disappears as quickly as he came.

Should we all be worried about our dear little baby sister? Is she safe? Should we put a stop to this?

Your brother,

Ron.

Ron only had to wait a day and a half for the replies, as four owls deposited letters for him at breakfast one day.

Dearest Ron,

We are sorely disappointed in you. We are sure that The-Boy-Who-Lived would never endanger our lovely sister physically and would never hurt her emotionally. Beyond that, we are convinced that she can take care of herself and will not be forced into anything.
We are curious as to why you are writing about such an easy and obvious way to wind you up.

That we are, Gred. I wonder if he is angry for other reasons.

That could be Forge. What would those reasons be?

Well Gred, could he not like to see his best friend and his only sister happy?

I don't believe so Forge. I believe that he is just jealous that he did not think of it first.

But Gred, would he be Gryffindor enough to try such a thing in the open in front of Queen and country, not to mention students and professors.

Alas, we will never know Forge as he will seem like a copy-cat as his girlfriend has already heard of the tactics.

Perhaps he is just jealous. He did fail to think of it first as you said, Gred.

Ah yes, thank-you, but how is it that we did not think of it ourselves in our tenure at that wonderful institution?

Who knows, dear brother, but at least our girlfriends have not heard from dear Ginevra of this, so we may still be successful.

Quite right. But does this not give you any ideas for our someday-to-be brother-in-law?

Right you are twin of mine. I have nowhatched a plan myself.

As have I.

So, dear Ron, do not worry about it and expect a prank in the mail for Harry in the coming months.

Yours truly,

Gred and Forge.

P.S. Could you ask Harry for the spell he uses on the flowers? We could make a mint selling Everlasting Roses.

Ron blanched. He could see he would be getting no help from his twin brothers in keeping his sister chaste. He couldn’t understand how they didn’t feel that she needed protection. She was, after all, their baby sister and therefore needed a brother’s protection.

Well, maybe he would receive help from one of the others.

Dear youngest brother,

I believe that you have our younger sister read completely wrong. Of my siblings, I believe that she is the most responsible and trustworthy. I do not believe that she is going to be forced into anything, much less by Harry. He is, after all, your best friend.

But, on to other issues. This is the first letter that I have received from you this school year and you have not talked about your own academic pursuits. If you are to have a chance of making Head Boy as I myself did, you will need to buckle down and study. It is not enough to be an exemplary prefect, as I am sure that you are as a brother of mine, you must show the headmaster that you are amongst the best in the classroom as well. I hear from mother that you have made Quidditch Captain. While I did not desire to take that path of recreation, I have heard that being Quidditch Captain is a good stepping-stone to Head Boy as you have a chance to show your leadership abilities. It is not yet a foregone conclusion, as you may think, that Harry will receive the Head Boy position. He was not made prefect and it may be safe to assume that he will not be made Head Boy. The position of Head Boy is one requiring a true leader and he does not seem to be such. Just buckle down and work hard and you are sure to gain the position of Head Boy.

Yours,

Percival Ignatius Weasley.

“What a daft ponce,” Ron exclaimed, earning him questioning glances from the Gryffindors near him.

“What is it Ron?” Hermione asked.

“Oh well,” Ron said, stalling, he didn’t want to reveal to Hermione that he wrote to his brothers about Ginny’s relationship, “Percy wrote me and has this whole diatribe on how I need to study more to make Head Boy.” Hermione snorted her agreement with Ron’s brother. “But then he goes on to say that ‘It is not yet a foregone conclusion that Harry will receive the Head Boy position,’ as ‘the position is one requiring a true leader and he does not seem to be such.’”
Ron was glaring unbelieving at the parchment.

"How can he think that Harry doesn’t have the leadership skills to be the Head Boy? He’s the Head Boy in all but title. He leads a class at least three times a week of more than half of the school in defense techniques. He solves most of the problems of the lowerclassmen; when the first years of most of the houses have a problem they come to him before the prefects."

"Is that why the prefect duties have been so light this year?” asked Hermione.

"Yeah,” answered Ginny, “Haven't you seen the little tykes come up to him in the hallways?”

"Is that why he was late for potions last week? He lost twenty points for being five minutes late."

"Uh-huh,” Ron confirmed with a nod. “A Hufflepuff had a question about writing to her parents. They are muggles and Harry answered her question and later took her to the owery to send the letter."

"Wow, how did I not notice?” asked Hermione.

"Easy, you're taking so many classes that you're either in class or studying,” said Ginny, chiming in on the conversation. “Not saying that’s a bad thing, but since Harry has only four organized classes, he has the time for the other students.”

“But what about his training?” Hermione asked.

“He can do that at any time,” answered Ginny, “It's best just before bed time, as he’s currently using most of his time training for exhaustion.”

“Don’t you mean endurance?” Hermione asked.

“Yeah, that too. He needs to be able to stretch himself harder and for longer and he needs to be in control, still, after he is exhausted,” answered Ginny. Ron and Hermione both were looking at her like this was a new revelation about their friend. “Besides, it's a good thing because he'll let me cuddle him and baby him if he’s exhausted,” she said, as if it were the best treat in the world.

Ron continued the last two letters after classes that day, as they weren’t going how he expected and he didn’t want his sister or girlfriend to find out about his attempted meddling.

He managed to find time before dinner when Hermione was busy in the library to read the notes from Bill and Charlie.

Hey Ron,

You’d better be careful about this line of thought. There’s a reason that Charlie and I are scared of Ginny. We taught her too well. While you were off to school, we taught her to throw a punch and land a kick. She’s deadly. Not only does she have every dirty fighting skill we could teach her, but she also inherited her mother’s yelling capacity and temper. She’s safe from Harry because she would just kill him if he hurt her and she’s safe from your meddling, as she would rip you limb from limb if she knew that you wanted to deprive her of her new love. Don’t mess with her. She can take care of herself. Worry about Harry’s safety around her, if you want to worry so much. If she wants, she gets.

And what’s wrong with you? Didn’t we teach you better that to let your best friend be the most romantic of your group? He didn’t have the advantages of older brother’s wisdom as a resource for learning. Were you asleep when you could have been learning from our successes and failures? Do something romantic for Hermione and stop worrying about Ginny. She can take care of herself, and besides, if she ever did tell us that Harry hurt her, then we could and would tear him apart. That is our job as brothers.

Sagely,

Bill.

P.S. I will have to ask Charlie how we never came up with school traditions as creative as Harry.

Daftest Ron,

You seem to be in the dark about how love works when you are teenaged. It can get hot and heavy quickly and most boys are not considerate of their love’s happiness, or at least not as their first priority. Harry seems to be the exception. Ginny has owled me numerous times about their relationship. It seems that after her first year she was reluctant to use a diary and I was her substitute. Don’t ask; I will tell nothing. You are the only one to know of her owling me on a regular basis, so no telling anyone. Especially her. I say this to let you know that I am privy to all that you have heard and more. There is nothing for the Brothers Weasley to worry about. You just need to step off of your high horse and realize that our sister is happier than she has ever been in her life. We didn’t have the ability to make her this happy as only true love can do this. She loves the way he trusts her. She loves the way he is soothed by her. And she loves the way he surprises her and shows how passionately in love with her he is. Just remember, as long as she trusts us, we’ll know if he tries to do anything to hurt her. If you screw up that trust, we will never know until long after it is too late.

Just remember, you can’t intimidate Harry. I’ve heard all of the stories from Mom about what he has done, and the ones from Ginny to
There is no way in the world to intimidate Harry James Potter. He has faced dragons, merpeople, sphinxes, dark lords and death eaters. If you try to scare Harry away, he’ll only do the opposite. He’s that strong and stubborn, as you should know as his friend. Don’t do anything stupid.

And…Ron. If Harry hurts Ginny, I will hurt him. If you cause Ginny to get hurt, I will hurt you.

Sincerely,

Charlie.

Ron paled at his brother’s conviction and took the combined advice of his brothers entirely to heart.
Hermione Jane Granger was born September 19th, 1979 and as, in the wizarding world, a young person’s seventeenth birthday marked their start in their adult life, Tuesday had seen her enjoy her most important day. She had celebrated it in a style that she, uniquely, enjoyed. She had been eagerly wished a ‘happy birthday’ by more people than she would have ever thought would be even casual friends. She had had a good day of lessons and a great evening in private with her boyfriend. What she looked forward to more was the coming Saturday, however maliciously. The feral smile on her face might have scared even Moody. She smiled as she recollected receiving permission from the Headmaster to ‘visit her parents’ with Ginny. The smile would have certainly scared most Aurors.

Adding to the grin was the knowing look from the Headmaster. Sometimes he was just too well informed about what the people in the school were thinking.

Yet, permission was still granted, which surprised Hermione after the Headmaster’s grin. She, of course, mused that Harry probably wouldn’t have been surprised at all, as he had more experience with the aged professor one-on-one.

“Ginny, are you ready?” she asked her younger friend.

Hermione looked up to see the redhead woman smiling at Harry.

“Just a sec,” Ginny said before bending down to Harry’s ear.

“Hey, babe,” she said lightly to him. “You don’t mind me going with Hermione to visit her parents, do you?”

Harry smiled and pecked her on the cheek. “Of course not. You need time with your friends separate from me. I’ll be fine.”

Ginny smiled at her considerate boyfriend. “Just don’t hurt yourself today.”

“I won’t. Have fun,” Harry dismissed.

Ginny and Hermione smiled, with a predatory glint in their eyes.

“We will,” they said together softly.

As the girls were taking a portkey from the Headmaster’s office to Hermione’s home where her parents were waiting, Harry was walking through the halls of Hogwarts to an inconspicuous transport crest, so he wouldn’t be seen disappearing. To Harry’s mind, this method of entering the Chamber was certainly better than the old method.

He contemplated what he would practice today, as there was no Quidditch practice later. He had finished his homework. Nothing to do but practice for a bit. His thoughts turned back to a month old question in the back of his mind. What would happen if he were to put his magic reserves behind a flame spell? Could he melt a piece of the obsidian that he has been working with for the crests?

He chuckled to himself at the idea. Maybe today he could find out.

A gasp and the sound of the coffee table being bumped were the sounds that initially greeted the teenage girls upon arrival at the London home of Doctor and Doctor Granger, husband and wife.

Mrs. Granger was standing in the living room, her shoulders steadied by her husband, with her hand over her heart from the shock of seeing two teenagers materialize in front of her in an instant. Mister Granger had to suppress his chuckles at the sight of his normally in control wife jumping in fright at her own daughter.

“Hermione Jane Granger,” said the mother of one. “Don’t do that. You almost gave me a heart attack.”

“Sorry mum,” said the bushy haired teen. “But you’ve seen portkeys before.”

“I know,” said Mrs. Granger. “But that doesn’t mean that I’ll ever get used to them. You almost landed on top of me.”

“Mum,” Hermione said as Ginny giggled behind her hand, “I told you before, it’s not possible to materialize on top of something else. The magic won’t allow it.”

“Magic or no magic, don’t do that!” her mother ordered.

Hermione smiled, “Okay, Mum.”
“Hello, Mrs. Granger, Mr. Granger,” Ginny greeted the room.

“Oh...Mum, Dad,” Hermione said, mentally chastising herself for not making introductions, “you remember Ginny, right?”

The Grangers smiled and Mr. Granger replied, “Of course, honey,” he said to his daughter. “Hello, Ginny. What’s new in your life?”

“Please, everyone sit down. I’ll go make some tea,” said Mrs. Granger as the hostess.

“Now, dear, why are you really here in London?” asked a smiling Mrs. Granger.

“Just thought that we would visit my parents after my seventeenth birthday, Mum,” replied Hermione with an air of innocence.

Mrs. Granger gave her daughter a look of serious disbelief.

“What?” Hermione asked, her innocent air faltering. Ginny just sat silent, studiously silent, watching the exchange between mother and daughter.

“Oh, fine,” said an exacerbated Hermione. “We’re going to go to Little Whinging to teach a little lesson to Harry’s Aunt and Uncle.”

“And why is that, young lady?” her father asked.

“Well, um...” stammered Hermione.

“Mrs. Granger, Mr. Granger,” Ginny said, relieving her friend. “We need to do this for our own sense of justice.” She took a deep breath.

“Hermione has probably mentioned Harry Potter to you before and so you probably have some inkling of what a wonderful person he is. What you probably don’t know is that he grew up in a house where the other people, she spat, “hated him. He was beaten and abused; mentally and physically. His relatives took steps to make sure that he knew how unwanted and unloved he was. He grew up in a four-bedroom home with three other people, his aunt, his uncle and his cousin; however, he was forced to live in the cupboard under the stairs until he received his first Hogwarts letter. I say first because that one was destroyed before he could read it as were the next several hundred. His uncle took great steps to prevent him from learning of his heritage until a representative of the school showed up in person to see that he had received his letter and was able to attend the school. By now she was on a roll, emotionally, and couldn’t stop. “Throughout his life under their care, he has been called a freak, beaten by his relatives, locked in his cupboard, starved and abused. He has been treated as a slave for the family to cover the ‘costs’ of his board there. This previous summer was the first time, since he was orphaned, that he has ever had an entire brand new outfit of muggle clothes. The first time that he ever had one article of new clothing was his Hogwarts robes when he was eleven. All of his clothing before was hand-me-down’s from his morbidly obese cousin. They tend to fit him like a tent. The one thing that I am glad of is that he was not born a girl and placed in that environment, so that the abuse would have been complete.”

The Granger women in the room took a sharp intake of breath.

With a steely look in his eye, Mr. Granger asked, “Not to alarm you, but are you sure that the abuse was not ‘complete’ as it was?”

Hermione let out a small sob. Ginny was able to answer, though. “Yes, Mr. Granger, I’m sure. For a court proceeding to declare him an emancipated minor, he voluntarily took a truth serum and detailed every abuse. Even between the three of them, they did not take the final step. However, between the three of them, they did nearly every other despicable thing, mostly mental abuse from his aunt and uncle and physical abuse from his cousin with the knowledge of his aunt and uncle. They did practice corporal punishment, however, with a quite liberal view of what was punishable.”

Mr. Doctor Granger took a deep breath before he spoke. “Consider that a good thing, then, Miss Weasley.” At her odd, curious look he continued. “I assume that you are considering a future to your relationship with this young man?” She nodded. “Of the forms of abuse a child suffers, sexual abuse is the most destructive. The effects can go unnoticed for years and not crop up until adulthood to further ruin their lives. Evidence of other abuses can be noticed much sooner and can be more easily dealt with.” He gave her a wane smile. “From the stories that I have heard of Mr. Potter, he has already overcome much of the expected problems and, with good friends such as yourselves, should move through the rest of the more subtle issues.”

“Yes,” Ginny said quietly, “Thank you.”

“Now,” said Mr. Granger, “I assume that you picked this weekend to meet out justice because you just turned seventeen, Hermione?” She smiled and nodded. “I also assume that you are not simply turning them in to the Bobbies because of a lack of evidence that could be presented to the magistrate?”

“Yes,” Hermione answered.

“In that case,” Mr. Granger said after a brief look in his wife’s eyes, “while we do not approve, if you will promise to abide by some things, Elizabeth and I will drive you there and back.”

“What things, dad?” Hermione asked.

“You will do no physical harm that will require treatment of a doctor or healer, as you call them in your world, I believe,” he listed. “You will not do any psychological harm that will cause loss of income or the like. And, Miss Weasley, as I understand that you are not a legal adult yet, you must promise that you will not use any magic.”

At the look from the girls, Elizabeth Granger intervened, “Understand, we ask these promises to protect you from the law and a heavy conscience. This is not what a parent wants to see their child feel that they have to do. We just hope that you are both safe. This is the best way, dear.”
“Thank you, mom, dad,” Hermione said sincerely. “We will abide and promise, as you said.”

“Yeah, we promise,” Ginny repeated.

Mrs. Granger smiled at the two young ladies before her. “Just realize, girls, that this won’t change the boy’s relatives’ viewpoints. Go into this knowing that this is for yourselves.”

“It’s still necessary, mum,” Hermione said.

“We understand.”

As a black four-door Mercedes wove its way from London to Little Whinging, a stone chamber beneath the world’s oldest wizarding school was slowly increasing in temperature. Harry Potter stood at the tip of the Chamber’s seal fueling a firestorm in the center of the chamber with his magic. A fireball ten feet in diameter floated three feet from the floor, flames writhing in the sphere with an occasional flare-up licking the surrounding air. Small shards of obsidian, leftovers from the creation of the crests, drifted into the side of the fiery orb and flowed out the bottom in liquid form. Sitting on a steel stool below the sun-like mass was a delicate black dragon; forming from the pieces of amorphous solid that were melted in the fireball before being integrated in the sculpture. Each molten drop of obsidian began to cool and harden as soon as they reached the open air, making the working time precious.

Ginny looked at her watch.

Two hours.

Hermione had been yelling and scolding for two hours.

Ginny was impressed.

Ginny grew up in a home with six older brothers, a strong but youthfully spirited father and a red-headed mother that could cow all of her children plus her father and a good portion of the Order of the Phoenix, at one time, when she was hot under the collar. The secret for survival with her mother was to cut her rant off before she got a head of steam behind her. If you missed this crucial stage, she would not calm down before she had exhausted her fire.

The problem is that this was not her mother, although the differences, at that time, were a complete loss to Ginny. If you had told her that Hermione was trying to do a perfect imitation of her mother, the only constructive criticism that she could offer would be to add just a little bit of nasal tone to her voice and it would pass as perfect.

The Dursley family had no chance to have cut her off before she got on a roll, as the first thing that happened was a full body bind for the three people. They were still conscious and alert, from the beginning; they could just not move or speak. And so, she went on.

“…and furthermore, how DARE YOU tell a little child that they cannot ASK questions. The very idea of stifling a child’s mental growth is repugnant. Nothing a child could do or ask could have, should have EVER caused human beings to act in such a manner. You are all vile and contemptible. You should all be thrown to the hyenas save the fact that even hyenas value the young of their species more than you have shown.”

Hermione paused to control her breathing and Ginny saw this as an opportunity to end this love fest.

“Okay, whoa there Hermione,” said Ginny. “Your parents are still waiting and you’re starting to repeat yourself.”

Hermione panted, sagging at the shoulders.

“Really?” asked Hermione.

“Yeah,” said Ginny. “You mentioned the ‘asking questions’ thing about an hour and a half ago.”

Hermione breathed out a sigh. “Oh. But it is important.”

“I agree. And I think that they,” she nodded at the Dursleys, “understand your feelings on the issue by now, but I think that it’s time to wrap this up and go to dinner before we go back to school.”

“Okay,” Hermione said, her voice getting hoarse now that she had slowed down. “Did you have anything to add?”

Ginny had a cold determined look to her eye. “Just one thing. Release that beached whale of a cousin of Harry’s.”

Hermione, trusting Ginny, waved her wand, canceling the body bind. Dudley stood in fright, backing to his father’s frozen body.

“I do not like bullies,” Ginny said, “and you are the worst. You should not pick on people smaller than you.”

Ginny hauled back, straightened her wrist and drove her fist forward, pushing with her everything behind the punch from her legs, torso, chest, shoulder and arm straight through her knuckles, every ounce of power her small form held concentrated on the chin of Harry’s childhood tormentor.
Harry was still working in the Chamber of Secrets as Ginny and Hermione were finishing with their version of Justice and entering the luxury car for the ride home.

Harry couldn't feel the heat any more as he had started to get chills and to develop muscle aches and a slight headache, as well as an upset stomach. He failed to notice that he was having a slight problem focusing that had nothing to do with the perspiration rolling onto his glasses. It didn’t occur to him that any of these things needed attention.

The beginning of the car ride back to London was quiet as everyone digested the day’s events. Mr. Granger finally cleared his throat to break the silence.

“That took a while. Could you tell us, briefly, what happened?” he asked, definitely.

Ginny giggled before explaining for her friend. “Not too much, magically speaking. Hermione paralyzed them and then yelled at them for two hours straight.”

“Yes, we could hear from the car,” Mrs. Granger said. “Even understood most of it.”

Hermione gave an embarrassed ‘oh’ before she hid her blushing face.

“Figures,” Ginny responded. “I only stopped her when she started to repeat herself.”

“Impressive,” her mom said.

“I thought so,” Ginny said with a smile.

“What else happened?” asked Mr. Granger.

“Oh, well…just as you asked, nothing that would require a hospital.”

He spared her a glance back as he drove, silently demanding a further explanation.

“Oh, all right,” Ginny sighed. “I had Hermione unfreeze Harry’s cousin and told him not to pick on people smaller than himself and then taught him some humility.”

“Not with magic, I hope,” Mrs. Granger responded.

Now it was Hermione’s turn to giggle. “No. Perfectly muggle. He is roughly the size of a baby hippopotamus and she gave him one good punch to the chin and laid him out on the floor.”

Mr. Granger answered this with nothing more than a raised eyebrow to the image in the rear view mirror in appreciation and reassessment of the diminutive young lady.

When Harry finally succumbed to the heat that had been attacking his body, it proved to be fortuitous that he had been standing at the tip of the school crest. Just a couple of minutes after Harry’s unconscious body came to rest on the Chamber’s crest, Madame Pomfrey was startled to find him lying on the stone floor of her hospital wing, directly on top of the beautiful piece of stonework that he had installed for her. She immediately set to work assessing and treating her patient before she called the Headmaster on the floo.

The young Gryffindor ladies arrived back at the Headmaster’s office that evening on schedule to little fanfare and a very short conversation.

“Hello, ladies,” said the aged Headmaster. “Am I to assume that your birthday celebrations were pleasing?”

“Yes, sir,” both girls said.

“Ah, then,” he said, “perhaps it would be best if you ladies retired for the night.”

“Yes, sir,” they repeated.

“And you may, if you wish,” the Headmaster said, “stop by the hospital wing and check on Harry on your way to the tower.”

“What?!?” yelled Ginny. “What’s wrong? What happened? Is he all right? How long has he been there? What’s wrong with him? Why didn’t you get a hold of me? Why didn’t you tell me right away? Oh, I’ve got to go check on him!” She turned and sprinted out the door without waiting for any answers.

Professor Dumbledore and Hermione could hear the rapid descent of Ginny’s feet on the stone steps and the receding sound of her running from the office.

“To answer her questions, even though she has already left, Miss Granger,” Professor Dumbledore said, “Harry has suffered from heat exhaustion and is being given plenty of water and left to rest and gather needed sleep. He will be given a pepper-up potion in the morning and will be no worse for the wear. I did not contact you and waited to tell you as there is nothing else to be done and it was far from dire. He has been in the hospital
wing for a couple of hours now and is probably sound asleep at this moment."

“Thank you, Professor,” Hermione said politely.

“Now, off you go to your dorm,” said the Professor, ending the conversation.

Harry spent a peaceful night amongst the stark white linen of the hospital wing with a vague impression of a fiery angel soothing him for a short time as he slept. The last thing any person wants to hear, a recognized voice using every syllable of your birth name as the start of a reprimand, interrupted said peace.

Apparently he should ‘be more careful.’

He shouldn’t ‘try anything like that ever again, you hear me?’

He should ‘take better care of yourself.’

He should ‘drink more water.’(?)

He should ‘never, ever worry her like that ever again.’

(‘He should learn to wear earplugs to bed,’ Harry added silently.)
“Professor Tonks,” said Harry with a happy smile. “I understand the Waltz and other traditional dances, but when are we going to be able to use this dance style?”

Ginny grinned at his question. Harry was really being a good sport in volunteering for dance lessons. She enjoyed dancing and had a bit of intuition that there may just be a dance this year.

Besides, he was a fast learner at physical things like this; she guessed it was all of the years on a broom, learning coordination and timing.

“Yes, Mister Potter!” Tonks said in a playful snarl. “And I told you two to drop the ‘Professor’ routine when we are alone.”

She smiled sweetly at the young man and his love.

“Besides,” Tonks continued, “some of the faster songs, even in the wizarding world, are suitable for this style, and the Aggie Swing sure gets the attention.”

Harry rolled his eyes, “Just what I need…more attention. Isn’t there any dancing that we could do that would make people ignore us?”

Ginny hugged him tightly and then held him out at arms length while she overtly raked her eyes up and down his body.

“Not a chance, honey,” she said with a lascivious grin. “How you look, it won’t matter how you dance, the females will stare. The best you can hope for is to learn how properly so that you can impress people with your skills too.”

“Oh, okay,” Harry conceded, melodramatically. “This type of dancing is just hard on my shoulders. I seem to be finding new muscles with every dance I learn.”

“Don’t worry, Harry,” Tonks added. “During a real ball, you won’t have to do this one more than a time or two.”

Ginevra Weasley woke up and found a note under a purple rose facing her from her second pillow. How Harry managed to get her correspondence to her dorm was beyond her. Yet this wasn’t the first time, and hopefully wouldn’t be the last. She just hoped to wake up with him putting the gift there so she could take advantage of him.

She sat up excitedly and tore at the envelope. After a quick read, she found that this would be another good Friday.

After several lengthy discussions on the subject, the Defense Association was well up and running. It was structured to be open to the entire school, without prejudice, a goal that was difficult, even as it was worthy.

The meetings were between the last class of the day and dinner in a two-hour block three times a week, Monday, Wednesday and Friday. All students were welcome to each class, with the advanced material being taught in the first half hour, less advanced in the second and Harry helping each group with suggestions until the end of the meeting. This allowed the more advanced members time to practice while lower levels were being taught. Anyone who Harry saw to have mastered a lesson was asked to help others with the effort. Most often the group that accompanied him to the Department of Mysteries was the core of the helpers.

The Friday meeting eight days before the first Quidditch game, this first game quite early in the year, was well underway before dinner when the door opened once again; a rare occurrence, as members were seldom late.

Harry glanced up from his position with a second year student to see a familiar blond head and two mounds of muscle and fat entering the room.

Harry made his apologies and gave brief instructions to the student before walking swiftly to the entrance of the Room of Requirement. Several students and friends perked up at the action. The situation could get rather messy.

“Hello, Malfoy, Crabbe, Goyle. What brings you to our club meeting?” Harry said as he reached the area of the door. With a wave and a silent request to the room, the entrance, along with the four Hogwarts students, was enclosed in a room of its own, with a new armored door leading to the previously open practice area.

Malfoy studiously observed the change to the room.

“What’s wrong, Potter?” Malfoy spat. “Worried that we will see something that you are teaching and get you in trouble?”

“No,” said Harry confidently, “Just don’t want us to be hit with an errant spell. When students are practicing, it’s best to have your attention focused. Besides, the Headmaster is aware of all of the magic being taught here.”
“Whatever.”

“Now,” said Harry in a civil voice, “how may I help you three?”

“I heard that this is an open club and I want to join,” Draco proclaimed, “as do Crabbe and Goyle.”

Harry smiled.

“Certainly,” he said, “just read and sign the wizarding contract and you are joined.”

Harry waved his hand and a pedestal appeared with three parchment contracts atop.

Malfoy grabbed the offered quill and scratched onto the paper.

Nothing happened.

“What is the meaning of this, Potter?”

“Just a contract, Draco,” he answered. “But it won’t accept your signature until you read it and understand the conditions and clauses. We believe in informed consent.”

Draco grumbled and started to read. Harry simply stood near the door to the Room proper with a look of disinterest on his face.

“This is ridiculous, Potter,” raged Draco after a few minutes of reading. “You can’t possibly expect to say that we can’t use what we learn however we like? This is utterly absurd.”

Harry put on a serious expression.

“Of course I can,” Harry returned acutely. “Everyone that I am teaching has agreed to these conditions. No one may even observe a meeting without a signature. These are dark times and society must be protected.”

Draco was outraged. “There is freedom of choice. You can’t impinge on my free will like some ponce lord or something.”

“But, Draco,” Harry said with concern, “didn’t you know that free will is always an option. I’m not telling you which side to fight on; I am telling you that if I teach you anything, it will not be used against the good guys or innocents,” he said before continuing in a calmer, even voice. “Feel free to go grovel on your knees in front of the great half-blood ponce dark lord himself. Feel free to receive cruciatus curses for his entertainment. That is your choice, but it will leave you dead or rotting in a cell for the rest of your life.”

“What do you know?” Draco asked with venom and acid in his voice.

“I know that you still have a choice,” Harry said assuredly. “You haven’t done anything to warrant your removal from society…yet…but your father would have you kissing all of the right boots to steer you in that direction if you don’t grow a bloody backbone and make your own choices in life. The only thing more pathetic than a Deatheater choosing to grovel at Moldieshorts feet is one that never had the backbone to make the choice one way or the other to begin with.”

Draco was so incensed that he pulled his wand, intending to teach this git a lesson.

Big mistake.

Slytherin rule number one: Don’t draw your wand unless you can win.

Harry pulled his wand before Draco could finish his incantation and banished the fool before the Slytherin’s magic was cast.

Mistake number two came when Draco Malfoy had used a spell more complex than he needed. Had he finished the seven syllables, Harry certainly would have been in pain with an assortment of missing parts from his body, but it was no match for the two syllable banishing hex.

Draco Malfoy lay, crumpled, against the sturdy wooden door, with nothing good to show for his arrogance.

Crabbe and Goyle just looked between Harry and their leader with a snarl on their lips, however, they were indeed helpless without a leader. Harry simply gave them a command that they could understand.

“Please take Malfoy to his dorm and let him sleep it off,” Harry instructed them. “He may be thinking better by the morning.”

The thugs-in-training did as commanded, leaving Harry to return to the meeting already in progress. As if to illustrate his earlier point, Harry had to duck a misdirected curse as soon as he cleared the doorway.

Harry sat waiting in the common room in his new suit. While shopping, his fashion experts had insisted that someone of his wealth would need several suits, so here he was standing by the fireplace in his darkest Italian cut suit. Strangely, Ginny wouldn’t let him buy an all black wardrobe.

Ron and Hermione walked through the portrait hole into the common room, only to stop in their tracks upon spotting their best friend.

“Harry,” Ron said, “what are you in that get up for?”
Hermione, however, was not saying anything...just staring...and smiling.

Harry smiled at his friends. "I'm taking Ginny to dinner and dancing under the stars."

“What?” Ron asked again. "You know that you can't leave Hogwarts. How are you going to pull that off?"

Harry showed a sly grin. "Magic."

Any retort that Ron was going to make was cut off, as Ginny came down the stairs in all her glory...well, dressed beautifully, not that other meaning.

Harry and Ron's jaws dropped at the same instant. Harry had been rendered utterly speechless. Ron, however, had been rendered apoplectic. This was his sister! How dare she walk around in a 'Little Red Dress'?

Harry recovered first and he walked, transfixed, over to his girlfriend.

"Ginny," he whispered with hungry eyes, "you look beautiful."

Ginny had eyed her boyfriend up and down as he walked over from his waiting pattern. Harry looked stunning in his graphite grey Italian suit with black dress shirt and stunning royal blue silk tie. The suit was tailored to fit his lean frame and compliment his shape.

"Mmm, Harry," she growled, "you look amazing. I am so glad that Tonks came with us when we went shopping."

She made a good show of raking her eyes over his suited frame.

"Ginevra Molly Weasley!" Ron exclaimed. "What, exactly, do you think that you are wearing?"

"This, Ron," Ginny said with heat, "is a dress. It is what a woman wears when she wants to look nice."

"But...But...it's too short. You can't wear that!"

Ginny went from patronizing to boiling in less time than it took for the words to clear her brother's lips.

"I can and I will!" she exclaimed for the entire common room to hear.

"I forbid you!" Ron declared with equal volume.

Harry was still by Ginny's side, but he turned to Hermione for a question of his.

He whispered to her, "Would Ginny appreciate me helping her right now?"

Hermione whispered back, "No, she'll win. Just tell her how beautiful she looks later, after you two are alone."

"Thanks," Harry said sincerely.

Luckily, their conversation went unnoticed by the two combatants.

"I will wear anything that I please," Ginny yelled back. "And it is either this or I go starkers."

"You are too young to be wearing clothes like that," Ron declared. "You look like a scarlet woman."

"Ronald Bilius Weasley!" Ginny returned. "If you don't stop trying to control my life, Harry here will know exactly what a scarlet woman is and there is nothing that you can do about it, so SHUT UP!"

Ron was sputtering with rage. Others in the common room stared. Harry decided that now would be a good time to end this show, or rather showdown, and, as always, the best way to end an irrational argument is to walk away.

Harry looped his arm through Ginny's and turned her to the exit.

"Shall we, Ginny?" he said with a calm voice. "I believe that we should take a walk before we go to dinner. Give us a chance to relax."

Harry steered Ginny out of the common room and shut the portrait behind him, leaving Ron with steam pouting from his ears.

"How dare he?!" screamed Ron. "I wasn't done yet and she shouldn't be going anywhere in a dress like that! She should be properly dressed. That dress did not even cover her knees...and...and that was...that was...she was showing her..."

"Cleavage, Ron," said Hermione in an exacerbated voice.

"Yeah! That," Ron agreed.

"Ron," Hermione reasoned, "you're wrong. You can't control your sister's life and until you realize that, I am afraid that I can't be attracted to you."

After she said that she crossed her arms over her chest and trudged up the stairs to the girl's dormitories.

Ron was left thunderstruck, looking between the portrait hole and the girl's stairs.
Harry started out at a quick pace, if only to keep up with the storming Ginny. It took five minutes and four floors of tirades before she slowed enough to be embraced and comforted.

"Ginny," Harry said in comfort, "do you know why Ron reacted like that?"

"Why?" she growled out.

"Mind you, you can’t let him rule your life, but it’s because he loves you and wants to protect you from the big bad world. It’s misdirected, but he does love you."

She leaned her head on his shoulder in frustration, looking for understanding and comfort.

"But why does he have to ruin my night?" Ginny asked, frustrated. "Why did he react like that?"

"He reacted like that because he’s used to seeing his little sister. As long as he’s able to see you that way, he can’t see the changes that you’ve gone through from little girl to young woman. Your normal clothes and Hogwarts uniform kept him in the comfortable setting that he remembered," Harry said. "But when you came down in this dress, you presented him with an image that he wasn’t ready for, and probably never would be. You presented him with the image of a beautiful and sexy woman. Frankly, his mind wasn’t ready for that. I think that you may have broken him."

Ginny smiled and turned to face him. She began to lightly play with his tie.

"I thought that I had broken you for a second," she teased. "You just stared. Do you really find me sexy?"

"I think that I was off kilter, but not quite broken," he smirked. "And, yes, I find you incredibly sexy. Mind you, much more leg and you could have shorted out my poor little mind. Do those things go all the way up?" he asked with a lecherous grin and a wiggle of his eyebrows.

Ginny broke out into laughter, hanging onto Harry’s shoulder for support. Really, heels weren’t meant for gales of laughter.

"Oh my god, Harry," Ginny laughed, "that has to be the worst line that I have ever heard."

"Oh, then you haven’t heard; ‘Is it hot in here or is it just you?’" Harry finished, mocking a deep sexy voice.

Harry brought his arm around Ginny’s back to support her in her mirth.

Harry continued, “Or the ever classic; ‘Hey babe, I seem to have lost my phone number, can I have yours?’”

"Oh, Harry, that has got to be the worst," Ginny said, her eyes shiny from laughing. "Please no more. I don’t want to test my magical mascara with tears of laughter."

"If you insist," Harry smiled.

"Thanks Harry," she said, looking into his eyes, "Not minutes ago, I was ready to remove limbs, but the heroic Harry Potter braved the female Weasley temper just to make her laugh; the best cure."

"Psst, Sarah," said a Ravenclaw girl amongst a group in the entry hall. "Get a load of those two," she said, indicating the Red and Black couple walking casually through the entry hall.

"Oh, wow," Sarah said. "He looks delish. Think that Ginny Weasley would loan him out for a bit? I could just eat him up."

"I don’t know," Ravenclaw girl number one said. "But if I get the chance, I won’t waste it."

"Harry, that was delicious," Ginny declared.

"Thank you."

"How do you do it?" she asked.

"Hmm?" Harry said, trying to identify the ‘it’.

"How do you set up this kind of a date inside Hogwarts without us being interrupted and with a gourmet meal to boot?" Ginny asked.

"Ah…I have many secrets, but this I shall tell you," Harry said, imitating a shao lyn master. "If you wish to accomplish your goals, seek ones that will make the effort themselves, not ones who would but ask others."

"Sage advice," she nodded. "Translation; you asked Dobby and he took care of it."

Harry smiled back. "He took care of the dinner. I provided the atmosphere and table."

"Really?" she said in appraising approval.
“Oh, and the music,” as he said this the music changed from the light string quartet affair to a more bold but equally slow enchanting ballad. Harry rose from his seat. “May I have this dance?”

Despite herself, Ginny giggled.

“Of course, kind sir.”

That Sunday was spent like most Sundays so far in the year. Harry sat and read his research books in one of two places. When the weather was fair, he, Ginny, some of her friends and, many times Ron and Hermione, could be found on the grass near a shade tree. When the weather was foul, they could be found in the Room of Requirements.

Here, in addition to the group of friends, you could often find others; students asking questions, needing help. Harry and Ginny weren’t sure how it happened, but this was how it went. The older students aided the younger ones when they could and offered encouragement when they couldn’t.

“Dawn,” Harry said to a Hufflepuff second year, “Why are you worrying about this? You don’t take Arithmancy yet. That’s not for another year.”

She smiled at him.

“I know, Mister Potter,” the second year said, “but I wanted to get a head start because I like the subject and it looks so interesting and hard, I’m already halfway through next year’s books but I wanted to answer this question and this doesn’t make it clear and it is one of the basics.”

Harry smiled at the babble.

“First, call me Harry,” he said. “Second, Hermione,” he said to his nearby friend, “is there a better book in the library for beginning Arithmancy?”


“Thank you,” the student smiled.

“How did you not end up in Ravenclaw, Dawn?” asked Harry.

She blushed, “I asked the hat not to be a Ravenclaw. I heard from my sister how they are not very nice or accepting and I didn’t like that idea.”

“Of course,” said Hermione. “Just don’t judge a whole house on what you have heard, or the actions of a few.”
A normal breakfast in early October found Harry and his friends sitting happily before the start of the day’s Quidditch match of Gryffindor versus Ravenclaw. The current year’s Ravenclaw squad was in rare form; with most of the players returning from the previous year, they had launched directly into concentrated practice such as had not been seen in the Ravenclaw house in many years. It would be no throwaway match, as Ron, the Gryffindor team captain, knew. He was determined to loosen them up before their first match. He’d picked a young team and had to deal with the nerves that came with it. Adding to the pressure, Ron’s entire family had chosen this day to turn out for the first game of the season and to see Ginny on her spectacular new broom.

Wow, that’s a nice broom, Ron thought. He was jealous, but not in a bad way, he reasoned. He just wanted a broom as good as that someday. He didn’t begrudge Ginny the nicer things that she would surely get under Harry’s kind eye.

He had a plan to lighten the mood already in the final stages, all of the work done, and just the results and rewards left for unveiling. Had he been more familiar with the muggle world he could have likened it to dominoes. He had spent a very long time setting the prank up and once it started, there was no way to stop it, it was all automatic, relying mostly on the reaction of others to provide the entertainment.

Harry saw the look of mischief in his friend’s eye and was cautious. Just about three weeks ago he had experienced Charlie Weasley’s mischief during his prank for the Weasley boys’ competition. Harry had come out all right, but had spent an entire day as a dragon, being fawned over by Hagrid, the Care of Magical Creatures Professor, as he taught his class about dragons. It was an interesting experience, but not one that he was in a hurry to repeat.

Harry’s eye was caught by the Headmaster at the head table and saw that he was waving Harry over to him. Harry got up from his spot, as he had finished his small breakfast. It never paid to eat a large breakfast before Quidditch, especially as a seeker. Too much food would dull his reaction time, and the snitch allowed no quarter.

“Harry, where you going?” Ron asked. “We’ve got plenty of time.”

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“The headmaster wants to see me,” Harry responded.

This elated Ron, which he managed to not show until Harry’s back was turned. The mischief danced in his eyes, however, as Harry made his way to the staff table. His plan would go better than ever with Harry in front of the whole hall instead of at the Gryffindor table.

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“Yes, sir?” Harry asked when he reached the head table.

“Good morning, Harry,” the Headmaster greeted. “The Deputy Headmistress and myself have decided to hold a Halloween Ball and needed to ask a favor of you.”

Professor McGonagall pointed a quick look at Professor Dumbledore that said that she had been less involved in the decision-making than he indicated.

“Certainly sir,” Harry responded curiously. “What can I do for you?”

“Since you have made improvements to the Chamber of Secrets and as the student body could use a change of venue,” the Headmaster prefaced, “I was wondering if we could make use of the chambers for a night.”

“Sure,” Harry said after little consideration, “that sounds like fun.”

“But Albus,” protested Professor McGonagall, “Surely the student body can’t go down into the chamber through the entrance in the third floor girl’s bathroom. No one would attend the ball.”

“I believe, if I am not mistaken, that Harry has discovered another, easier, method of entering the Chamber,” Dumbledore countered. “Is that not so, Harry?”

“Are you trying to say that Salazar Slytherin created two entrances into the Chamber of Secrets?” a shocked McGonagall asked. “Surely we would have found the second entrance by now if that were the case.”

“Of course not, Professor,” Harry said. “Salazar Slytherin only created the one entrance and until Professor Dumbledore allowed me some time and latitude this last summer there was only one. I found a much more convenient entrance midway through the summer.”

“Latitude,” sneered the potions professor, “Of course he did.”

Harry ignored the comment from his professor, turning to the Headmaster.
“Anything else sir?” Harry asked.

“No, we will discuss the arrangements later,” Dumbledore said. “I believe that it is nearing the time for you and your team to make their way down to the changing rooms.”

“Yes, sir,” Harry responded to the dismissal.

Harry turned around to see a burgundy owl winging its way directly at him. It dropped a letter into his hands before swooping out of the hall. This was unusual enough for the hall to turn their attention to the lone Gryffindor at the front of the dining students.

Harry felt a sense of dread wash over him, but forced it down and replaced it with all of the bravery and strength. He tore the envelope open and pulled from it a familiar looking card. He had first seen one printed with ‘Percy Ignatius Weasley’ only this new card was printed with ‘Ronald Bilius Weasley’.

Harry dropped the envelope from his left hand as he felt the magic wash over him from the little card in his right. Harry was frozen in place, unable to move anything but his head. This time, for a change, the card was the delivery method of the curse, rather than just a calling card.

Harry’s nipples hardened as he felt a cool breeze blow across his body. He looked down to find himself bared in all of his glory, his modesty only protected by a pair of emerald green silk boxers that Ginny had chosen for him on their shopping trip. He was suddenly glad that he had charmed them to be spell resistant and that his blind grab that morning had not turned up a pair with an embarrassing pattern.

A silent hall met Harry’s newly exposed appearance. He turned his attention to the other students to see a mixed reaction. The boys looked ready to laugh, and similar expressions showed on a few of the female faces, but not all, or even most of the females reacted this way.

The vast majority of the female faces held a look of a predatory nature behind their surprise. Harry imagined that it would be similar to the look his future panther self would have on its face when stalking prey. He didn’t spend any time tying to notice such a look on any of the boys in the hall; that thought just turned his stomach. Some things were better unknown.

He never felt so wanted in his life…and it scared him.

I was content to eat my breakfast, a girl narrated in her own mind, and listen to my friends before the match. I, of course, don’t play. I just don’t do Quidditch. Watch it, sure, but not do it. But why discuss it all day and night? As such I was not fully listening when I saw Harry Potter walk up to the Headmaster. Now he’s one hard thing to figure out.

He seems to have all of this fame but he hates it.

He’s ridden hard in potions but, yet, no one can remember him doing anything bad in there.

He’s taken on the task to teach the whole school defense and he’s better at it than any other teacher that we’ve had for the real classes.

And here he is, he can just walk up to the Headmaster of the school Professor Albus freakin’ Dumbledore and just have a conversation with him.

I have to admit that he’s definitely adorable. He’s just so sexy with his power and confidence. Well, confidence in magic anyway. He isn’t exactly a ladies man.

But he could be…

Mmmm…

Oh howe could be…

How many of the girls in this school would love to get a piece of that, a piece of The-Boy-Who-Lived, the single person on the planet who has faced He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named more than any other and lived to tell the tale?

And he just walks up to the Headmaster and talks.

Oh, he’s turning around.

And he stops.

What is it?

Oh, I see. The owl post was done fifteen minutes ago but now there’s one on a kamikaze course with that delectable young man now. Of course, this means that everyone else in the room is watching him now. Oh, joy, not just me now. My continual staring seems less stalker-ish that way.

Everyone’s looking because post owls at unusual times are always something interesting. If you watch what happens now you have all of the freshest gossip later. Otherwise all you could do is repeat everyone else’s gossip.

Harry pulls a small card out of the envelope and drops the envelope and … oh my!
Wow!

Mommy want!

All of Mr. Potter's clothing, save his boxers, are gone!

There's not a sound in the hall.

Drool.

He's not the skinny boy that we, or at least I, expected.

Skinny yes…well, more honed and wiry.

Boy no…that is a man.

His muscles are defined. He doesn't have bulk, just fantastic definition.

Now that is a man treat!

His boxers are a wonderful shade of emerald green. Looks like silk.

His abs are of the washboard variety.

There…that vee of the muscles angles down into his boxers. It just draws your eyes down.

To his boxers…

Wow…his boxers really bring out his eyes. Hmm…never thought I would be saying that about someone in the great hall at Hogwarts.

If only he weren't wearing his glasses.

Oh, who cares? He's still an Adonis.

Even his thighs are well defined.

Hmm…he can't seem to move. Must be part of the spell. This must be a prank because he's not one to flaunt 'it'.

And what a wonderful compilation of 'it' those baggy robes have been covering.

This was definitely a situation that was not made to make Harry comfortable, but he wasn't going to let it get the better of him.

Oh wow, half naked man treat, a Ravenclaw thought to herself.

This witch wants more.

Who would have thought that beneath those robes was a Greek God?

And he's just standing there in all of his glory for me to see.

Well me and two hundred other females.

Why are the boys snickering?

Do they really think that Harry Potter has anything to be ashamed of?

Certainly not…

How will my boyfriend live up to that?

What was that flash of light?

Was that just me getting light headed or was that a photographer.

I want a copy!

To think Cho dated him that once and all she could do was cry on him, and then test him on the first date…dumb.

You only test guys if you want to lose them.
For that in front of me, no tests.
Ok…maybe some physical ones.

Endurance and what not.

Hmm…he’s playing Quidditch today.
*smile* And I’m not!

Yay!

I can just watch the master seeker at work. I would have been too distracted to play today anyway.

Oh…he’s breaking the spell.
He is so strong and powerful.

Too bad that he wasn’t sorted into Ravenclaw
All those hours locked in a tower with him…hmm.

Oh, what’s going on now? Hermione thought.

First the Headmaster wants to see Harry, now an owl is delivering a letter and owl post was done at least fifteen minutes ago. I hope that this isn’t one of the Weasley Family Pranks, because you know that Harry hates the attention and this thing in front of the entire school is too much.

Oh no…by the look on Ron’s face, he did this.

What’s he done now?

Oh my…Harry’s…His…His clothes are gone.

And what happened to the skinny boy that I grew to know?

He got toned and fit.
He turned into a man.

Ginny is so lucky.

Ron’s my boyfriend, but I swear that he can be such a daft prat sometimes. Now Ginny will have to fight off hordes of women wanting her boyfriend. After seeing that, if I were not dating Ronald Weasley I would have chased my other best friend.

How could Ron be so stupid?

And Ginny won’t share.

And she can be scary when defending something of hers.

Oh, wow…Harry has broken the body bind. That must’ve been hard to do.

Mrs. Weasley was glad to come to her children’s school to watch the Quidditch match today. She got so lonely during the school year. For five years now she has been alone all day in her ramshackle house. After so many years of children running around making a racket; you get used to the constant noise.

With all of her children in school or graduated, the house was as quiet as night all day long.

But her babies were all growing up. At least her children have found happiness. Ron had Hermione; Ginny had Harry; Fred and George were secretive, but she knew that they each had someone. Percy had come back to the family and had introduced her to dear Penelope. She was such a good girl. Charlie had started to date Nymphadora, last Mrs. Weasley heard. Maybe she could keep him out of trouble. But, of course, this was Tonks we’re talking about. Oh well. And last…Bill had that wonderful French woman Fleur. She was such a charmer. All of those Veela powers and Bill wasn’t even phased. It must be so hard to find true love when you’re a Veela. Every man will do anything for your attention, even lie. Well, Bill was the exception. Oh…and Harry. He seems to be the only other that can have a decent conversation with her. Ginny was lucky there. Harry’s eyes would not even wander for a Veela.

And there he was now, talking to Albus.

Oh!
What happened? He touched some letter and then, suddenly, he's starkers, or nearly.

Oh, what has one of my sons done now?

Oh, and he does look good, if only I were thirty years younger and single.

His boxers were very classy, if you could call any underclothes that when they're on display in front of the public.

He let Ginny come and pick out all of his clothes for him. That was a lot of trust.

Did Ginny know that he looked like that before now?

“Mum,” Ginny said, breaking her mum from her contemplations of her family, “I think that it’s time for you to teach me those spells that you promised after my second year.”

“What?!” exclaimed Mrs. Weasley with her first reaction before coming to her senses about the situation. “Oh yes, I can see that dear. We’ll take care of that this afternoon.”

I guess that I know now. Perhaps they’ll continue to wait for marriage, because, I, as the mother here, have no doubt that that’s in the future. I have to trust them to live their lives, though.

Harry managed to break the petrification, but not before looking at his assailant.

Ronald Weasley.

Harry could tell that Ron thought that the prank was supposed to be embarrassing and that Harry would just go running from the hall.

But Harry would show Ron.

Harry straightened his back and raised his chin. He would not slink, sulk, crawl, run, scamper or try to hide himself whatsoever.

He would walk proud and pretend that nothing had happened.

He walked proud and powerful back to his spot at the Gryffindor table and to his girlfriend. Harry was sure that she hadn’t seen the lascivious looks on the rest of the females in the hall because she wasn’t using their eyeballs for marbles yet. She could be quite vicious.

Harry came to a halt in front of her and reached down to take her hand and guided her to her feet.

With a quick glance at his best friend, noticing Ron’s smug look at a prank well executed, he cupped the back of Ginny’s head with his right hand and the small of her back with his left and bent down.

Ginny angled her face up at his prompting and tilted to the right. He matched her tilt to the right and lightly brushed his lips against hers.

Ginny raised her hands to his neck and pulled herself closer to his exposed form. She ran her fingers through his hair roughly.

After quite some time in front of the stunned hall, they broke the kiss for lack of air.

Harry put some space between himself and Ginny, her hands held in his between.

“Ginevra Molly Weasley?” he asked in a commanding tone for all to hear, she winced at her whole name being used. “Will you go to the Halloween Ball with me?”

There were gasps from the girls in the audience. Harry couldn’t be sure if the gasps were due to the scene in front of them or the fact that there was to be a ball.

Ginny recovered quickly.

“Harry James Potter,” she said formally, “I would be honored to accompany you as your date to the ball,” finishing with a mind blowing kiss.

She apparently wanted to make her claim to him in front of the audience in order to stave off other advances.

Professor Snape seemed to be the first teacher to recover, and he did so in typical Snape fashion.

“Mr. Potter,” Snape said for the whole hall to hear. “Seeing how this is not broom closets, but the Great Hall of Hogwarts, your actions are wholly inappropriate. Twenty points from Gryffindor. And as you have decided to take the Headmaster’s thunder for announcing the occasion, I believe that an appropriate punishment for your lack of attire and rude interruption of our meal would be for you to plan the ball yourself.”

“Now see here, Professor…” started Professor McGonagall.

“Professor Snape,” the Headmaster interrupted with a record-breaking twinkle in his eyes, “I believe that that is a wonderful idea.”

“Mr. Potter,” Dumbledore continued, “If you would let me know what decorations and arrangements need to be made, please forward me the specifications and I will do my best. That is, if you are willing. Maybe you can find some input to assist you in this endeavor.”
The Headmaster twinkled his eyes with a meaningful look and Harry immediately understood. Harry turned to his girlfriend and had a silent conversation.

“We’d be delighted,” Harry answered after a second’s pause. “I’ll send some owls out tonight.”

“Wonderful,” Dumbledore said turning to the rest of the hall.

“If I can have your attention please,” the Headmaster said causing most to turn to him for the details. “On October Thirty-first, Hogwarts will have a Halloween Ball beginning with dinner at seven o’clock, followed by dancing. Third year and below will be escorted back to their houses by their heads of house at nine and the upper levels may stay until midnight. Mr. Potter has agreed to provide a different venue for the ball than has ever been used before. Transportation will be provided in the entrance hall beginning at six-thirty. Please be prompt. Dress will be formal. To allow everyone to be properly prepared, there will be a Hogsmeade visit the weekend prior. Classes on October Thirty-first will end at noon and are cancelled for November First. Thank you.”

The Headmaster sat down, causing the girls in the room to start whispered conversations and the boys to look apprehensive.

“Now, my dear,” Harry addressed Ginny with his nose up in jest. “Perhaps we should proceed to the changing rooms for something more appropriate to wear.”

“Yes,” Ginny agreed. “Perhaps we can find an appropriate broom closet between here and there.”

Snape was left sputtering and scowling at the comment.

Ron was left stunned.

“Ron, give Harry back his wand,” Ginny commanded.

Ron reached his hand out with Harry’s wand.

“Thank you,” Harry smiled.

Harry and Ginny burst from the entrance doors into the great outdoors rolling with laughter. They held each other up as they made their way to their respective changing rooms in preparation for the day’s match.
Chapter 23: Gryffindor v. Ravenclaw

Thank you to my Beta’s Donalddeutsch, Cateagle and Sparky40sw.

A beautiful tawny owl winged its way from Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry clutching a small package that promised the owner of the owl bountiful rewards for their effort. The destination of the soaring predator was Greater London. The specifics of its destination would not have made Harry Potter happy and perhaps it was best that he had no idea of the owl, its destination, or even the existence of the package.

The bludgers and snitch were released after Madame Hooch finished her speech to the captains of the participating teams. She had little worry as the two teams had a good history of fair play. The quaffel was released and the game started.

Harry circled the pitch, his eyes in constant motion, inquiring after his prey.

After five minutes of searching he realized that he had acquired a shadow. Cho Chang was using the reactive method of seeking. She seemed to intend to follow Harry and then rob him of the snitch when he saw it.

This was a tactic that annoyed Harry in most circumstances. The only time that he liked the other seeker to play ‘follow the leader’ was when Harry needed to stall the completion of the game, to build up a greater margin of victory and thus leave them on better footing in the tournament. This wasn’t the plan for the day, and Harry was duly glad of that, so Harry was currently getting annoyed. He wanted to catch the snitch without someone on his tail twigs the entire time.

He had a plan.

He angled his broom down and waited for Cho to follow him on his course, descending the whole time. After she was well into it with him, he angled back to level flight, only not quite. He angled his broom to increase in altitude slowly. Hoping that his opponent would follow his lead to the tee, he slowly drifted up.

With each lap he gained some altitude and it was not long before he cruised well above his normal height. He now looked down on all of the action as if in a blimp over a ballgame.

The game of Quidditch was normally played at the happy height of fifty feet in the air, as that’s the height of the goal posts. Harry and most seekers usually circled at around sixty feet in order to be just slightly out of the action. Harry had drifted to the height of one hundred and fifty feet and his fellow seeker was marking him so well that she seemed to not even realize that she was so high above the action.

Suddenly, Harry’s searching eyes locked on the center of the pitch. Harry pulled his broom to the side and pitched the nose straight at the ground and pushed it forward for speed. He didn’t need to look back to know that Cho was racing him for the snitch. She took straight after him and slowly gained on the diving figure.

Harry kept from pouring his everything into the broom’s speed. He maneuvered to the left; following his script. He jinked right as if the snitch had darted a few feet. As the imaginary snitch maneuvered again, Harry pushed his broom into a straight vertical path straight at the ground. Cho was still on his tail.

Harry gripped both hands on his broom as he judged the last second and pulled with all of his might, as it seemed that you could count the blades of grass.

He heard the audience gasp as he pulled out of the dive with inches to spare. The gasp told him of a stunning success of his Wronski Feint. He looked back to see that the length of Cho’s broom had impacted the ground, leaving the young woman gasping for breath sprawled on the ground, but relatively unhurt.

Ginny Weasley was having the time of her life. She had been riding her new broom, The Banshee, in all of their practices, but nothing could compare to the competitive spirit of a full game.

She grabbed the quaffle from mid air as if it were standing still. She yanked the handle of her broom into a quick climbing u-turn to reverse her direction. This, unfortunately, brought her straight on into the path of the opposing chaser that had been following her, desperately. With quick thinking, she dove straight at the ground, just as Harry had taught her at the Burrow. She avoided the collision, leveled off and then contemplated the best tactic to gaining a goal.

Harry spent the free time while Cho was recovering searching for the snitch. He scanned the entire pitch from his high vantage, from one goal to the other. He was casting casual glances at Cho, both to see that she was safely recovering and to gauge when she would be joining him.

He noticed that she was sitting up now and had regained her feet with the help of Madame Pomfrey. If Harry knew the mediwitch, she would now be trying to convince Cho that she needed to spend the night in the hospital wing starting post-haste.
Harry saw the snitch very high, directly over the center of the pitch. Harry sped forward then rocketed straight into a vertical climb. He glanced back to see Cho on her broom and starting her pursuit. This didn’t worry him in the slightest. What did catch his attention was the bludger that was aimed to intercept him in seconds.

Harry did a barrel roll, clutching his broom tightly, but he could still feel the bludger skim his lower back as it sped past.

Harry continued to climb full speed at the Golden Snitch, which was lazily making circles at nearly three hundred feet.

Harry shot his left arm out and reached for the elusive magic ball and wrapped his gloved fingers around it, fluttering wings and all.

Harry tipped over backwards and rolled to his right to begin his descent, victory clutched in his hand.

Harry barely saw the bludger before it caught him at the apex of his arch, one hand on the broom and his legs in racing stance.

In retrospect, if he had his legs in a stronger flying stance, he may have been able to keep a hold of his broom. However, as he was already pulling his broom over in a tight arch, as soon as his hand was knocked free, his entire body followed suit.

Ginny was still coming down from her high of a successful goal when she saw a crimson streak chasing something small and…golden! The streak, which could only be Harry, shot straight up in a fast climb. She held her breath as he neared his objective, her game forgotten.

As the Quidditch game at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry was concluded in accordance with the rules, the previously mentioned Tawny owl landed at the offices of Witch Weekly with a package that would surely not make the subject of the enclosed photos happy.

It had been an exciting game. The Gryffindor chasers were well matched against the Ravenclaws, the score reflecting the tightly fought battle. Each keeper was keeping more than half of the constant and strategic assaults from success. Neither team’s chasers were going in for the straightforward, simple approach of just one chaser against one keeper; they were calling plays and flying formations.

Even with admirable play by the keepers, the score was sixty to fifty for the Gryffindor team. Both keepers should have been proud, but they would both beat themselves up for not stopping more shots after the game high had worn off.

A particularly well-executed Wronski Feint performed by Harry Potter and nearly as good avoidance by Cho Chang initially drew the attention of the audience from the chasers and keepers. Only nearly as good as it left her gathering her wits on the pitch before she could return to the hunt.

In the lull time while Harry was looking feverishly for the snitch, the audience turned back to the chaser action.

Ginny was racing behind Sarah Mallard, the third year chaser that Ron had appointed to the team. According to the plan, at around fifty feet to the goal, Sean Wilkins would come in from his higher track and cross in front of them. This would serve to confuse the keeper just as Sarah pealing to the right hand goal would help. The maneuver executed precisely, Ginny waited until the last second for the keeper’s reaction before shooting for her goal.

The audience was enthralled. They listened to the announcer, a forth year Hufflepuff, announce the goal and then the exciting yell afterward.

“Potter has spotted the snitch!” the announcer exclaimed.

They watched him climb vertically, dodging one bludger with a well timed roll and then reach for the snitch. It was magnificent, the perfect culmination to a well fought game.

Charlie had watched all through the game as Harry had lured his opponent into a higher and higher orbit. He watched in fascination as a seeker tactic that he had never seen before unfolded before his eyes. It seemed a great way to deal with an opposing seeker marking your every move; lure them high above the pitch and then do a Wronski Feint. The added altitude nearly assured that the other player would not avoid the ground. And she didn’t.

_Luckily for her she was only dazed_ , Charlie thought.

_Oh, Harry’s spotted the snitch. Look at him climb. He sure is a great flyer._

_Great avoidance of the bludger._

_He got it! And just one more bludger to avoid…_

_Oh no, he doesn’t see it. There’s a bludger headed straight for him._

_No Harry, don’t pitch over backwards. The bludger will hit you that way._

Charlie watched as his sister’s boyfriend was struck on the shoulder of the hand holding onto the broom.

Charlie watched as Harry fell straight down, without his broom.
“Oh, shite,” Charlie screamed, “he must be three hundred feet up. Bill, can you get him?”

Bill was in a panic beside his brother.

“No, he’s at the center of the pitch,” Bill answered as calmly as he could manage. “He’s too far away for anyone to get him. If he was just a bit closer to this side, I could spell the ground.”

The audience gasped as they were all looking at the doomed boy.

Harry was in trouble and he knew it. The ground would not forgiving from his altitude.

_You’ll have to take care of that, don’t you, Potter._

He twisted himself in air to face the approaching ground.

_Oh bugger, I didn’t know that I was that high. Here goes._

He cast three separate cushioning charms to the ground below him. Luckily, his time snogging Ginny in the halls was paying off. He imagined that he knew more cushioning charms than any other at the school and he hoped that the power he poured into it was enough to save him.

Harry spun back around to face his back to the ground, knowing that he had to spread his body out to spread the impact.

As he neared the ground he had a last second thought and cast one last charm.

_Accio Firebolt!

Ginny watched the catch and the tip over, just as she had seen so many times before. She knew that Harry loved flying the most when he could feel the Earth’s gravity trying to claim him, but knowing that it was not match for his own freedom at that particular moment.

From her position above the field, she couldn’t see the approaching bludger, nor did she see it spiral away after its successful strike. All she could see in the world was the love of her life separating from his broom at an impossible height and plummeting to the unforgiving ground.

The crowd watched as Harry plummeted to his doom.

He turned to face the ground, his wand extended.

They were all surprised when he shot a short succession of lights at the ground below. The ground momentarily glowed blue, then orange and finally white before going back to normal. Some were amazed that Harry had fallen only half the distance to the ground by the time he finished his spell work.

They watched him twist in the air, facing the sky once again, wave his wand and spread himself flat.

_This is going to hurt._

Blackness.

The editor of the weekly magazine, Witch Weekly, looked at the cache of wizarding photos with the smiling face of a lottery winner. Freshly in her hand, she had photos of the young man who had just recently made the top five most eligible wizards, according to her own magazine, in his boxers. This would increase her magazine readership tenfold. Witches who didn’t subscribe would empty the wizard world’s newsstands. She made a mental note to increase the printing and double-ship the bulk orders.

Harry’s consciousness swam back to the surface despite his adamant objections.

“Harry,” said an enchanting voice.

“Harry, wake up for me.”

Harry tried to move his hand to rub his eyes.

But, they just won’t cooperate.

“His hand twitched. Madame Pomfrey, I think he is waking up.”

Harry heard the click of the healer’s heels as she approached.
Of course he’s waking. He knows that he needs his potions now. He’s been in here so many times that he knows the process. He’s an expert patient. Yet, still, he’ll try to leave early,” she saw one figure shaking her its head. “So, what this time? Fell off his broom again. Why we have that sport in a school for children is beyond me,” she ranted quietly while measuring out potions; “Sure, let’s have children fly on broomsticks hundreds of feet off the ground, then let’s let other kids hit hard balls at them, trying to knock them off. Oh, and let’s add a little ball that forces the children to fly at breakneck speeds straight at the ground or, even better, straight into the sky. Oh, yeah, just the thing. How many times is this, Mister Potter,” she enunciated his name fully, “that you have been to visit me for that silly game? I swear, any more and I’m just labeling one of these beds for you and moving your trunk from your dorm. It would certainly be more efficient. And no doubt, I’ll have to deal with students trying to sneak in to see you again. I swear, this is an infirmary, patients need to rest while they’re here, not to socialize.”

“Um,” Harry said, after opening his eyes some time during the lecture, “Sorry?”

“What?” she asked, surprised that he had spoke. “Oh, yes, well, just try to be safer next time.”

“Ok.”

She placed several vials of potion on his nightstand.

“Now, no more than five minutes and then your visitor must leave,” Harry turned to the redhead girl sitting by his bedside, only then realizing that she was holding his hand. “Just take these potions and go back to sleep in five minutes.”

“Yes, Madame,” said Harry, sheepishly.

Harry turned to Ginny, noticing her as she sat so peacefully holding his hand and staring into his eyes.

“Ginny…”

“Harry,” she said, her voice full of cold passion, “Don’t ever make me worry like that again.”

“Wha…” he started before he was interrupted, as if he had never spoken.

“I could have died when I saw you fall. It was so far and you just fell and you were twisting in the air,” by now she was breaking down into sobs and tears, “and I saw you shoot the ground with your wand, but I was so sure that it wouldn’t be enough, and then you summoned your broom and I knew that it wouldn’t get there in time,” huge teardrops rolled down her cheeks as she was overwhelmed by the tears, “and I flew toward you, and I knew that I wouldn’t get to you before you hit the ground, and it felt like my heart was being ripped from my chest. I just knew that you would be dead and I would be the first to reach you and I wouldn’t be able to do anything for you.”

Harry pulled her onto the bed and enveloped her in a giant hug, pulling her to his chest.

“Ginny, I love you,” Harry said with confidence.

Ginny sniffled and responded, “Oh, Harry, I love you, too.”

Harry waved his wand over the bed that they lay in, expanding it to hold them both.

“Now,” Harry said, ignoring his own pain, “I seem to have survived the fall, but if I don’t take these potions and get some sleep, I’m afraid that I won’t survive Dear Madame Pomfrey.”

“Ok, Harry,” she said, moving to get up.

“No, Ginny,” Harry said. “Just lie here with me and go to sleep too. You’ve been through more stress today than I have and need your rest. I think you should just put your head on my shoulder and let me hold you while we sleep. It just might help us both to have a good night’s rest.”

“Mm…Okay,” Ginny said slowly, her eyelids having lowered to half-mast.

He waved his wand again to clothe Ginny in a set of silk pajamas, leaving her comfortable for a night’s rest.

Harry reached over and downed the first four potions, recognizing the healing potion, calming potion, muscle relaxer and bone knitter potions. He looked at the last and knew it to be dreamless sleep potion. Madame Pomfrey was all too predictable. Harry swallowed half and then brought it to Ginny’s lips.

“Here, Gin,” Harry said in a soothing voice, “Drink this, it’ll help.”

She let him pour the potion into her mouth before swallowing it. She snaked her arms around his rib cage and placed her head on his shoulder for the duration.

Harry smiled at her, pulling the sheet and blanket over them both before taking her in his arms and relaxing onto his own pillow, leaving him dead to the real world, happily in his own contented dream one, populated with just he and his perfectly real Ginny.
Harry opened his eyes and was met with a sea of red with light meeting his eyes through the fiery tresses.

That someone was Ginny, he realized. He smiled.

Harry snuggled back down and closed his eyes, his nose twitching. The smell was uniquely Ginny.

Harry drifted back down into a contented slumber.
“Hmmgm.”

Harry was awakening again and felt the bundle in his arms stirring as well. He wondered what was disturbing his perfect sleep. He had not been this happy in his recollection of his life to date.

“Hmmgm.”

Harry heard it this time, and evidently so had his companion. She stirred more fully this time, lifting her head.

“Hmmgm.”

Harry finally recognized it as someone clearing his or her throat.

Harry opened his eyes, momentarily blinded by the bright lights of the infirmary.

“Huh?” Harry wordlessly questioned.

“Good morning, Mr. Potter,” a voice that Harry immediately recognized as his Head of House said.

Harry turned his gaze to the small group of persons not horizontal in the infirmary at the time.

“Hello, Professor McGonagall, Mr. and Mrs. Weasley, Weasley family, friends. Good morning,” Harry greeted.

Okay, maybe the group was not all that small.

“Good morning,” she said, turning her gaze slightly to the left, “And good morning Miss Weasley.”

“Huh? Wha?” Ginny said in the haze still hanging in her brain.

“I said, Good morning, Miss Weasley and as you are the only Miss Weasley in many generations, I expect that you know whom I mean,” answered the Professor with a steely glint in her eye.

Apparently the sassy redhead had wakened enough to be snarkey at the least.

“Well, occasionally I do wonder about Gred and Forge,” she answered.

“Hey, that was only one badly charmed group of sherbets and that was more than a year ago,” sniped one of the twins in good humor.

“Yeah, and we ate the last of those last month.”

The ever-strict head of the Gryffindor house was having problems maintaining her strict exterior at the exchange.

“What?” Ginny exclaimed, “I thought that you two would throw those out after mom forbid you from using them on others.”

“Others, yes,” answered George, “but that doesn’t keep Fred safe when I hear his Angelina complaining about he doesn’t understand women at all. I had to do something to rectify the situation.”

“Bet Angelina found that off-putting,” snickered Harry.

“Yeah, can’t understand that myself,” said Fred, “I think I made for a fetchingly tall woman.”

“I guess she doesn’t go for such a thing,” chuckled Harry, his arms still around Ginny’s waist.

“Yeah, just lucky for you that Mom forbid us from spreading the wealth. Guess we’ll have to come up with another method of prank.”

“Of course, Gred.”

“Quite enjoyable, Forge.”

Professor McGonagall seemed to have recovered both her inner and outer calm, putting on a stern face.

“Now, Miss Weasley,” Professor McGonagall addressed. “Shouldn’t you be in your own bed, not in that of someone of the opposite gender?”

Ginny shot to her feet beside the expanded bed while speaking quickly to cover her act.
"Oh, well, Professor, you see," she fumbled, "I was so worried about Harry, and I just stayed here waiting for him to wake and I thought that he would have died from the fall and I got so tired. I was just so exhausted and I was crying so Harry expanded the bed and changed me into these silk pajamas..."

"Hey, Whoa," yelled the twins in stereo, "He changed you into your pajamas!" they exclaimed with a dangerous glare at Harry.

"Hey, Guys," said Harry, quickly, sensing a threat to his person, "Magic," he said holding his wand. "Just magic, no hanky and certainly no panky."

"Oh, well, Okay then."

"Quite a good job of transfiguration, Mister Potter," admired Professor McGonagall.

"Thank you."

"Yes, quite nice pajamas you have there Miss Weasley," the Professor continued, "but that doesn't warrant your indiscretions."

"Oh, But...But we didn't...we haven't..." Ginny sputtered.

"I am truly convinced of that, Miss Weasley," McGonagall stated, "and that is why I just request that you remove yourself to your own quarters and try to not repeat this event."

"Of course, Professor McGonagall," she said, moving toward the exit after a peck on Harry's cheek. She had a sly smile on her face, indicating that she might not be serious about trying not to repeat the event. She hadn't lied. She had no intention of letting Harry get injured again, causing him to be in the infirmary, but that didn't mean that she couldn't cuddle him all night at other times.

"Miss Weasley," added the stern Professor, "Your attire?"

Ginny looked down at her emerald green silk pajama bottoms and tops in dismay.

"But I like them," whined Ginny, "And Harry made them just for me."

Harry blushed and Professor McGonagall rolled her eyes at her student.

"Fine," she said. She quickly transfigured an empty potions vial to a Gryffindor robe for Ginny. "Put this on and I believe that Harry will allow you to keep your present."

Harry blushed again as Ginny smiled and let out a slight happy squeal.

At George's insistence, he and Fred sought Professor McGonagall out later that morning, after they had checked their old haunts and had a special talk with a certain poltergeist. Leaving the surreal meeting with Peeves smiling sinisterly and their own pockets somewhat lighter, the twins found the Professor's door open. They paused at the intimidating professor's classroom doorway.

"Professor?"

"Hello, Misters Weasley," Professor McGonagall answered upon looking up. "How may I be of assistance?"

"George wanted to ask you something about Harry before we left; now that we see that he has recovered," Fred said, closing the door securely.

"Alright Mr. Weasley," their former teacher responded. "How may I help?"

"I was wondering," George said, "who has responsibility as Harry's parental replacement, now?"

George and Fred were acting very serious, which concerned the Professor greatly.

"Well, Mr. Weasley," she answered, "according to the Wizengamot, Mister Potter is now an adult, and as such he no longer has anyone responsible for parenting him."

"Oh, well," George said, "we figured that, but hoped that there was still an adult that would help Harry with the things that still need to be taught, which are not covered in class."

"Such as what, Mr. Weasley?" she asked.

"Such as the facts of life, Professor," said George, blushing heavily.

"I believe," Fred immediately offered, "that what my dear brother is referring to so shyly is the facts of life in concern to the interaction of adult wizards and witches."

"Well, Mr. Weasley," she responded, "he does have relatives and that is something that they would have assuredly addressed."

"But, surely, you didn't forget that his relatives are content with never communicating," George reminded her. "They wouldn't have helped him in any way."
Plus, Professor,” Fred continued, “the content of the ‘talk’ is probably different for muggles than for wizards. Harry could be at a great disadvantage.”

“Oh, well,” answered the stalwart Professor, “yes, yes of course someone should have this conversation with him,” she said, obviously uncomfortable with the direction of this discussion.

“Well, Professor,” said George, with just as much discomfort, “I don’t feel that it would be best if my brother or I were to have this initial conversation with our dear friend and investor. We were hoping that you, as the head of his house…”

“…the closest that he has known to a mother outside of our own…”

“…would be the best to discuss this with him.”

“It would be uncomfortable for Mum to talk about it with him…”

“…not to mention Dad…”

“…as they are the parents of his romantic interest.”

“I see what you mean, Misters Weasley,” conceded the matronly professor, “but I can’t help but feel that this is not normally within my purview as a Hogwarts Professor.”

“Of course it’s outside of your normal duties, Professor.”

“But we appreciate the help to one that we consider a brother.”

“Certainly,” the normally stern Deputy Headmistress said after a moment of consideration, “and I will have ‘the talk’ with him, as I agree with you two that he does need to know certain things with correct information, rather than the often incorrect information I fear is commonly spread amongst the young adults of this school.”

“Thank you, Professor.”

“…and may we suggest that this would be easier if you were to get a relative expert on the medical side of the matter by securing the assistance of Madame Pomfrey?”

“And if you would, Professor,” continued George, “Would you, please, give him this personal letter afterward? It is to assure him that if he has any questions that require, um, discussion with his contemporaries, he would be welcomed to discuss it with one of us rather that rely on the information from his younger friends.”

“We believe that this letter is best read after ‘the talk’, as he may be in need of help absorbing the information from a younger perspective.”

“Of course, Messer’s Weasley,” the Professor said appreciatively, “and this is a good thing that you two have done. You are good friends to Mister Potter and he needs all of those that he can get.”

As the terrible Weasley twins finished talking with their old Transfigurations Professor, Harry was in the hospital still, though not unhappily, as his very own fiery redhead was comforting him. Their attentions were diverted by the arrival of a common tawny delivery owl bearing a rolled package. Harry took the package and gave an appreciating pet to the animal.

“Well open it,” said Ginny impatiently.

“Patience.”

“Shush…what is it?”

Harry unrolled the package and discarded the protective layer of parchment to reveal...

“A magazine,” Harry said. “Funny, I don’t subscribe to any…”

Harry trailed off as he saw the cover of the glossy magazine, ‘Witch Weekly’. It was emblazoned with a picture. A picture of him, Harry James Potter.

Well, him and his boxers…and not much else.

Harry stared in shocked disbelief.

Ginny stared for a completely different reason.

Ginny shook herself free of her stupor before Harry managed to wrap his mind around the thought that he was gracing the cover of an international magazine with little left to the imagination.

Ginny grabbed the magazine and flipped to the listed pages of the promised pictorial.
Well, Harry," she started, "that’s not too bad. You look really good so it’s not too embarrassing."

She flipped another page and the center of the magazine folded out, twice.

"A CENTERFOLD!" screamed Harry. "I know that I said that I would wait until Christmas to enact revenge for all of the pranks, but a centerfold!"

Ginny looked at the twice folded paper and growled, "I better not find any of these posted in the girls’ dorms."

"Or anywhere else," grumbled Harry.

"I’m going to go…" she said, getting up and kissing his cheek, "go and do…something."

"George, I do believe that, while we were not looking, we may have matured into adults."

"Fred, I do believe you may be right. That was a good thing we did in there."

"Yes, I agree. But with your maturity, I am afraid your pranks have turned nearly evil."

"Yes, dear brother, as a deed, it was both righteous and necessary, but as a prank, it was at the same time, evil."

"Yes, good but evil. Quite a combination," agreed Fred, "but, what was really in the letter?"

"The letter stated just what we said it did, but at the same time it included a card, from me, taking credit for conceiving of the prank part of ‘the talk’."

"Yes, I understand that it is a prank, but how can you take the credit? It is just ‘the talk’, and you, or we, are not doing the talking."

"Yes, but I take credit for it as a prank, as the only more embarrassing person that I could have chosen to ask at the school would have been our own Sneering Potions Professor, and we could have never pulled this off with him."

"Indeed, but perhaps Harry won’t appreciate the genius of such an evil prank."

"Madame Pomfrey, may I leave now?" an antsy Harry asked.

"Not quite yet, Mister Potter," the school healer said, "but you may get dressed in the robes your head of house has brought."

"Okay," Harry said, "but why can’t I leave if I can dressed?"

"Mr. Potter," came another voice from the other end of the room, "Perhaps I can answer that."

Harry looked up to see his transfiguration professor dragging an easel to his screened off area.

"You see, Mister Potter," started the Professor, "there comes a point in every young witch or wizard’s life when they need to learn certain things, when they realize that there are differences between witches and wizards. We believe that it is time for us to have ‘the talk’."

Harry and Ginny staggered to the portrait hole at the same time, meeting shoulder to shoulder in shock. Amazingly, one of them managed to give the password to the kind, rotund lady.

They shuffled through and over to the couch where they normally sat.

"What happened to you two?"

This caused Harry and Ginny to look at each other for the first time since entering.

"Oh…well…you see," they both started at once.

"You first," Ginny said.

"No," Harry said, "you first. I insist."

He shuddered.

"Oh…Okay…well, Mum sort of…she…gaveme‘thetalk’.

"What?" Ron asked.

"I said," said Ginny, quietly but clearly, "Mum gave me ‘the talk’."

"Oh?" Harry said, breaking out of his shell a little. "I got ‘the talk’ too, but from Professor McGonagall and Madame Pomfrey." He shuddered again.

"You got ‘the talk’ from two witches?" Ron goggled. "I got mine from Dad. It was bad enough getting it from someone of the same gender. That’s
got to be horrible from someone of the opposite sex.” Ron shuddered.

“Yeah,” Harry said. “But imagine how bad it would have been from your dad for me?”

“Why?” asked Ron.

Hermione snickered and then answered, “Because your dad is also Ginny’s dad, and that would be…awkward.”

“Oh…O-o-oh,” comprehension flashed to Ron’s face. “Yeah, bad.”

“So, we know why Ginny got ‘the talk’, why did you?” Hermione asked.

“Really?” asked Harry. “And why did you get ‘the talk’ Miss Weasley?”

Ginny smiled, but tucked her chin down and blushed. She wasn’t answering.

Hermione, however, was amused.

“Well, Harry,” Hermione answered for her friend. “During your…display…Saturday morning, Ginny turned to her mum and told her it was time to teach her ‘those’ spells.”

Harry blinked for a second. “Ah, those spells. They taught me some of ‘those’ spells as well, but they had flash cards and an easel with diagrams and illustrations…,” he shuddered heavily.

“I don’t get it,” Ron said. “What is so bad about diagrams and illustrations?”

Harry shuddered again. “Ron…in the wizarding world, diagrams and illustrations…move. And I was being taught by…”

“Oh…yeah that’s bad.”

“As to why I got ‘the talk’ now,” Harry said, “afterward they gave me this in an envelope.”

Harry held out the card proclaiming George to be the prank king (in his own mind) with this prank. Harry didn’t show them the letter because of some…graphic language and…well…adult content. As nice as their offer advice was, it was not PG-13.

Harry blushed thinking about it.

“Ginny?” Harry said in a whispered voice.

She turned to look at him.

“H-harry? I thought that you went to bed?” she said in a shy, quiet voice.

“I just laid down,” Harry said. “Too many thoughts, not enough distraction.”

“Oh.”

“Gin…,” Harry said hesitant, “we should talk after…you know.”

“Yeah,” Ginny agreed. “I guess that this sort of rushed us to this point,” she chuckled.

“Yeah,” Harry smiled, “I guess it did.”

“Did it scare you?” Ginny asked.

“No…Yeah, I guess it did,” Harry said. “What she said about when we…and when…and what could happen.”

“Harry,” Ginny said in a caring manner, “I know it will hurt some, but…”

“But?”

“But it will be worth it…someday,” she offered.

“Gin,” Harry said softly. “This isn’t necessary. We have a good relationship. We don’t need to take that step yet. I love you and I love ‘us’ the way we are.”

“You mean…?”

“I mean that we don’t have to. I don’t feel ready. I…well…you…I don’t know how you feel about it, but we should wait. We have a f-future ahead of us. Let’s not do anything too early.”

“Oh…good…you mean that you don’t want…?” she asked shyly.
“Gin, when I look at you I smolder with desire to be with you in every way,” Harry assured her. “You are the most beautiful, desirable, sexy woman that I know and I need you more than air, but I think that we should wait.”

“Thank you, Harry,” she hugged him. “I was worried that you wanted it, you know, with all of your romantic dinners and kissing, I just thought that you…”

“Ginny, I treat you well because I want to treat you well,” Harry said firmly. “I have no ulterior motive. I expect only love if you have it and honesty always.”

“Harry,” Ginny responded, “you’ll always have my love and honesty.”

“Thank you.”

“About the other…when…?” she asked.

“Maybe we should wait until we are married…unless something changes…” Harry is cut off by his own yawn and the sudden need for sleep.

“Perhaps we should go to bed,” Harry said. He leaned down and gave her a light brush of lips together. “I have potions tomorrow. G’night.”

Harry turned and left the common room by way of the boy’s staircase.

Ginny stood shocked.

Harry said married.

Harry wanted to be married someday.

Harry wanted to be married someday to her.

Harry wanted to be married someday to her and he wanted to wait for sex until he was.

She smiled.

That was all right for now, but she might just have to change his timetable someday.
Chapter 25: Of Practice and Dinner

Thank you to my Beta’s Donalddeutsch, Sparky40sw and Cateagle.

“Okay, Gin. One more basket of balls and then we go back to your studying.”

Harry stood in the geometric center of the Chamber of Secrets with his Ginny off to his right; safe. Near where Salazar Slytherin’s statue used to be, was a stage of burl maple with a simple clear finish. A piece this size had never before been made from such a rare and expensive wood. Of course, in the magic world, price wasn’t an issue, when all it took was the knowledge and imagination of the caster to conjure such a masterpiece.

At the base of the stage sat six baskets full of golf balls.

No, it wasn’t a driving range; it was a training range.

“Ah, come on, Harry,” Ginny whined. “It’s only October and I can think of better things to do right now than studying.”

“Gin, if you don’t study now, I won’t even see you come April and that would suck,” Harry finished with a cute, pouting frown.

Ginny giggled, “Okay, we’ll study, but only after we finish with the decorations in here. Halloween is only a couple of weeks away you know.”

Harry groaned.

“What’s wrong, babe?” Ginny asked and then her eyes flared. “That better not be a groan about taking me to a ball!”

Harry’s eyes flew open in fear. He knew when not to mess with Ginny, and that could change at any moment with her Weasley temper.

“Hey, whoa,” Harry backpedaled. “No it’s not that; I want to take you dancing, it’s just…you know…everyone else.”

“What?” she asked. “Shy now are you?”

“Yes…I mean no…” Harry said in frustration. “It’s just that I’ve been getting all of these…looks…from girls ever since Ron’s prank and that damned article.”

Ginny growled and glared, “What kind of looks?!”

Harry swallowed, “Luckily not that kind of look,” he said under his breath. “They look at me like I’m a slab of meat and they’ve suddenly got a craving for rare.”

Ginny broke from her glare and giggled. She remembered some very inappropriate comments along the same line that she’d overheard from some underclasspersons before she had shut them down. Still, she had to agree with both his and the underclasspersons’ sentiments. He was getting leered at and she could understand that. But she just didn’t have to be happy about it. So, occasionally, she had to put some of the other students in line and remind them that he was taken. Usually just a glare would do, occasionally an overt show of affection, and Harry, being a man, was mostly clueless.

“But I’ll be there to protect you,” Ginny assured him in a slightly patronizing manner. “I won’t let the scary females get their hands on you or your beautiful body.”

“Hmmph, beautiful, huh?” Harry growled. “Men’s bodies aren’t beautiful, they are rugged, handsome, chiseled, but not beautiful. You are beautiful, men are not.”

“What’s wrong, not manly enough of a word for you?” Ginny teased. “And it’s surprising that you think about men’s bodies so much.”

“Quiet you,” he said. “Let’s just get on with the training.”

“Sure,” she laughed.

She moved behind Harry and pointed her wand at the basket of balls. Quickly she levitated one after another, turning them colors other than white before summoning them at him at great speed. However, they never reached their target, as he was rapid firing slashing, bludgeoning and explosive hexes. The entire basket of balls took under a minute and the two of them were left smiling, successful. They were so in practice that they weren’t even short of breath. They were then free to move on to the decorations.

Harry stood in front of the Gargoyle guarding the Headmaster’s office grinning in amusement. Here he was to meet the Professor each week for their discussions, and he wasn’t given the password. Each time a new candy, but Harry, after the third week of school, had come up with the perfect foil for this plan of the old codger.

“I solemnly swear that I am up to no good,” he said as he taped his wand to the old parchment in his hand. He watched as the spider-web of lines...
spread out to detail the millennia old building and its inhabitants.

Harry scanned the map for his own location, but stopped short.

“Oh…so that is where they got to,” Harry said in amusement.

Harry smirked and then proceeded to check his own location. *There it is.*

“Werther’s Originals.”

The statue stepped to the side, revealing a staircase moving up its well; slow and inviting. Harry stepped on, standing patiently for the slow ride. At the top he stood in front of the door, waiting. He knew very well that the Headmaster knew he was out there and decided to test the man’s patience. In the mean time he withdrew a quill and parchment from his robes and drafted a note.

“Harry, please enter,” he heard from the far side of the oak doors.

Harry smirked before pushing through the massive doors.

“Good afternoon, Headmaster,” he said. “Getting better, five minutes this time.”

“Ah, yes, our games,” the old warlock said. “It was the right time to ask. Sooner and you would not have finished your note. Later and your tea would be cold.”

Harry faltered for just a moment. The old man really did have a few more tricks up his sleeve.

“Thank you, sir,” Harry said, taking the offered cup. “Someday I’ll figure out how you do that.”

Harry held up the rolled note, “Do you mind if I send this now, sir?”

“Of course not, Harry.”

“Dobby!” Harry said.

A small pop registered beside Harry’s chair announcing the arrival of the free elf.

“Yes, Harry Potter sir. You is needing Dobby’s help, sir?” the excitable elf asked.

Harry smiled, “Yes, could you deliver this note immediately to Mr. Ronald Bilius Weasley?”

The house elf smiled widely. “Yes, sir, Harry Potter, sir.”

“Please,” Harry said. “Just call me Harry. Can you find him right away, Dobby?”

The Headmaster smiled.

“Of course, Harry, sir. Within this castle, house elves be finding anyone,” said the enthusiastic house elf.

“Excellent, Dobby,” Harry smiled. “Give him this note immediately then. Please, don’t stick around for him to reply. I’m sure that I’ll hear about it later.”

Dobby took the note and bowed deeply before disappearing again with a pop.

“What was in the note, Harry?” asked Dumbledore. “Won’t you see him after this meeting?”

Harry chuckled, “Now I probably will. The note was a little revenge and a reminder.”

The Headmaster cocked his eyebrow in question.

“A couple of weeks ago,” Harry answered the Headmaster’s questioning look, “Ginny and I got dressed up and had dinner and dancing in the Chamber and Ron didn’t approve of Ginny’s attire.”

The Headmaster nodded his head sagely. “And when Mister Weasley doesn’t approve of something, it is not a silent event.”

“Precisely, sir,” Harry returned.

“Then what have you done to our esteemed redhead?” the Headmaster asked.

“I just interrupted a similar outing of his,” Harry stated. “I pointed out that how Ginny was dressed was and is exactly how Ron wants to see Hermione dressed.”

“Ah, pointing out hypocrisy. Not the old Marauder style of prank, I see,” he said. “I’m glad that you have formed your own style that will leave the walls where they are.”

Harry smiled. It felt good to be favorably compared to his father and as his own person.
“You wanted to know how things are going, sir?” Harry asked to further the weekly meeting.

“Yes, indeed. Halloween first if you would,” specified Dumbledore.

“Okay, the stage is set and everything’s nearly ready,” Harry spoke efficiently.

“Care to elaborate, Harry,” Dumbledore prodded.

Harry chuckled. “Sure. I’ve conjured the stage and the tables, chairs and decorations. Ginny helped with the conjuring that she knew, like the decorations, since that’s not taught until NEWT level classes. Everything is set except the special lighting; which has to be added the morning of the Ball, as Fairy lights start to get thoughts of their own if they are more than a day old. The floating candles are in a pile waiting to be lit and placed that morning. The only thing left is to wait.”

“Indeed, very good, Harry,” the Headmaster said. “Professor McGonagall and myself must inspect your preparations at least a week prior to the Ball, but that can be arranged.”

Harry smiled, “Not into surprises, Professor?”

Professor Dumbledore chuckled, “As a person, surprises are the spice of life. As a headmaster, surprises are dangerous and irresponsible. The key is a balance of the two when possible.”

“Oh, yeah,” said Harry. “I assume that you want see everything that the students will see?”

“Of course,” the Headmaster answered. “The balance here is in experiencing the surprise before any of my students.”

“Yeah, that works,” Harry agreed. “I’ll arrange dinner so that everything is close to the same as it is for the ball. You can transport down to the Chamber from here.”

“Wonderful,” the Professor said. “And what of your own training?”

Harry left the Headmaster’s office and proceeded out of the front doors to the waning Scottish Fall sunlight. He stood and enjoyed the natural warmth for a second before looking around. With the sighting of a shock of red hair, he had found his goal. There, below a large shade tree, sat his love, Ginny. Wasting no time, he walked over to the group of fifth year girls and their boyfriends.

“Hey, everyone. Hey, Gin,” he said, “mind if I sit with you.”

She smiled up at him from the blanket that they were all sitting on. “Of course not. My back is getting tired and I could use something to lean on.”

“Well,” Harry mock-huffed, “as long as I can be useful.”

Despite his huff, he scooted up behind her; legs splayed to each side and pulled her back to his chest for her support. He felt awkward; so he flicked his wand and conjured several pillows to support his own back.

His audience gathered flies.

“Well, what do you expect?” Harry asked. “For me to ruin my own back as a martyr for the cause of Ginny Weasley’s Comfort?”

Ginny quipped back, “If that is what is needed, dear.”

Harry answered her in the most mature way he could think of. He stuck his tongue out at her.

“Nice.”

“Harry,” said Neville, “you just conjured several pillows with just a flick of you wand.”

Harry blinked, “Um, yeah…magic.”

“But, what we learned in class was to conjure one,” Neville argued, “not six.”

Harry smiled at his classmate. “Neville, what we learned is the general incantation for conjuring a class of things, including pillows. What comes out is what we are picturing clearly in our mind…so-o-o-o…”

From the realization on Neville’s face, you would almost expect to see a light bulb lit over his head. “So, picture multiple pillows and get multiple pillows.”

“Yeah, that and a little extra power and you’re set,” Harry continued.

Samantha rolled her eyes. “See Ginny. That’s what you get for dating over your year. They talk about junk you haven’t seen yet.”

“Yeah, but I got him wrapped ‘round my finger,” Ginny proclaimed. “He’ll teach me anything I want.”

Harry smiled down at her. “Of course I will.”
“Anything…?” asked Ginny’s friend Cassidy with a mischievous grin.
Ginny blushed, causing all of the girls to giggle.

“Hey, quiet you dirty, dirty witch!” scolded Harry. “Robert, you really need to help her keep her mind out of the gutter.”

“Why would I do that?” asked the tall fifth year brunet Ravenclaw. “I enjoy her mind being in the gutter.”

“Well,” Harry fumbled, “just don’t include me.”

More giggles, oh boy.

“Oh, hey, Gin,” Harry said. “Remind me to apologize to Hermione.”

“Okay, I give,” said Samantha. “Why do you need to apologize to your best friend Hermione?”

Harry blushed. The prank, as it were, was not well thought out; it not only would annoy Ron but also Hermione.

“I well…,” Harry stalled, “I noticed that Ron and Hermione were occupying the fourth floor broom closet on the north side, so I sent them a note with Dobby.”

“You did what!?!?”

“Oh, Harry,” Ginny groaned, “Why, pray tell, did you do that. You know that you would annoy them both; while I don’t mind you annoying my brother, why Hermione?”

“Well, I really didn’t think about that before I did it,” Harry said sheepishly. “It seemed fun and fitting.”

“Fitting?” asked Luna.

“Well,” Harry said, “the note that I sent Ron reminded him that he should leave Ginny alone and not be hypocritical.”

“Huh?” offered Cassidy.

“I took Ginny for dinner and dancing in one of the chambers of the school and we got dressed up for the date. I was in my Italian suit and Ginny was in her red dress…”

“My ‘Little Red Dress’, ” Ginny smiled at the memory.

…and Ron sort of blew a brotherly fuse. Forbidding this and warning that,” Harry seamlessly continued.

“It took Harry walking me through half of the school to get me in a good mood again,” Ginny informed her friends.

“Oh,” exclaimed Robert, “that red dress. Cass, you remember it. You told me that Gin was walking her ‘catch’ around everywhere to show him off.”

Cassidy grinned, not denying the statement.

“I wasn’t…but I…and he,” sputtered Ginny. “I…okay, maybe I did want to show him off a little, but who could blame me.”

The girls chuckled. Yes, chuckled, not giggled, chuckled; deeper, with more humor.

“No one, I’m sure,” Samantha said, “but just so you know, now about half of the females of the school want to ‘sample the wares’.”

Harry groaned.

Ginny growled.

Harry and Ginny sat in the common room working on their homework. This had been the activity for the past four hours. Nerves were beginning to fray.

“Grrr,” growled Ginny. “I can’t take this any more. Harry, I need to stop before I go bonkers. This is too much.”

Harry looked at his watch and saw that it was almost dinnertime and smiled.

“Okay, Gin. Let’s stop for the night,” he shot her a smile. “It’s dinnertime. Why don’t you go take a shower and change out of your school robes and we can go and get a special dinner.”

Ginny suddenly beamed at him a gorgeous smile. “Really? We can have a special dinner tonight? Just us?”

Harry smiled back again. “Of course, Gin. We’ll just stop by the kitchen and get them to send some of tonight’s dinner to our spot and we’re golden. We can use the crest outside transfiguration and be there while the food’s still warm.”

Ginny was happy for so many reasons. Her boyfriend knew when she needed his time. He was always able to give her what she wanted. And he
was willing to bend his life to suit hers. It came down to her being happy to be loved.

She got up and gave him a peck on the lips before sprinting up the girl’s stairs. Harry sighed and went up to his own dorm to get clean and changed. By silent consent the dress for this impromptu date was to be muggle casual.

Hermione and Ron were walking arm in arm to the great hall for dinner when Hermione thought that she saw something in the distance. It looked like Harry and Ginny in muggle clothes, but then they were gone.

"Ron," she said, "did you see that?"

Ron, ever helpful, said, "Huh? See what?"

Hermione was frustrated at his stunted observation skills but answered calmly, "I thought that I saw Harry and Ginny come up from the kitchens and then just disappear in front of Professor McGonagall’s classroom. How did they do that?"

"Maybe they went in."

"No, they weren’t at the door. They were just in the middle of the hall."

"Hmm, maybe you were just seeing things."

Hermione harrumphed but continued to dinner silently.
Ginny waited in the prepared Chamber for her boyfriend to arrive. They had set everything up perfectly, as far as they could tell. Nothing was just 'good enough'. The plan, in general, was to show the Headmaster and the Deputy Headmistress the setting for this year’s Halloween Ball.

With a smile, Ginny ran her thoughts over again. Yes, there it was…'boyfriend'. She giggled. She really couldn’t help it. She didn’t like the thought of being a giggling little girl…but sometimes, she was stuck.

She had a boyfriend and, since that moment, her life was no longer normal. Sure she’d had a boyfriend before, but that had just been Hogsmeade and snogging; perfectly normal. But since she had consented to be Harry Potter’s girlfriend…since she had gained Harry Potter as her boyfriend; life had been different in a not normal, wonderful way, and that was without thinking about the ramifications of 'The-Boy-Who-Lived’. Here she was in her OWL year and she was not only not behind on her studies, she was ahead; she was on the Quidditch team as a chaser; she was snogged regularly in the halls without warning and she managed to go to a dress up dinner at least once a week with the man that she loved, all while being confined to the grounds of a boarding school. She was learning magics more advanced than she would have ever in school and was helping her boyfriend to learn to be the most powerful wizard in the world.

She gave herself a mental shake, Oh, yeah…back to the plan.

The plan, specifically, was to have Headmaster Dumbledore and Deputy Headmistress McGonagall to dinner in the venue just as the students would in a week’s time. Harry would perform the same magics and they would both give the two a tour of the Chamber of Secrets and the caves below their school. It’d be a nice evening; good food and an allaying of fears.

Now she just needed Harry to show. She looked her watch…he wasn’t late yet. Of course, he never wore a watch since the second task. Hmm…”Damn sodding wanker. How dare he…” interrupted Ginny’s thoughts.

Ginny spun around, gaping at her boyfriend.

“Harry! What the…?” she asked.

Harry grimaced.

“Gin,” Harry said with a wince. “I know that you hate when your brothers get all protective on you,” Harry waved his hand in a gesture, “but would you mind if your boyfriend protects your honor when you aren’t there?”

Ginny smiled. This was either going to infuriate her or be very funny; perhaps both, in time.

“What happened?” she asked in a drawn out voice, a silent ‘this time’ on her lips.

“Well, you see,” Harry said, “There were these fifth year Ravenclaws that I overheard talking about you.”

“About me?” Ginny asked, surprised.

“Well,” Harry said, “more specifically, about your body.”

Ginny blushed. “Unflattering things, I assume.”

“Oh, they were very impressed. They were nearly ready to worship you, I think,” Harry corrected.

Ginny smiled, “Oh, Harry. Just because another student likes me, doesn’t mean that you need to get all ‘jealous’ and do something about it. You’ve all ready won me. The competition is over.”

“Oh, I hear guys all of the time admiring you. In fact, I see many more that simply won’t take their eyes off of you,” Harry stated. “But the way that these guys were describing you couldn’t be printed in PlayWizard. I wouldn’t have done anything if it was just another group of your admirers.”

“Oh, stop,” she said, acting shy. “You make it sound like there are a lot of stalkers out there after me.”

“Maybe not stalkers, but at least half of the male population of the school looks when you pass,” Harry told her. “You must have noticed.”

Ginny giggled, “Apparently about as well as you noticed your following.”

“Wha…?” intoned Harry, dumbfounded.

“Oh, please, Harry,” Ginny drawled. “We could fund Saint Mungos if we just opened a kissing booth in Diagon Alley for a week.”
A week?" asked Harry, incredulously.

"Long lines," she clarified. "Just a galleon each."

She actually stayed serious for about ten seconds before busting up.

Ginny grabbed her sides as she laughed. Harry slowly started to chuckle before he joined her in laughter.

After they had calmed down, Ginny asked in her best stern voice, "So, Harry, what did you do that would be considered protecting my honor?"

Harry smiled, "Bat Bogey Hexes in your honor and Lasting Headache Jinxes just from me for all of them."

Ginny laughed again. "I wish that I could have been there to see that," she said with a grin. "If that is how you defend my honor when I am not around, I approve. As long as you are not hitting people or doing anything permanent."

Harry held up his hand and said, "I swear."

Ginny smiled at him, "You swear with your right hand, Harry."

"I know," he said with a devious grin.

"Shut it, you devil," she said with a light smack to his head, "and finish with the preparations for dinner and get the arch ready."

"Yesh Mashter," Harry said after hunching his back and swinging his right arm back and forth below him.

"Yeah, whatever, Quasimodo."

Minerva McGonagall waited patiently in the Headmaster's office, her curiosity growing with each minute.

"Albus," she finally asked when her curiosity exceeded her patience, "how exactly are we getting to the Chamber?"

The Headmaster chuckled, "To tell you the truth, I really do not know. I know the mechanism, roughly, but not the delivery."

"Albus," said Professor McGonagall in frustration, "someday, if you don't learn to answer questions in a straight forward manner, I'll be forced to send you to Madame Pomfrey with reason."

Albus laughed, "Someday, you'll reach this office and then, Minerva, you'll understand better why I speak the way I do."

Minerva scowled, her lips a thin line that her students learned to recognize as a warning in their first week of classes, if not before.

She was so intent on the Headmaster that she didn't notice the goings on in the rest of the office. Not that there normally are many other things going on in the office to be concerned with, besides the barmy old man behind the proverbial curtain, and certainly attention must be paid to him. But this time she missed the arrival of another point of interest.

"It would seem, Minerva," said the venerable Professor, "that our method of transport has arrived, if I'm not mistaken."

Minerva McGonagall turned to see an ancient looking archway in the center of the open space of the office, on top of and at an angle to the new crest that now adorned the space.

"What is it, Professor?" she asked with a curiosity despite the hardness in her voice.

The archway was roughly hewn of a single piece of stone standing five feet wide to shoulder height and arching to nearly eight feet tall. The arch seemed to be filled with a pool of liquid metal, a near perfect mirror, only marred by enchanting ripples. Bracketing the opening on each side was a short fence of decrepit wood that had not known life in this century; creating a channel to the mesmerizing portal.

"I don't know, Professor," he answered, "However, I believe that we can assume that we will find out shortly if we only step up to the device."

The Headmaster stood from his desk and offered his arm to his colleague. "Harry, won't they see us if we just are standing right in front of them?"

"The glamour's covering us, too," Harry assured her. "When they come in, they'll see the Chamber as I first saw it."

"Minus me," Ginny said with as much of a smile as she could muster, covering the involuntary shiver that went down her spine.

"Yeah," Harry smiled, "minus you. Think we should?"

"No," she said firmly.

Harry hugged her to himself with the impending arrival of their guests. The nature of the transportation system made the travelers arrive without fanfare or pomp. Suddenly, where there was before an uninterrupted view of the runic arch, there were then two elderly professors standing arm-in-
With a gasp, Professor McGonagall was the first to speak, “What is this, Albus? Surely we can’t have the students in here.”

From her point of view, they were standing at one end of a dark, dank chamber, dripping with putrid water. Frightening viper statues stood on each side of the large chamber, dark liquid dripping from their fangs.

“Ah, how lovely,” replied the aged Headmaster, “this is a perfect setting for a Halloween Ball.”

She looked at him as if he had lost his last marble. “With all due respect, Headmaster, this must be some sort of a mistake.”

Harry walked forward, still covered by the glamour charm, to continue the evening to his mental script.

“Welcome,” he whispered, “to the Chamber of Secrets.”

Professor McGonagall jumped as she heard the disembodied voice. She was greeted with an eerie laugh echoing around the Chamber.

“Perhaps you should look at it with a true eye.”

The Professor stood tall against her fear.

“That was an amazing feat of magic, Mister Potter,” Professor McGonagall praised after they had eaten dinner. “Would you care to walk me through your transformation of this Chamber?”

“Oh, sure,” agreed Harry, “over the summer I found a book in the library that was written by the Founders on the construction of Hogwarts.” Shock and surprise registered on the Transfiguration Professor’s face. “It showed how to conjure and transfigure stone and how to change the statues.”

Regaining her wits, Professor McGonagall continued along her professional interests, “And the Statue of Salazar Slytherin, was that a transfiguration?”

Ginny giggled behind her hand.

“No,” she said from behind her hand. “That was just Harry having fun and letting out his pent up anger.”

Professor McGonagall raised her eyebrow in continued curiosity.

“I, uh,” Harry stammered, “I turned it into dust with bludgeoning spells, blasting hexes, slashing curses and what ever else that I could think of to practice power.”

Harry gave a sheepish smile.

“Very good, Mr. Potter,” Professor McGonagall said. “And at the beginning, what was that arch that brought us here?”

Harry and Ginny shared a satisfied glance. They agreed. Professor McGonagall thought that the arch was the method of transport. This was the final pass of the tests for the crests. When Harry passed out on the crest the Saturday after Hermione’s birthday, he inadvertently proved that the crests would detect someone with a medical emergency and transport them to the hospital wing. Of course the other tests were much more sedate and controlled; he and Ginny seeking privacy and turning off the system to prevent accidental guests; the Headmaster playing with the settings and spending an afternoon porting between random crests throughout the castle; and of course Harry and Ginny’s numerous trips to and from the Chamber. It was well tested and now they knew that they could fool someone as intelligent as the Transfigurations Professor into thinking that it was the ancient looking arch not the floor it stood on.

“Just something that I found in some old books. Dead useful,” Harry proclaimed.

“Indeed Mr. Potter,” Professor McGonagall agreed. “Now please show me what you learned in the subject of Transfiguration to make these changes on the Chamber.”

Ginny smiled proudly at her boyfriend.

The dinner with the Headmaster and Deputy Headmistress went well, the educators were satisfied and, indeed, impressed with the setting for the next ball. They had toured the Chamber proper before Harry and Ginny showed them the associated caves. Harry and Ginny both had worked on preparing them as a place for the students to walk and have some private time, in replacement for the paths and rose gardens of the last ball. At various nooks there were transfigured benches for couples to have relatively quiet times together as the night progressed.

“Very nice preparations, Mister Potter, Miss Weasley,” congratulated Professor Dumbledore.

“Thank you,” Harry said for them.

“Yes, very good,” agreed Professor McGonagall. “However, I am concerned that these caves are a bit much for the younger students.”

Harry smiled cheekily, “Yeah, I can see how these caves would not be appropriate for, say, a second year student.”

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Harry smiled cheekily, “Yeah, I can see how these caves would not be appropriate for, say, a second year student.”
Professor McGonagall’s lips twitched slightly as she fought a smile. “Very funny, Mister Potter, but you know what I mean.”

Harry smiled but dropped his cheek. “Of course.”

“Our plan,” Ginny continued for him, before he could cause any trouble, “is to only open the doors when the third year students and below have left for their dormitories.”

The Professors did smile at this good idea.

“Very well,” Professor McGonagall approved. “You seem to have planed it all well indeed. I love your decorations and the crystals.”

She was referring to how the caves were interspersed with patches of crystal veins in the rock wall like numerous spider webs; concentrated at each nook that contained a bench. The crystals were in a rainbow of colors, glowing with obvious magic. Further decorations included stands of softly luminous crystals growing from the floor at larger areas to break up the path. The whole effect was quite otherworldly. The setting didn’t seem to be of this earth. Harry thought that it was more something that you would see on early American science fiction that Dudley enjoyed watching when Harry was younger.

“Ginny did a very good job,” Harry praised. “She directed the decoration in the whole place.”

Ginny blushed, in reaction to his statement.

“Why the magic torches along the walls with such magnificent lights as these?” asked Professor Dumbledore.

“The crystal,” Ginny answered, “is only lit with a spell and it’ll fade after a day or so. Most people that come down here after the ball won’t know the spell for lighting them, but one of the first things that you learn is how to light a torch, so,” she motioned with her hand, “torches.”

“Of course!” Professor Dumbledore agreed to the revelation. “Very well thought out indeed.”

During the preparation for, and even after approval of, the work that Harry and Ginny had spent so much time on, school continued. Harry had been keeping up with his schoolwork and paying attention in class, but this had been made easier with the pure review and relearning nature of the first many weeks of Defense Against the Dark Arts.

With her Auror training and quick, young wit, Professor Tonks had taken to the subject with gusto. The only problem is that many of the students taught by the toad Umbridge the previous year knew next to nothing of practical magic, and none had the motivation that her star pupil had in independent learning. Thus she had to spend weeks teaching the practical magic that was neglected by the toad like woman.

This allowed Harry a lot of time to do other things in class when he had proven that he had already mastered the subject for the day. Sometimes he would assist Tonks in teaching the students and sometimes he would prepare himself for his lessons to the D.A. The extra time in class was going to come to a close just before the Halloween ball as the other students caught up with the start of the year curriculum and the beginning of proper lessons.

“Class,” started Tonks in her Professor voice, “as we’ve finished ironing out the deficiencies in previous years, we’re now moving on to the first topic of the Advanced DADA curriculum. The first thing to learn is silent casting.”

The class perked up at the thought of the new subject. Tonks felt the raising of attention levels and smiled as she went on.

“Some teachers would have you do this by having you strain to produce a spell as they hexed you, providing little chance that any would see success in the first day,” Tonks advised with disapproval. “While this is a ministry approved teaching method, I don’t believe that we’ll be taking this route.”

A snort could be heard from the Slytherin side of the room. “We’ll be rid of the half-blood yet. The ministry won’t like her varying their teaching methods.”

Tonks’ eyes latched on to the offender. “Mr. Malfoy…as you have chosen to interrupt this class once again, I will, this time, take ten points from Slytherin.”

Despite the glares from his housemates, Draco Malfoy, never the swiftest broom in the shed, just could not shut his mouth. “Yeah, well, how long do you think that you will be here when you defy the Ministry’s guidelines?”

“Mr. Malfoy, once again you do not show the proper respect for your superiors,” Professor Tonks lectured. “That will be a further twenty points from Slytherin and a detention tonight with Mr. Filch. I’m sure that he can come up with a suitable method for you to remember your place as a student. As for my teaching methods and following the Ministry guidelines; I remind you that I am the teacher in this classroom and have far greater experience in the subject than you. I will teach by the method that will yield the best results and will leave the students in this class best able to defend themselves in the event that some low life scum in a white mask decides that following a deranged psychopath is more productive than their own previously pathetic lives. Now sit down before you lose more of your house’s hard fought points.”

The blond Slytherin sat quickly, fuming at being told off by his cousin of all people.

Harry, Hermione and Ron stayed after class, packing up their bags slowly until the room was empty save for them and their teacher.
“Good class, Professor,” Harry said with respect. “It’s good to try something new.”

“Thanks,” Tonks said with a wane smile, “but I shouldn’t have lectured Malfoy like that.”

Hermione scoffed, “Oh please, he’s been deserving that from a professor for five years. He needed to be put in his place.”

“Yeah,” said Ron, “and you can’t say that you didn’t like doing that to the wanker.”

“Ron!” admonished Hermione.

“Yeah, that wasn’t bad,” smile Tonks genuinely.

“Not bad! It was bloody brilliant!” shouted Ron again.

“Ron! Stop cursing.”

“Professor Snape,” said Harry on Monday evening in the Potions classroom where he had found the Potions Master.

The greasy professor looked up from the potions book that he had been reviewing while making notes on a long piece of parchment to the side.

“Yes, what is it Potter?” Snape sneered.

“Sir,” Harry said politely, “you know that the ball is tomorrow.”

“Ah, yes, Potter,” the Professor returned with a remarkably small measure of animosity. “No need to remind me. All of those hormonally charged teenage wizards and witches trying to find a semi-private place to do their unthinkable deeds, of course I remember that tomorrow is the accursed day.”

“Yeah,” Harry said, biting back a chuckle, “I know how you feel about that sort of thing.”

“Go on,” bid the irritable professor.

“Sir, I thought that you might be a bit too busy after escorting the lower classes back to your common room to return to the ‘torture’ that you would experience at such an event,” Harry said as he pulled the small book from his book bag.

“And how would I be too busy, Mr. Potter?” the Potions Professor asked with a snarl.

Harry smiled in a conspiring manner, “I thought that you might just be exploring this potions book that I retrieved from the restricted section,” Harry said as he pulled the small book from his book bag.

“And why, Potter, would I choose that time to read such a paltry book?” the Professor asked, his impatience evident in his tone.

Harry reached into his bag again and withdrew a small jar filled with a greenish grey powder, setting it on the desk.

“Because, Sir,” Harry answered, “that book has potions that were long forgotten due to one missing ingredient.”

Professor Snape’s scowl became more evident and nastier. “Get to the point, Potter!”

Harry smiled a humorless smile. “The point, sir, is that this is Basilisk Powder.”

“Basilisk Powder!” exclaimed the sinister professor. “So you finally retrieved the carcass from the Chamber. I have been asking for years for the old coot to allow me down to retrieve the thing.”

“Really?” asked Harry in surprise.

“Yes, Potter, really,” the Professor answered in monotone. “Now get on with it before I assign you a detention tomorrow night with Mr. Filch.”

“Okay, fine, here’s the deal,” Harry said, placing his hands firmly on the desk between them. “This is only enough powder to last for a dozen potions or more but it is just a small fraction of what I have,” Harry proclaimed with a satisfied grin. “If, by chance, no student is punished or reprimanded for a rule that isn’t recorded in the official Hogwarts book of rules for the next 48 hours, I’ll give you a jar of this powder that is the size of your jar of nettles.”

“Potter, I will not have you bribe me to not do my job!” the Slytherin Professor said. “And I assure you that bribing a professor is in the rule book.”

“Yes, but I’m not bribing you to not do your job. I’m bribing you to do just your job and not make new rules up just to make the student’s evening less enjoyable. Could you explain to the Board of Governors why you saw fit to punish me for bribing you to follow the rules?” asked a heated Harry Potter.

“But you’re trying to bribe me to stay away!” the Professor exclaimed as he shot up from his chair, slamming his palms onto the desktop.

“Not stay away, Professor,” said Harry, calmly. “I just thought that you would rather not have the temptation of being around the students and would rather be with your potions that would most likely be simmering at that time as Basilisk Powder potions require at least seventy-two hours of
Professor Snape’s eyes bored into the sixth year. “I will not abandon my house to the whims of the other teachers or students. As their Head of House, it’s my job to look out for their interests. As such, I will be around. Count on that, Mr. Potter,” Professor Snape spat.

“As you wish, Professor,” Harry said, biting back his retort. “Just remember, that sample may be the last that you see for a long time, as I’ll not release the remainder to the general public or to potion masters until after the Dark Ponce is dead. I have several drums of this and I won’t have any of it helping that git. And I’m sure that you would rather have it for free instead of the prices that I can demand from your peers.”

“That should be mine anyway,” Snape proclaimed darkly, “as it is school property.”

“It is mine,” said Harry. “I killed it. I harvested it. I packaged it. I stored it. It’s now in the Potter family vault, nicely protected, and the Headmaster has acknowledged that it is mine to do with as I please.”

Professor Snape scowled heavily.

“Just consider,” Harry offered an olive branch, “this an opportunity to receive ten thousand galleons worth of potions ingredients for just doing exactly your job. Just consider your actions, Professor.”

Harry turned abruptly and left the dank dungeon, distantly glad to have made it out of the room without punishment for his gall. His heart was hammering in his chest at the strong stance he had taken against his long time nemesis.
In the Gryffindor common room, at fifteen minutes after six on October 31st, the only older students to be found were all nervous males. There were many younger students, decked out in their best robes, running around without a care, but the older students looked at this event as something much more serious. Oh how nice life was before thoughts turned to the opposite sex. Times when you could just be friends and not think about holding her, kissing her and...well, where is she? Ron asked mentally. Why couldn't Harry be here waiting with me?

Another Ball. The Ball two years ago had been an unmitigated disaster. Ronald Bilius Weasley had not come to realize until painfully too close to the last Ball that the perfect woman was out of his grasp. He had waited too long to open his eyes. But, even then, with his eyes open, he hadn’t acted as he should have. He had craved any interaction with the bushy haired genius. He would seek any conversation, any chance to speak with her. Unfortunately this, more often than not, led to an argument and eventual fighting. They seemed to thrive on the arguments, but it did neither of them any good. Ron never did get the sense or the courage to truly start the relationship by approaching the beautiful woman directly. He was saved from that task, ultimately, by his sister. She, through his twin brothers, forced him into admitting his affection for Hermione after a most solid and satisfying kiss.

Another Ball and there he stood by the great fire in the common room, waiting. Luckily his brothers, the twins, had been successful in their joke shop and had bought him new dress robes. He looked quite dapper and ready to escort a lady to the Ball, quite the opposite of the ruffled and lace bedecked outfit of nearly two years ago.

Okay, he admitted it. He was nervous. Come on man, this is just Hermione. You've known her since the first day on the train back in first year. You've been friends since Halloween that first year. You've been friends for five years. Ron gulped. Exactly five years tonight. Five years ago Harry forced him to go looking for a crying girl that he had hurt. Had he ever apologized? Ron thought...and thought. Oh how daft. Of course not! I made a girl cry and never had the sense to apologize. Great. I am such a git sometimes.

Ron ended his musings and inner-contemplation when the girl's staircase showed activity. One by one the girls came down the staircase, pausing near the bottom to find their escort in the crowd of male students. If possible, the wait became more torturous as his Hermione was, one by one, not the next to come.

Ron barely registered that Hermione was indeed the next to descend the steps before his brain gave up the ghost and he could no longer think. The only thought to bounce around the confines of his skull was that an angel had descended from heaven. Her ice blue gown hugged her form so much differently than her day-to-day robes that he could hardly think that she could be his girlfriend. His thoughts, so recently on the eleven year old that he had first met and saved from the troll, ground to a halt as his brain tried frantically to update archaic information of just last week with the image of the most beautiful being in existence. Last week it had been a Hermione in a green flower print sundress. His thoughts mapped every detail in minutia. How she could have ever thought that he was good enough for her was beyond him, but he was not stupid enough to point that out. He could only savor the look of her bare shoulders and petite neck. Her normally bushy hair pulled up and shiny in an indefinable sculpture of beauty. The dress showed off what was missed under the generic robes she normally wore. He admired her legs, her waist, her “gulp” breasts.

She was a vision of splendor.

And then she turned to him and smiled.

Hermione was having her princess fantasy night. She was to attend a ball with the man that she loved, had loved for years, who had finally screwed up the courage to admit what, it seems, he too had been feeling for years.

Oh, the wasted time. But he needed to grow and mature to be ready for her (of course, he still needed to, some). So the wait was not all in vain.

She stepped back to the princess fantasy. She was attending the Ball in an ice blue formal gown that was guaranteed to fry his cortex. She was showing off a conservative amount of skin, but the where was well chosen, a bit of shoulder (okay, all of the shoulder), the front not low enough for a lot of cleavage but enough for a beautiful pearl necklace and a large tear drop spot in the back that ensured that she need only get him to dance one dance and he would dance the night away, just for a chance to rest his hand on her bare back.

She shivered at the thought with a smile on her face.

She descended the stairs and stopped to catch a glimpse of her handsome prince in his cascading silk dress robes, royal blue to offset his hair and complexion. She had to smile at the care Ron had taken to find the right outfit the night. The man hated to shop, but was willing to endure it for her.

This would be the perfect night. She screwed up her own courage and walked to the apparently dumbstruck man that she perhaps loved. She took his hand in hers when she was close enough, in an attempt to bring him from his stupor. Inside, her Id was dancing a dance of victory. She wanted to stun him, and his reaction was screaming to her subconscious that he found her beautiful. Every second that he stared at her like that was further reaffirmation that she was desired. Her Id could have basked in that for eternity.
Her taking his hand broke Ron from his stupor and allowed him to connect his screaming subconscious to his mouth once again, luckily with his sometimes deficient conscious mind doing full work on keeping him from embarrassing himself with the often inappropriate inner thoughts that would have tried to rush through his lips.

"Wow," Ron articulated, "Hermione, you look gorgeous."

The entrance hall was crowding with the school’s students in various states of formal dress. The younger students, in general, were simply in their best school robes. However, by third year, the students had dressed more elegantly. Milling about, some nervously, some with delight, the mixed students filled the spacious area with their movements and their voices.

"Hermione?" whispered Ron into his date’s ear. "What are we doing here in the entrance hall?"

"I don’t know," Hermione said, the admission seeming to cost her. "All that I know is that Professor Dumbledore said that Harry was providing the venue and to be here at 6:30 to go there and here we are."

"Do you think that Harry is loaning the Professor one of the Potter mansions?" Ron asked, hopefully deluded.

"No, Ron," said Hermione. "I think we both know that he meant the Chamber of Secrets."

Ron visibly gulped. He had not approached the Chamber since Harry had rescued his sister in second year and even then he hadn’t make it past the cave mouth. That was still a heavy day on his emotions. "But, we’re in the entrance hall not Moaning Myrtle’s Bathroom."

"Well," Hermione surmised, "I guess that they don’t expect the students to slide down a pipe."

Ron looked at her like she would offer more of an explanation, but none came. In truth, she really didn’t know how they would get there.

Sara Molina was with all of her friends, waiting like everyone else for something to happen that would announce the start of the Ball. Being just a second year student, she didn’t have a date, mostly because the boys her age were completely clueless about gender of certain people (her) and what that really meant. Nothing to get too depressed about, but if Bobby doesn’t start noticing the existence of a certain female soon he will be hexed up one side and down the other!

"Sara," said one of her friends as she approached. "You look totally awesome! Where did you get the dress?"

"Owled my mom for it," Sara explained. "Once she got over the bird in her kitchen, she went down to the shop, bought it, and sent it to me with the owl."

"Oh," said the girl, crestfallen. "Wish I’d thought of that."

They stood on the edge of the great crest in the entrance hall. For some reason the only patch of empty ground was directly over the crest, leaving it was inexplicably vacant. Some, however, stood admiring the crest for its artistry.

"The new crest is sure pretty, isn’t it?" Sara asked.

"Yeah, beautiful. I wonder who the artist was," said Sara’s blond friend.

"Dunno. But it looks like it was a lot of work-yaaa-aa-af" she screamed at the end. A dull grey stone rose from the crest, as if coming from beneath.

"What the…?" several of the onlookers asked.

The stone got wider as it came up into existence, slowly revealing the surface covered in runes that the group of second years had no chance of translating. Another few inches and an underside came from the floor in the center of the stone, beginning the evidence of an arch. The stone ribbon continued to rise, spreading wider as it was revealed.

"Wow."

The stone seemed to rise at a painfully slow rate, eventually drawing itself to a width of around five feet; revealing age marks and chips in the stone surface. An agonizing period later, time filled with students jockeying for position to see the happenings, another feature started to rise from the floor. This was a well-worn wood fence, the boards at odd angles and the wood distressed with obvious age, the softer wood between the grains having left the surface of the wood long ago. This rough appearance was only punctuated by the occasional patch of white paint that, rather than offering any protection from the elements, highlighted the lack of maintenance that must have typified its life.

At final stop, the arch stood at nearly eight feet in height and stood five feet wide. The wooden fences spread out from the arch on one side, beckoning passage.

"What do you suppose we are supposed to do?" a male voice on the other side of the crest asked.

Just as he finished his question, a fog formed from nowhere, creating a curtain in the archway.

"Ooh."

To the surprise of everyone present save Professors McGonagall and Dumbledore, the fog condensed, slowly, into a vertical liquid metal surface,
defying all precepts of gravity.

That completed, Professor Dumbledore stepped to the forefront and addressed the students.

"If you will all proceed through the arch, this Ball may commence," he said with a definite twinkle in his eye. Funnily enough, this twinkle did not especially reassure young Sara Molina.

"Attention everyone," came a high, authoritative voice in the kitchen. "All house elves! We’s is just thirty minutes from dinner. You’s all is knowing your where’s and what’s, yes?"

In the kitchen of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry nearly a hundred heads with tennis ball sized eyes and long ears nodded.

"Good good!" said the commanding voice. "Remember the lessons of the greats before us." The house elves turned to previously concealed paintings adorning the walls of the kitchen. "We must remember Jubby, who commanded this kitchen during the great food fight of 1936. Did he let any of the food used be less than great? And Seffy, who single-handedly fed the great armies of 1862 after the Dark Lord Malfizzy poisoned all the rest of the elves. Was her Christmas pudding at the Yule feast any less than perfectly formed?" Each house elf in the kitchen puffed his or her chest as they took heart in the reminders given, turning from portrait to portrait. "And we must never forget Mrs. Weezy, while she is not a house elf, she embodies what an elf must strive for. She keeps a kitchen for nine Weezy’s, each similar to the current Master Weezy and still she has enough to bring many more to her table. Her house is the gathering point for many on occasion and none shall ever leave her house hungry. It is these lessons that we must learn!"

A hardy cheer of agreement echoed through the kitchen.

"Speaking of lessons, who had Master Weezy for the last menu feast?"

A shiver ran through the population of house elves at the mention of a menu feast. A hand at the back rose timidly.

"I did, commandant."

"Yes, Sebby," said the leader of the Hogwarts house elves. "And what happened last time?"

"Master ate all of his food and finished Mistress Patil’s, commandant."

"From this we shall learn," said the lead elf. "Whoever gets Master Weezy’s table, remember who you is serving and give him more. That goes for the rest of you, too. Remember, whoever gets Master Dumbledore, to put two peppermint humbugs on his plate. Whoever gets Mistress Hayeck to make her portion spicy and remember that Mistress Ginny wants Master Harry to eat bigger, so make Master Harry’s meat thick and add more gravy." Heads around the room nodded in understanding.

"It is almost time, so being ready!"

As the students entered a dark chamber lined with viper statues with mouths open and fangs bared greeted them. The end of the Chamber, some could see, held a statue of a demented looking bearded man with wild eyes and a sinister sneer. The ceiling was rugged rock, dripping with putrid water. Nothing of the Chamber seemed welcoming.

The entire school had made their way 'through the arch' by the time the first student cracked and let out a scream. The forth year Hufflepuff had had too much of a fright for the limited fortitude that she contained.

"Calm down everyone," came the booming voice of the Headboy. "I am sure that this is just a little mistake and if everyone would just calmly go back the way that we came, everything will be all right."

Professor Dumbledore looked at the seventh year student and smiled with confidence that the young man was doing his job excellently.

Obviously, someone took his advice, as there was a shuffle from the groups closest to the ‘arch’.

"It won’t let me through. We’re stuck!" screamed a Ravenclaw.

"Welcome," said a booming, breathy voice, "to the Chamber of Secrets!"

Two younger students, a Slytherin second year and a Gryffindor first year, screamed. Nearly all others murmured in hushed exclamation.

"We’re in the Chamber of Secrets!?" several exclaimed in unbelieving question.

"Isn’t this where Slytherin’s monster is!?" others thought to point out.

None of the teachers were given a chance to respond as the mysterious voice spoke again.

"Four-Hundred and Twenty-Seven have entered," the mysterious, booming voice continued, "Six have left alive!"

Another scream echoed through the chamber.
“Four-Hundred and Twenty-Seven have entered,” the mysterious voice continued, “Six have left alive!”

Another scream echoed through the chamber.

“But, no fear,” continued the voice again. “You will all be safe once you open your eyes!”

On the last syllable a bright flash spread from every corner and the entire school watched as the Chamber transformed. The grime beneath their feet seemed to melt away leaving golden hued granite. The statues creaked as the viper’s fanged mouths worked closed from their menacing pose and each statue morphed into another form, some ravens, some badgers, some lions and some, subtly, into the much tamer visage of the current Slytherin snake mascot. The giant head statue of Salazar Slytherin himself melted away to reveal a giant stage of magnificent hardwood occupied by a full band.

Upon their appearance, the band started up with a low roll of a beat from the drums and bass guitar, soon joined in soft tones of a piano and guitar. The music was timed with the walls of the chambers, lined with the mascot statues, sliding away from the students to reveal dozens of tables and chairs to each side of the once narrow chamber.

“Look,” said one anonymous voice, “the ceiling!”

The students not looking up before, looked up in time to see the last of the damp, rocky ceiling obscured with the vision of the red and orange hues of the cloudy evening sky as the sun set out of the students’ view.

Unnoticed, Harry stepped up to the front of the stage. “Welcome, everyone, to the Chamber of Secrets!”

The school turned to him, in awe still from the transfiguration of the Chamber that they thought they had all just witnessed.

“If everyone will take their seats,” Harry said, motioning to the tables to each side of the students, causing previously unnoticed candles floating over the tables to flare to life taking the dim surroundings and bathing them in bountiful light. “We will have a short respite to settle nerves while the band plays one or two of their favorites.”

Somewhere between relieved and stunned, the students wondered around to find their friends and seats at tables.

Harry stood at the center of the stage with a smile on his face. The evening had gone off perfectly so far without a hitch. He had tables full of students, albeit with bewildered expressions on their faces, and his favorite redhead on his arm.

“Hello, everyone!” Harry said with a light Sonorous on himself. “I hope that you weren’t irreparably terrified. Just thought that we would have a bit of a fright for Halloween.”

“I’ll send you my cleaning bill, Potter!” came an anonymous voice from the back of the Chamber.

Harry laughed. “Just be careful with the Evanesco in that area. Wouldn’t want any accidents. Better just stick to Scourgify instead.”

A light laughter spread through the hall as the tension broke.

“We have a few minutes before dinner starts, any questions?” Harry inquired with an open smile.

“What the bloody hell was that four-hundred and twenty-seven and six thing?” asked Justin Finch-Fletchley from the middle of the hall.

Harry laughed again at the look of horror and interest spread throughout the audience.

“That,” Harry said, “is the true statistics of The Chamber of Secrets. Salazar Slytherin, Tom Marvolo Riddle, Professors Dumbledore and McGonagall, Ginny Weasley, who assisted me in preparing this Chamber for your enjoyment, and myself have successfully entered and left with our lives,” he said with an innocent grin, “and the rest of you are the remaining four-hundred and twenty-one.”

A giggle spread through the Chamber, a mixture of nerves and relief. Harry was enjoying himself a little with the audience, but had his limits. Harry was not destined to be a stage performer, preferring not to be in the spotlight. Teaching the DA was not like this. This was more like he was performing, entertaining his guests.

“We all know the rest, but who is that Tom guy?” asked Bill Seers, a seventh year Slytherin from the DA.

“Yes, him…” Harry trailed off. “That’ll just ruin the mood of the evening. How about I tell you all about it tomorrow night at dinner? A little history lesson in hypocrisy.”
Harry nodded at the murmur of assent from the students.

Harry smiled at the shift in magic, indicating the readiness of the meals.

"Ah, it seems that dinner is ready. You may, at your leisure, peruse the menu in front of you and don't be shy."

Their Master of Ceremonies duties momentarily complete, Harry and Ginny left the stage arm in arm.

Professor Dumbledore smiled at the MC's as they descended from the stage. The Headmaster waved his wand casually, creating a five-piece string ensemble at one end of the stage, which seemed content to play themselves from their upright positions. The music floated quite successfully to the far tables despite its dulcet tones.

Harry and Ginny sat at the table closest to the stage on the side with the stairs that they descended. After a generic greeting Harry looked around at the people he was now seated with. At the table with he and Ginny were Neville and Luna, holding hands with sweet smiles on their faces, Ron and Hermione, eyes dancing with excitement and joy, and Professor Tonks and, curiously, Remus Lupin.

"Professor Lupin," Harry exclaimed with a smile. "Fancy seeing you here. What brings you to our humble little dance?"

The former DADA Professor chuckled at his friend's son. "First of all, please, call me Remus or Moony since I'm not your professor anymore. Second, humble? Little? You seem to have your father's flare for the dramatic with your mother's gift for understatement of her accomplishments."

Harry smiled at being compared to his parents. He had known so little of them, even after entering the school that they attended, that he lapped up anything relating to them.

"As for why I'm here," continued the lycanthrope, "I was asked by this lovely witch," he gestured to Professor Tonks, "to accompany her to the ball as her date."

Harry raised his eyebrow with a definite smirk. "And here I believed Mrs. Weasley when she had you, Professor Tonks, and her son Charlie practically married off."

Tonks blushed furiously. "We only went on two dates when he visited the Burrow in May," she said before straightening her back and regaining composure, "hardly even a relationship. Since then Remus and I have been...well..."

Harry smiled like a cat that got the canary, "Seeing each other? Getting serious? Exploring each other's fillings? Finding his ticklish spots? Seeing how curled a metamorph's toes really can actually get?"

This time both Tonks and Remus blushed like tomatoes. Harry casually picked up his menu, ignoring the blushing couple. He scrutinized the choices with a casual air.

"Now, Harry," said the erstwhile professor, "don't tease Tonks. We just may decide to get back at you."

Harry smirked in return. "You're welcome to try."

Remus grinned in return. "From what I've heard, you've been an easy target recently. Seems you haven't avoided one of the Weasley pranks."

Harry smiled in a predatory manner back at the Marauder. "That's just part of my deal with Ginny. I let the pranks take place so that I can judge them at the Christmas holidays and I won't answer them in kind until after judging."

"That's awfully generous of you, Harry," said Ron.

Harry smirked at him, but Ginny answered. "Well, how's he supposed to judge the best prank, if he cuts all of them off before he even knows what they are?"

"Besides," added Harry, "how can I deny any request from my Ginny?"

Ginny beamed her thousand-torch smile at her wonderful boyfriend.

Harry looked up from his menu and smiled back at Ginny.

"I think that I will have the rack of lamb," Harry said. "How about you, Gin?"

She giggled, "Didn't you have enough of that with Charley's prank?"

Harry laughed as a huge plate appeared in front of him with two full racks of lamb and extra helpings of burgundy sauce and mint jelly.

"Oh, boy," Harry said, his eyes wide. "Looks like I better get started if I want to dance at all tonight."

Neville perked up, "Didn't know that you knew how to dance, Harry."

Harry's smile shined brightly at his casual friend. "Some things," Harry said, turning his smile to Ginny, "are worth learning."
After the table had finished their respective dinners, save for Ron, who despite his rapid consumption had some left yet, Harry brought up a subject with his former professor that he had been thinking about for some time.

“Remus,” said Harry, “Are you still having trouble finding work?”

Remus sighed. While this was not the most polite of conversation for the ballroom table, he knew that Harry cared for him and was curious about the direction of the inquiry. “Yes, but that doesn’t really matter with me at Grimmauld Place. With the Order activity there, I’m well taken care of and find myself well occupied.”

Harry was often saddened that his father’s friend couldn’t find work. While Remus’s inheritance from Sirius made employment less of a necessity, Harry knew that Remus held pride in his work.

“Well, Remus,” Harry said in an official ‘Head of the Family Line’ way, “While the wizarding world may have declared me an adult, I find that there are a lot of things that are beyond me. I know roughly how much gold I have and I know that neither I nor my family will need to work for a living; however, I don’t know about the contents of the rest of my estate. Would you agree to let me hire you to manage my estate? I imagine that I have some sort of houses or such along with my family investments.”

Harry said this in as adult of a manner as he could, so as to seem the employer that he wanted to become.

“Hmm,” contemplated Remus Lupin, “let me consider it, cub.”

Harry laughed, “Cub? Well if you are going to call me that…”

Letting the previous ‘adult’ façade fall, Harry held his eyes wide, his eyebrows turned up in the center and his chin down in the classic ‘puppy dog’ look of pleading.

“Okay,” exclaimed the graying former professor. “What would you have me do?”

“Investigate my estates,” Harry said with a small glance at the quiet Ginny, “and give me your opinion of their condition and any staffing needs to get them back to running conditions. Find out what I have my money doing, if anything. Help me to evaluate charities that need funding. And help me to figure out if there are more companies like the Twins that could flourish with some assistance.”

Remus laughed, “It seems that you really do want an estate manager. Okay, I accept.”

“Great!”

Harry walked up to the stage shortly after convincing his father’s friend to work for him. As he walked, he marveled at the fact that a wage was not discussed. This, in Harry’s mind, left the matter to his own discretion. Of course, he could pay the man whatever Harry wanted to pay him, but he couldn’t force Remus to spend a knut.

Reaching the center of the stage and stepping into the magical spotlight, Harry cleared his throat before applying the Sonorous charm and continuing his MC duties.

“Ladies and Gentlemen,” he said, gathering everyone’s attention.

“Pothead, finally gets to be in the spotlight for real. You’re such an attention whore!” yelled a familiar voice from near the back.

Harry could see Professor McGonagall’s outline as she stood to take care of the interruption. Harry spoke again to take care of it himself.

“Please, Professor,” Harry said, specifically to the Transfiguration Professor. She heard and paused, allowing him to address the problem. “Mr. Malfoy. You’re the one who won’t allow these fine students to enjoy themselves in peace. Your own head of house forced me into this position without my asking for it, so please sit down. If you don’t behave yourself, I will have you ejected.”

“Oh, and what could the great Golden Boy do to a Slytherin Lord such as myself in the great Salazar Slytherin’s own Chamber?” as Draco said this, he casually drew his wand. Nobody ever said that he was the sharpest tool in the shed.

A rumbling was heard, but Draco ignored it, as he was intent on the Master of Ceremonies.

“You will find that this Chamber is protected now from all darkness and ill intent,” Harry said confidently. “The students in here that harbor no such thoughts are in no danger but any ill act will be dealt with swiftly!”

Harry gestured over Draco’s shoulder, causing the tall blond Slytherin and the rest of the audience to turn and stare at the stone statue of his own house mascot moving to cover his actions, ready if his ill intent becomes ill action. A single scream was heard, but didn’t interrupt the verbal war of the two rivals.

“You’ll find, Mr. Malfoy,” Harry said in a calm, cool voice, “that this Chamber is no longer the possession of Salazar Slytherin or his descendants and has not been since the end of our second year. Do not attempt anything or you will find the response less than forgiving. Now sit down or leave!”

Draco reluctantly sat, his face colored in rage. The statue silently retreated to its former position.

“Well, that was interesting,” Harry jovially said. “Now, as I was about to say, tonight’s band will, once again, be the Weird Sisters,” Harry’s declaration was met with enthusiastic applause and some whistling and cheering. Harry continued, “Dessert, for anyone wanting it is on the tables...
to my right," he gestured and several long tables faded into view heaving with sugary goodness of all varieties. “And for the Halloween traditionalists, there’s a display of traditional muggle Halloween candies at the rear of the chamber near the great doors.” Harry waved his wand, canceling another illusion covering a fountain of gumdrops and waterfall filled with candy corn instead of the customary water next to a table covered in a cornucopia of muggle sweets. Sitting in a place of pride at the center of the table was a large bowl of lemon drops.

“And now, The Weird Sisters!” Harry backed to the side of the stage out of the spotlight before retreating down the stairs to find his beautiful partner waiting for him.

He spoke in her ear, as the band had started to play.

“Ginny,” he whispered, tickling his breath against the curve of her ear, “have I told you a dozen times yet today how beautiful you are?”

Ginny tingled against his breath while she smiled at his sappiness.

“Maybe only a couple to go, my prince,” she answered

Harry took her hand bowing to kiss the back in a formal manner. “May I have this dance, my fair lady?”

Ginny curtsied and allowed herself to be led to the empty floor between all of the round tables.

Ron and Hermione were standing at the side of the dance floor, which seemed to stretch for the entire length of the Chamber, bracketed by tables full of couples on one side and a single, nearly endless table heaving with every dessert the Hogwarts House Elves could imagine, down the other.

With Ron not yet asking her to dance, Hermione was splitting her time watching the other couples dance and staring off at the stone archway that had brought them to the Chamber. Numbers and thoughts were not adding up in her mind, as she tried to figure what was bothering her with the whole transportation scenario. It simply didn’t match any of the forms of transportation she was familiar with in the magical world. She knew that she would have to find herself in the library to research if there was a transportation method that she was neglecting to think about before her thoughts would fully settle.

She was just contemplating the thought of the vertical metallic liquid surface within the arch possibly working similar to Floo Travel, when Ron grabbed her hand and squeezed; gaining her attention over the din of the dance floor and interrupting her thoughts.

“Hermione,” he said directly into her ear, “let’s go get something to eat at the dessert table before those midgets get it all.” Ron gestured to the massive table opposite that was beset with the younger years trying to get their share before they were to be excused to their common rooms for the night.

“Ron,” Hermione responded to him, the nuances of her exasperation washed away by the solid bass of the thumping music long before it reached his ear. “There’s plenty and don’t call them midgets.”
You’d think that they’d need to breathe, at least.”

“Ron,” said Hermione, “They’re happy.”

“Yeah,” said Ron, “But that doesn’t mean they don’t have to take a breath every couple of minutes. That’s just unnatural,” Ron said, gesturing to Harry and Ginny on the dance floor during a slow dance, only the slightest movement evident as they swayed slowly in a circle, their lips locked in an embrace of love.

“I’d think that you’d want to see her happy again,” Hermione sighed.

“Oh, I’m happy,” Ron assured his girlfriend. “All of us brothers’re happy to see her smile so brightly again. I’m just saying that if they don’t pause to take a breath soon, they’re going to pass out and then what are we going to do?”

Hermione giggled at the absurdity of their conversation. Harry and Ginny had been dancing, non-stop, for nearly an hour with the biggest of happy faces plastered on. Hermione could tell how genuine the emotions were as she saw their eyes nearly glowing. It was good to see her two friends so light-hearted, as they seem to have had the hardest lot in life.

“This song is almost over,” Hermione said. Ron looked at her in surprise. “What?” she asked. “Am I not allowed to know modern wizarding music? I’m in a dorm with Lavender and Parvati. They’ve had the Wizarding Wireless blaring for five years now. It’s impossible not to listen.”

Ron grinned at her, “Just admit it…there are things that entertain you other than books.”

Her eyes twinkled back at his grin. “Well, of course there are, Ronald,” she said, her hand lightly playing with his collar. Ron gulped at her actions. “And just for that comment, you will be escorting me to the dance floor for the next dance!” she stated with authority.

Ron gulped again and nodded. She easily had complete control of him whenever she wanted. He simply had no choice in the matter.

Just after he acknowledged his next assignment, the current song ended, allowing for a short pause as the live band gathered themselves for the next song.

Harry and Ginny embraced on the dance floor until the drums beat out the start of the next song. Ron and Hermione observed, with the start of the fast paced beat and deep bass guitar accompaniment, Harry and Ginny break from their embrace and look each other in the eye. With a nod from Ginny, Harry drew her hands into his, their fingers hooked together, him holding hers lightly with his thumbs at the back of her knuckles. Slowly at first, Harry and Ginny leaned back into their stretched arms before drawing them horizontally, pulling their bodies together as they stepped forward with their right foot, turning them around an imaginary center pole. They repeated this; more quickly each time as they approached the tempo of the fast paced song. Each time they’d go to the same starting point, each momentarily balancing the other as they threw their mass back, pulling on their connecting hands only to pull each other back together as they continued the pattern.

“Wow!” exclaimed Ron. “How ‘bout if we just wait for a slower song. I think that I can do slower.”

Hermione nodded, “Yeah, slower…Wow, yeah. When she described that, I didn’t picture it being so…”

“Fast?” completed Ron as the dancing couple reached full speed, several repeats of the steps per second.

Hermione nodded again.

“Crazy?” he also offered. She nodded vigorously as Ginny was launched in a move that had her sliding between Harry’s legs, only to return the way she came and be launched into the air. The moves that started this dance seemed forgotten as Ginny spun and dipped, amongst other less than sane maneuvers.

“You know,” said Ron, “Harry didn’t describe this to me at all.”

They only realized that Harry and Ginny were being watched by half of the school when they heard a collective gasp during a move that had Ginny swing behind Harry’s back with her knees bent around Harry’s forearm before he caught her on the other side with his other arm.

“If he drops her,” Ron stated clearly, “I’ll have to hurt him.”

Following an intermission permitting the heads of houses to escort the younger students were escorted back to their common rooms, Professor Dumbledore announced the recommencement of the Ball. He waved at the band for a little patience as he made one more announcement.

“As some of you know,” Dumbledore said, “during Balls at Hogwarts, it is customary to install a rose garden for students to spend some time
walking through in order for them to catch their breath and relax between activities. Unfortunately that option is not available from this location beneath the school. As such, our hosts, Mr. Potter and Miss Weasley, have cleaned up and decorated the network of caves branching out from the traditional entrance to this chamber. You may, at your leisure, choose to explore these areas for your own enjoyment. There are benches along the sides if you get tired while walking,” the headmaster said with a twinkle in his eyes revealing the smirk hidden beneath his beard. “A word of safety, if you please, the caves have been warded to ensure student’s safety but caution is always recommended.”

Harry, standing at the ‘traditional entrance’, otherwise known as the great serpent door, quietly hissed to the snakes engraved in the great surface. Methodically, one by one, each lock bolt was disengaged before the great door swung into the Chamber; revealing a softly glowing cave to the Ooh’s and Aah’s of the gathered students. Harry smiled and took Ginny’s arm, leading her to the candy corn waterfall for a handful of the treat.

Later that evening, at Ginny’s suggestion, Harry was dancing with one of his best friends. Harry and Hermione enjoyed a slow waltz near the middle of the dance floor with friendly banter.

"Harry,” Hermione said, “You and Ginny have really done a good job.”

“Thank you,” Harry replied with a smile.

“The caves were magnificent,” she continued. “How did you come up with the idea?”

Harry blushed at the praise but produced an answer nonetheless. “Well, Ginny did the design work, the color and placement of the crystal, where to place the ones in the path,” Harry said, lapsing into an artist’s enthusiastic babble, showing pride in his girlfriend and a bit in himself. “She had the idea to give everyone a place to walk around and have some privacy. She told me where to widen the tunnel and frame it with stalactites and stalagmites and she described the patterns that she wanted to see at each place. Have you looked at them?” Harry asked, forgetting that she had praised them in the first place.

“Well,” she said, “Yes we have.”

“Oh, really?” Harry said, raising an eyebrow. “And I assume that Ron was a perfect gentleman.”

Hermione blushed, “Yes, well, of course.”

“Yeah,” said Harry, “I knew that he would have had to be.”

Hermione thought about his statement as he spun her out and back. “You and Ginny really were serious about your dance lessons, weren’t you?” she asked with appreciation.

“Of course,” Harry said simply, not giving any extra.

“When you said earlier that Ron would have to had been a perfect gentleman, did you place the wards in the caves or something?” Hermione asked.

“Yeah, the wards are linked to me,” said Harry, “But what I meant is that Mr. and Mrs. Weasley taught all of their sons to treat ladies properly.”

“But, where did you learn the wards and what do they do?” Hermione asked with her normal studious curiosity. “And in case you haven’t noticed, I do know that you have been giving Ron hints about how to be romantic to me.”

Harry smirked, “What I meant about treating a lady properly is to keep her safe and happy as a priority. I don’t think that he quite received any romantic lessons from Mrs. Weasley, but I think he would take any hints on the subject that you’re willing to offer,” Harry said with expressive eyebrows causing Hermione to blush.

As the song ended, Harry felt a niggling at the back of his mind. It only took him a moment to realize what was up. He released his grip on his friend before turning to Ginny and seeing a look on her face proclaiming that she felt it as well.

Harry ran across the dance floor to her, turning so that their running paths were side by side.

“Harry,” she said loud enough to reach his ears at a run, “Go get a professor and I’ll sort out what’s happening in the caves.”

Harry gave a brief, “Okay,” before pealing off just before the great door to the caves.

Turning back, it didn’t take him long to locate Professor McGonagall, freshly back from her sojourn returning the youngsters to the Gryffindor Tower.

“What is it, Mr. Potter?” she asked, concerned.

“Harry,” she said, “The wards in the caves, Professor,” Harry took one breath and ran up the short stairs to the door, confident that the Professor would follow.

After sending Harry for a professor, Ginny sprinted through the caves, past couples that were all startled to see a woman with her wand up running through the dim caves. There were many caves under Hogwarts Castle, many connected to the Chamber of Secrets in a network looking similar to cracked ice; branches and intersections to the left and right to navigate. Through the wards interaction, Ginny never faltered; center, center, right, left; the wards drew her to a person in great distress.

Her wand out, she rounded one last corner and skidded to a halt, wand forward. What greeted her was a blond male in silken robes all over a
brunette girl, her hands balled up and beating helplessly on his back. Ginny slashed and flicked her wand like lightning.

"Petrificus Totalus , Accio Malfoy, Stupefy, Incarcerous, Cohesius !"

She stepped out of the way of the petrified body that flew toward her as it was stunned, bound in ropes and stuck to the wall opposite the bench. Perhaps she was a bit overenthusiastic, as the figure ended up bound from head to toe in rope; wrapped like a mummy.

Ginny turned to the distressed girl and found the sight of a frantic sobbing girl curled up on the bench. For a second, as she approached her cautiously, Ginny couldn't understand why she couldn't hear the crying, until she felt a membrane of magic that she passed through and suddenly she could hear the heart wrenching wails of the young woman. Ginny knelt on the ground before her and slowly brought her hand to the girl's shaking shoulder.

Harry led his Professor at a slower pace than his girlfriend had traveled, taking into account Professor McGonagall's age. Soon after they started through the caves, she'd had to remind him that she was no longer a teen. She was obviously distressed but couldn't force her legs to work any faster than she was without falling injured herself before she reached the emergency.

They rounded the same corner that Ginny had, to meet the sight of what appeared to be a ribbed chrysalis on the wall opposite one of the benched nooks. On the bench sat Harry's red haired girlfriend with a brunette curled in his lap. What they didn't find is any sound coming from the pair. They approached slowly.

Ginny looked up to find that Harry had successfully retrieved a professor, McGonagall in this case. She beckoned them forward as she knew that, until the silencing charm was lifted, they would have to be much closer to speak.

She could tell that they had passed through the charm when they both looked around for the disturbance that they felt.

"Professor," Ginny greeted, knowing that Harry wouldn't want a greeting at a time such as this.

"Miss Weasley, please explain," Professor McGonagall instructed.

"I came around the corner and saw Malfoy grappling at Mandy Brocklehurst here," Ginny replied. "She was trying to fight him off with all of her might, but he had the advantage. I disabled him," she gestured to the object on the wall, "and came over to Mandy. I noticed that he had placed a silencing charm, but I haven't had the chance to disable it."

"I see," the professor said. She waved her wand at the silent wall, dispelling it.

"Murdy," Professor McGonagall said clearly.

A moment later there was a snap and a proud house elf stood facing the Professor.

"What can Murdy do for the Professor?" the House Elf asked.

"Please bring Professor Dumbledore here. Will you be able to navigate his way here?" Professor McGonagall asked.

"No need," Harry said. He waved his wand and jabbed the tip at the wall, incanting, "Lumonous Crystalous !"

Just then, a branch of glowing crystal flared to truly fluorescent brightness, spreading up the wall to the center of the arched cave and then down the way they had came, lighting the tunnel to normal indoor levels.

"Just tell him to follow the ceiling crystals to us," Harry told the elf. "He'll find us in no time."

With another snap, the Chief House Elf was away.

Professor Dumbledore arrived in little time and assessed the situation with great efficiency.

"Miss Weasley," said Professor Dumbledore, "I am sorry to have to ask you to forgo the remainder of your evening, but would you please escort Miss Brocklehurst to the hospital wing?"

"Of course, Professor," Ginny said.

"Miss Brocklehurst, are you able to walk on your own, or would you prefer to be carried?" he asked in a soothing tone.

She lifted her tear-stained face to look at the Professor with blood shot eyes. She nodded before she uncoiled from Ginny's lap; however, she didn't release her hold on the redhead. Ginny rose to her feet with Mandy and transferred her arm to the girl's shoulder so they were facing the same direction.

"Please, Professor," Mandy said through her tears, "I don't want all of the other students to see me like this." She motioned to her dress robe's missing buttons and disheveled looks. Dumbledore looked at her tear-stained face and messed up hair and took sympathy on her.

"I shall go ahead and get the students' attention away from the arch," the Headmaster said, "and ask Mr. Potter to make sure that you get to the hospital wing with minimal fuss."
She nodded.

"Professor McGonagall, would you please unstick Mr. Malfoy and transport him to my office for disposition," the aged Headmaster requested with a steely voice. At times such as these, his age especially showed, particularly in his now dull eyes.

Harry led Ginny and Mandy to the crest in the Chamber as the students looked up to the Headmaster addressing them from the stage at the far end. The path back to the crest had been, thankfully, empty of students. He assumed that the traffic and bright lighting in those particular caves ruined the mood of the mutually amorous students.

Their arrival heralded by the tinkle of a small bell, they were suddenly in the Hogwarts hospital wing; gaining the attention of the matron. She came out of her office rapidly, hearing the old-fashioned bell over her office door ring, announcing the crest-born entrance. She came out to find three young adults standing on the crest depicting a mage’s staff with a snake obscuring the shaft as it was wound up it. The staff was supported by a lion’s shoulder, against the white background, its tip at the feet of a badger, with a raven perched on the staff’s ruby head, its wings outstretched.

One of the youngsters before her was in need of attention, as she seemed quite distressed, crying on Ginny Weasley’s shoulder. Mr. Potter, Harry as he had asked her to call him, stood with his hand lending emotional support.

"What happened here?" asked Madame Pomfrey.

"She was the victim of an attempted assault," Harry answered.

Madame Pomfrey gave him an assessing look before guiding the distraught girl to an empty bed near her office, far away from the doors.

"Mr. Potter," she asked with kindness in her voice, "Would you pull that screen into place and then excuse yourself as I examine Miss Brocklehurst."

Harry nodded, immediately moving to her command.

"Harry," came Ginny’s voice from behind the screen, "I'm going to stay here with Mandy."

"Sure, Ginny," Harry said, compassionately. "That would be best."

"Would you go back to the Chamber, just in case there are any more emergencies?" she pleaded with her voice.

"Of course," he agreed, "Don't worry, if you feel the ward again, I'll be taking care of it."

Harry stepped to the crest. "See you later, Gin. Rest well, Mandy."
Harry Potter and the Cracked Reservoir
Chapter 30: After Parties

Thank you to my Betas Donalddeutsch, Cateagle and Sparky40sw.

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Per a marriage contract between the head of the Malfoy family, Lucius Malfoy, and the head of the Parkinson family, Samuel Parkinson, Draco Malfoy was to marry Pansy Parkinson one year after their completion of NEWT testing. Draco Malfoy, the aforementioned groom-to-be and king of the Slytherin House at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, swam slowly to consciousness through a dark fog. The last he could recall, he was having a good time at the Halloween Ball. He had attended with his bride to be, but he wouldn’t let that stop him from having fun. He had found a bit of fluff that he could enjoy and managed to convince her to ‘take a walk’ with him. It really was useful to be seen by most of the girls in the school as the handsome ‘bad boy’, the type that seemed to attract all of the innocent ones. He liked the innocent ones. They were very good for certain things, even if they didn’t know it yet.

However, that was the last thing that he could remember. The next thing he knew he could hardly move a muscle. He opened his eye to find nothing. He fought his confinement only to have his prison contract around his shoulders, stomach and legs. His only reward; a serious leg cramp.

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An hour after Ginny departed, Harry had suffered through as much of the Ball as he could, being there without his date. He had danced with whomever was asking, and was the worse off for it. His feet and calves ached from never leaving the dance floor. While Ginny was in attendance, no other girl would approach and try to ask him to dance. With Ginny in the hospital wing seeing to an emotionally damaged young woman, Harry had no shortage of perspective dance partners.

His proverbial dance card had been overflowing from the moment he returned.

Harry walked stiffly to the crest at the foot of the Chamber and, unlike the rest of the people to use the ‘arch’ to return to the entrance hall, he disappeared as soon as both feet touched the colored stone.

"Did you see that?" asked Hermione.

"See what, dear?" answered Ron.

Hermione was staring at the point that Harry had last been.

"Harry was over there and just disappeared," she told him.

"’Mione," Ron said, "that’s how we go back up. Didn’t you see the firsties go back that way?" Ron asked.

"Yes, Ron," she said, getting frustrated. "But he disappeared at least a meter before the arch. He was just on the edge of the school crest."

Ron looked doubtful. "Are you sure, ’Mione?" he asked. "Come on," he said, distracted, "let’s get some more dessert."

Hermione sighed in frustration.

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Harry appeared in the hospital wing directly over the edge of the crest. He turned around to see two beautiful women looking directly at him. He gave a sheepish grin.

"Um, hi," he said, shyly.

"Hey, Harry," Ginny said. "Is it over already?"

Harry smiled in earnest, "Nah, I just figured that any more and I would have to spend a week in here."

Mandy smiled but Ginny looked on in curiosity. Harry smiled to himself, It seems that Mandy knows better than Ginny what could have happened. "Without you there, the other young ladies have much more courage. You’d think that they were all Gryffindors. I was handed from pubescent teen female to pubescent teen female for the past hour and never left the center of the dance floor," Harry chuckled. "I figured I had fulfilled my duties of a host and took my leave with my head held high and my tail between my legs."

Mandy giggled.

"Ah, what’s wrong?" Ginny teased, "Are the ickle wittle girlies too scary for the mighty Hero Harry James Potter, Battler of Dragons, Champion of Hogwarts, Slayer of Basilisks and Rescuer of Damsels in Distress?"

Harry and Mandy both laughed.
It’s the damsels with looks other than distress in their eyes that worry me,” Harry answered.

The two girls laughed.

“Hey, without you there, they all thought that this was their opportunity. I’m just glad that convention doesn’t require that I kiss each of the girls that I danced with. I had to practically sprint to safety.”

Ginny was still laughing, “Oh, poor me, with the most popular boy in school as my very own boyfriend.”

“Yeah, but if it had been you there alone,” Harry said, “all the boys would have been beating a path straight to you instead.”

“Right, sure,” she scoffed.

Harry, in an effort to change the subject, said, “So, Mandy, how are you doing?”

“I, um,” she said, haltingly, “Okay, I guess.”

“My godfather died trying to protect me,” Harry said, his voice full of emotion. “He was the last father figure that I knew. I only knew him for about two years and now he’s gone and it was partially my fault.”

“Harry,” Ginny said, “It wasn’t your fault.”

“See,” Harry said, with a half grin and his thumb pointing sideways at his girlfriend, “See what I mean? Every time I talk about it, someone has to say it wasn’t my fault.”

Mandy giggled at the couple as Ginny scowled in his general direction.

“See Ginny,” Harry said, “I can talk about Sirius and own up to the fact that I had some blame in it without getting depressed. It’s okay.”

“Harry,” Mandy said in a serious tone, “it wasn’t your fault.”

After she said this, both she and Harry broke out in gales of laughter as she joined the long list of people to say the cliché line. Ginny scowled for just seconds before she broke down into laughter s well.

“What is going to happen with all of this?” Mandy Brocklehurst asked.

“Well,” Harry said, “Malfoy will certainly be punished in school, but you have a choice to bring him up on assault charges with the Ministry or not.”

“Really?” she asked. “What should I do?”

Ginny and Harry smiled at the girl. “It’s up to you,” Ginny said. “It won’t be easy either way but you have to decide for yourself and what’s best for you.”

Mandy took a deep breath. This wasn’t an easy decision. In her heart she just wanted to be safe and not have to worry about some slimy Slytherin at school. What made the decision worse, is that she went with him willingly into the caves and this made her think that it was really her fault.

“I always liked him, you know,” she said quietly. “You wouldn’t know it, being in Gryffindor, with your open rivalry with Slytherin, but a lot of girls find him attractive with his blond hair and bad boy image. He just made my heart race when he paid me any attention. Then he asked me to go for a walk and I just couldn’t say no. He looked so handsome and …I just wanted the fantasy.” She took a deep breath. “He just wouldn’t listen when I told him no. His hands were everywhere and he had me pinned down and I couldn’t fight him off. I was hitting him but it had no effect. I screamed and sobbed… I was terrified. What could I do? I thought that he was going to get his way and I just didn’t want it to be that way…my first time.” She let out a sob prompting a caring Ginny to sit beside her and hold her in her arms. “It was my fault; I chose to walk with him, I didn’t fight hard enough. I let him win.”

Harry sat, stunned, through the outpouring of emotion. At the end he was outraged at how the ferret made this young woman feel.

“Mandy,” Harry said, his soft voice carrying force, “This wasn’t your fault. Nothing you did invited assault. If he didn’t have your permission for something that he did, then he is the one at fault. He has no right to take permission for the smallest of friendly acts to give him free rein against your wishes. It’s a shame that he would take advantage of your attraction to him.”

“I just want to feel safe at school,” she admitted.

Harry smiled; finally something that he could help in some small way with.

Harry stood. “I think that I can help there. Will you two be all right while I get something? I’ll be back in ten minutes.”

Mandy nodded and Ginny smiled, her pride in her boyfriend showing through.
Harry exited the hospital wing through the main doors, forgetting about the crests.

Harry hurried to the Gryffindor tower and through the portrait, ignoring the party in progress filling the common room.

He opened his trunk to find a shrunken case on the right side at the bottom. He placed it on the floor and gave his wand a hardy wave, causing the case to expand to its original size. Filling the case were numerous felt boxes, hundreds in fact. He grabbed a navy blue one and opened it to check that the right piece was in it before returning the reshrunk case to his trunk and rushing from the room.

On his way back through the common room, he quickly waved an acknowledgement to a couple of the younger years’ DA members without breaking stride. He couldn’t spare any time for real pleasantries. However, he did detour to the kitchen for some universal medicine for when your only ailments are disappointment, anger and heartache. Dobby and friends were as efficient as ever. The bowl of fruit painting had hardly swung shut before swinging wide again.

Bloody hell this floor is getting cold. When will someone come? How did I get here? Who the bloody hell tied me up like this? I’ll ruin them.

“Ginny, what should I do?” Mandy asked.

“That’s up to you,” Ginny replied. “If you don’t feel strongly one way or the other, just wait to discuss it with Professor Dumbledore. He’ll come along after the dance.”

“The H-Headmaster?” Mandy asked with a quivering voice. “Coming here? How can you be so casual about it?”

“Well,” Ginny answered contemplatively, “I’ve seen him loads of times and talked to him a lot. I guess that you start to realize that he’s just another wizard with a somewhat insane demeanor.”

“I don’t know if I could ever come off with such an easy attitude,” Mandy said earnestly.

“Comes with being around Harry. You get used to talking to the Headmaster and start to see him as human. You get used to having the school look to you for advice and government officials either wanting to be on his good side to raise themselves up or to beat him down to stand on his shoulders. Comes with the territory,” Ginny finished with a smile.

“You’re not talking about Fudge again, are you?” Harry’s voice came from the main doors. “I thought that we agreed to not talk about him, as that talk makes me want to just call Rita and get him ousted.”

“See,” said Mandy, bolder now with her familiarity with the young couple, “that’s what I’m talking about. It seems common place that you could cause a change in our government and it doesn’t bother you?”

“Sure it does, but who knows if it would even work or if I’d just prove my critics right,” Harry said, “but even with the strangeness, you still get used to just about anything, eventually. Still doesn’t mean that I have to like it.”

“Okay…” she drawled, unconvinced.

“Enough of that,” Harry said. “I brought two things to make this feel better. This,” Harry said, producing the deep blue velvet necklace box, “is to protect you in school and out.” He snapped the box open and presented it to her. “Wear it, and if you are in trouble, clutch it. If you are on one of the school crests, it’ll move you to the hospital wing. If you are already here, it’ll move you to the Headmaster’s office. If you are not near a school crest say ‘help’ and others will be alerted. If you are away from Hogwarts and can’t wait for help, yank the pendant off and the chain is a portkey that will send you, and whomever is touching it, to the entrance hall. Keep a hold of the pendant; it can still move you from the main crest to the hospital wing.”

“Wow!” Mandy said. She slowly took the beautiful box into her hand and removed the necklace. The chain was fine and long enough to hang down onto her chest but not within her ball gown’s concealment. The pendant had a gold outline and carved mosaic of brightly colored stone to create the perfect image of the Ravenclaw mascot.

“It’s simply beautiful,” she said, awestruck. “Thank you.”

Ginny smiled at him, silently thanking him for making her fast friend feel better.

Harry returned her smile, as Mandy was still quite busy staring at the necklace.

“And second, the universal medicine for a woman’s battered heart, or so I hear.” Harry brought his hands straight out in front, his right hand laden with a carton of ice-cream and his left holding two spoons. “Double chocolate fudge flavor with little marshmallows and peanut butter swirls.”

Ginny took the offered treat with a hungry, appreciative look.

“Why only two spoons?” Mandy asked. “What about you?”
As I understand it," Harry said, "This particular medicine only works if no members of the opposite sex are present to hamper the 'girl talk'. I still think that that's a euphemism for male bashing, but...hey.

Harry gave a peck to Ginny's cheek before turning on his heal and striding out. He promptly disappeared when he touched the center of the hospital crest.

"Hey, wait, he just disappeared," Mandy said with an epiphany. "Does that mean that the crests are more than just decoration and Harry knows how to control them?"

Ginny just smiled. No secret would come from her lips.

"Ginny," Mandy said, eyeing the young woman's smile, the Gryffindor as good as admitting it. "Don't ever lose him or at least half of my house will snatch him up in a hot second if news of his intelligence becomes known."

Ginny continued to smile. "That's why you won't be a party to them finding out."

"Of course not," Mandy said with a smile and a wink.

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Professors Dumbledore, McGonagall, Flitwick and Snape walked into the hospital wing shortly after midnight. They had just seen to the bulk of the students still attending the ball and now knew them to be back in the safety of their common rooms. To their knowledge, the only students left out were prefects patrolling for stragglers and the two young ladies in the hospital wing.

"Thank you for staying up to speak with us," Professor Dumbledore said.

"That's okay, Professor," she said, happily. "I think, after the medicine Harry brought," she motioned to the ice-cream carton, "I'm operating on a sugar high."

"You seem none the worse for wear," Professor Flitwick said in his calm high voice.

"All due to Ginny, here, and Harry cheering me up and getting me things to improve my mood and sense of safety," she said.

Professor Dumbledore smiled, "That's wonderful. What did Harry give you that could improve your sense of safety after a dreadful night such as this?"

"Certain things," she said, glancing down at her necklace, "that have ensured that help is never more than minutes away and a quick escape is always available," she smiled. "Oh, and a tub of ice-cream."

Professor Dumbledore noticed the necklace that she was hinting toward and felt the magic embedded in the object. He immediately knew, from his discussions with his favorite pupil, what this object would or could do.

"Professor," Minerva McGonagall started in her sternest voice, "How many times have I insisted that you not teach students to speak in riddles such as you do?" she asked in a scolding manner, sensing that the trauma the girl had suffered was but an unpleasant memory, needing humor for treatment.

"My apologies, Professor!" he bowed with the illegal eye twinkle in place.

The Headmaster transitioned his face from the jovial professor to the serious administrator in order to complete his duties of the evening.

"Miss Brocklehurst, I must ask you to recount the events of the evening from your own recollection, if you please," he requested with regret. "Would you prefer Miss Weasley to leave the room?"

"No," she said politely, "Please let her stay. She's a friend."

"Very well. Please proceed if you can."

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Ow Ow cramp, owl

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The Professors left the Hospital wing after a short retelling of the events. Mandy Brocklehurst had recounted the events with a detached air; the words seemed to be a part of an unpleasant part of life, no longer relevant to her. After the telling, they offered, vigorously, to contact Magical Law Enforcement for her to give a deposition and level charges on her attacker, but she convinced them that she wanted the punishment to be in house, as it were. She came to this conclusion after seeing the vehemence with which Professor Snape recounted the minimum punishment that would be given to the wayward Slytherin. This seemed to satisfy her sense of justice, to see the results first hand instead of in writing.

The Professors walked away as satisfied as they could, in a case such as this.

"Oh, my," Professor Dumbledore said, "Is it that late already? Has it really been more than two hours since the incident?"
“Yes it has, Professor,” said the scowling Professor Snape. “Worried about you beauty sleep at your age?”

“No, Severus,” Dumbledore said, “I’m just concerned for the condition of my office with Mr. Malfoy locked in there for the last two hours.”

“I don’t think,” said Professor McGonagall with a distinctly vengeful smile, “that he is in any position to do any harm to your office, Albus.”

“Oh dear,” Dumbledore said, seriously, “please tell me that you remembered to untie Mr. Malfoy and return his mobility when you left him in my office.”

“You instructed me to place him in your office and that is what I did,” she said. “You didn’t mention anything about releasing him. The wait will do him good,” she proclaimed, self-assured.

Throughout this, Professor Snape said nothing to the contrary or in protest.

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Where is everyone? My back hurts and this damned cramp won’t go away. Whatever I did, I won’t do it again if they’d just release me.
Chapter 31: Consequences

Thank you to my Betas Donalddeutsch, Cateagle and Sparky40sw.

Professor Snape was not having the best night. He had kept his word with the brat Potter. He had not given the discipline the children and n’er-do-wells so desperately needed, as he had not managed to catch any actually in the act of breaking a written school rule. It would come to a surprise of many that he actually knew the written rules of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry from cover to cover without fail, it was just his opinion that the children of the school needed someone such as him to keep them honest. Yet, he had gone through an entire school function without making one deviation from the hallowed book that stood on a pedestal in the library for all to see.

Here it was, after one in the morning, and he was striding down the hall with Professors Dumbledore and McGonagall. None of them were performing their normal professorial duties at the time. They were, instead, walking swiftly to the Headmaster’s Office, which contained a student who was caught in very errant ways, to perform their grim duty. Dumbledore was fulfilling his role as the Headmaster of the school, McGonagall was doing her duty as the Deputy Headmistress, and Snape was, himself, acting as the Head of Slytherin House. The Slytherin house was supposed to contain the most cunning and ambitious of the students. The plan enacted by the Founders was to sort the school by personality characteristics, and it had worked for more than a thousand years, but that was until it came against this one student.

Draco Malfoy was, certainly, not of the brave-to-a-fault stuff that Gryffindor would require. Nor was he particularly intelligent and studious, as Ravenclaw membership would have required. He could never in a million years be described as loyal and hardworking, and so Hufflepuff life was definitely out. That had, of course, left only Slytherin. The boy’s mind was so simple and his father’s dark influence was so strong that the sorting hat must have been able to tell from a meter away, as it took no time, barely a touch, to sort him as the responsibility of the unhappy Slytherin head. Unfortunately, even before his sorting, he had typified the public stereotype of the typical Slytherin student without any of the redeeming features that Salazar would have cherished; the intelligence, the subtlety, or the cunning.

And so the Potions Professor was in a worse mood than he had been all year, as he walked up to the ridiculous stone gargoyle that guarded the entrance to the Headmaster’s office of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. Would this day get no better before he slept or would it all be just written off in a flurry of infuriating, happy giggling children and disappointing, stupid wannabe Slytherin princes?

Draco Malfoy’s consciousness swam back from the nap that he had managed to slip into in his supine position on the floor. He immediately noticed that he was no longer tied and bound.

“Hello, Mr. Malfoy,” said a less than friendly, authoritative voice from behind him.

Draco rolled over and propped himself up on his elbows. After seeing the three professors in front of him, he scrambled to his feet and straightened his dress robes as best he could without being obvious.

“Mr. Malfoy,” Professor McGonagall said sternly, “take a seat and we will proceed.” She indicated a lone seat on the visitor’s side of the massive headmaster’s desk.

Draco turned, imperiously, trying to regain his haughty pureblood stature. He would not be treated any different than the pureblood heir that he was. He stood in front of the indicated seat with a straight back and authoritative posture that he had seen his own father take in situations that called for power to be waved in the face of lessers, such as the Minister or the Board of Governors. He decided to start off strong so that he was in control of the conversation.

“Who had the audacity to tie me, a Malfoy, up and why was I left on the floor of the Headmaster’s office for who knows how long?” he asked with his chin in the air. He didn’t raise his voice, because even he was not that stupid, but he tried to put every ounce of position that he could into it.

“Mr. Malfoy,” said Professor Snape with biting authority, “sit down and shut up!”

Draco opened his mouth as if to protest, but in truth was too shocked at his Head of House’s harsh behavior toward his favorite student. He rapidly sat, holding back his protests.

“In answer to your question,” started Professor McGonagall, “Miss Weasley was the one to restrain you and I was the one to place you in the Headmaster’s office at his request.”

Draco flushed in anger. “Why that interfering…how dare she!?!?” he exploded.

“SILENCE!” roared Professor Snape.

Professor Dumbledore decided to weigh in before things truly got out of control.

“Quite so, Mr. Malfoy. This is not a time for you to be talking. Just listen,” Professor Dumbledore said. “It was quite fortuitous that young Miss Weasley stopped you when she did. At the moment you are to be punished for the assault on Miss Brocklehurst, which can be handled within the confines of Hogwarts. Had the events proceeded any further, you would be in a detention cell awaiting arraignment on charges of rape, for which you could receive as much as five years in Azkaban.”
Draco bristled, “I did no such thing. That bitch is a liar!”

“Now, Mr. Malfoy,” said Professor Dumbledore in a patronizing voice, “Do you really wish for me to call an auror in with a forensic pensieve to obtain legal statements from Miss Weasley and Miss Brocklehurst in addition to Mr. Ford and Miss Blueshot who would offer testimony of seeing you enter the caves with the young lady. Add that to the silencing spell and the interesting weakening spell that you cast on the unsuspecting young lady and the evidence creates quite an interesting picture of attempted rape. This is a serious crime Mr. Malfoy. You would do well to treat it as such.”

Draco shifted in his chair uncomfortably. He glanced at his Head of House to see if he could garner an ally from the Potions Professor. The look of utter disgust and disdain in Professor Snape’s eyes rocked the young Slytherin back in his chair. Draco had always been the teacher’s favorite. He had allowed Draco to get away with numerous violations without punishment before. He had had great fun sabotaging Gryffindor potions with tacit approval from the Professor, particularly if it was Harry Potter’s potions set to be ruined. But now there was only a cold look in his eyes, previously unfamiliar to Draco. No help was to be found from Professor Snape.

Draco dropped his head at the change in his relationship with Professor Snape. One glance at the other teachers in the room showed him no quarter. He was defeated. Even as he realized this defeat, the anger welled up inside of him. How dare Snape, servant of the Dark Lord, go against the son of one of the Dark Lord’s inner circle?

He would pay. But first, Draco had to do some acting to get out of this room, and the only way to affect that would be to appear to accept his punishment with grace. Later he could report Snape’s behavior to their Lord.

“What…what is my punishment to be?” he asked, affecting a broken voice.

Professor Dumbledore breathed out a sign of exasperation. “You will be restricted to the Slytherin common room and your own dorm for the remainder of the week and weekend, until…”

“What?” Draco interrupted, his ire bubbling to the surface. “Restricted? Isn’t that a bit much?”

“Do not interrupt the Headmaster, Mr. Malfoy,” said Professor McGonagall in a terse voice.

“As I was saying, Mr. Malfoy,” Professor Dumbledore continued, “this will only be until Sunday, at which time we will decide what your full punishment will be. The restriction is to give the interested parties a chance to calm down and for your presence to not upset your victim.”

Draco was fuming. He was being treated like a common peasant! “I will lodge a protest,” he said.

“Feel free,” Professor Dumbledore said. “Now it is getting late and you should get your rest. Professor Snape, would you please escort Mr. Malfoy back to his dorm?”

Severus gave a curt nod before guiding the misfit from the room.

“Do you imagine yourself to be the next dark lord?” asked Professor Snape after he steered his student into an unused classroom on the way back to the Slytherin common room. “Do you imagine that this is how my Lord acted when he was a student here? Do you imagine that he held as little cunning and intelligence as you have exhibited in your school career? Tell me, what is it that you were thinking?”

Draco was incensed. “I,” he gave particular emphasis to himself, “am just what our dark lord wants in his followers. What would he care what I did to little mudblood tramps?”

“You know nothing about what the Dark Lord requires,” Snape said. “He requires servants that can follow orders and dish out what chaos he deems suitable when he deems it. He wants followers that can do as he wishes without raising the suspicions of every lightsider on the continent. You are next to useless to him. You are nothing compared to what he was when he was but a student here. He was charming, cunning and intelligent. You, however, seem to lack the ability to use your brain and pick the best time and actions to further any type of goals.” The Professor took a breath. “He was able to learn and grow more powerful without the professors becoming the wiser. He made all of the preparations to leave school and become great, learning magic that none have known for many years. You, on the other hand, seem to be little more than a punk. You would hardly qualify as more than a brute, certainly not one of his inner circle.”

“That’s what you know. I’m the prince of Slytherin and will be at his right hand after I leave school,” Draco said.

“You silly, stupid boy. You know nothing!” Snape shouted. “A proper Slytherin would be cunning and respected. He would have the rest of the school eating out of his hands not looking sideways at him with caution. You have all of the darkness and lack of moral fiber that oozes from the Slytherin stereotype without the cunning and intelligence necessary to make yourself a great Slytherin. A great Slytherin would conceal his true bent until it served him best to reveal himself. You, however, have never once concealed your true nature, as a Slytherin should. You are an open book for all to read. You seem to be only capable of dragging the Noble House of Slytherin down. You are hardly worthy of gaining entrance to the dungeons, much less being hailed as the Slytherin Prince by anyone but yourself and our detractors.”

“I will tell him what you have done and not done tonight,” Draco claimed, “and then I will have my revenge on you and the rest of those muggle lovers. He will punish you for not protecting one of his followers. You wait and see.”

“I will, if you are so confident,” offered Professor Snape with an evil sneer, “go to him right now and report the occurrences of tonight and let him judge who was in the right. He will find that you are next to useless to him in the school now. You will not have the freedom of movement necessary to operate in his interest and you will be watched for any wrongdoing. What you did tonight was thoughtless and brainless. After this, you are only interesting parties a chance to calm down and for your presence to not upset your victim.”
good for killing and raping muggles, never anything that would require subterfuge or cunning."

"If not for that meddling Muggle Loving Weasel I would not have had any trouble tonight," Draco said. "I'll have my revenge on her and will come out on top."

"You are more stupid than I thought. Potter will protect her and if you harm her, you are forfeit. You touch a hair on her head," declared the Professor, "and Potter will have us scraping you from the walls," he assured. "If you do anything toward her, the best thing that could happen to you is expulsion. Mark my words…do not mess with her. The Dark Lord will make any plans that are to be made to deal with her. Once he knows of your ineptness, he'll deal with you."

Professor Snape ended the lecture without waiting for an acknowledgement of his warnings and steered Malfoy roughly by the back of his neck to the entrance to the common room before roughly tossing him in on his face.

"I don't see him," Ginny said. She sat at the Gryffindor table in the Great Hall during lunchtime the day after the ball. By unanimous independent determination, all students fourth year and above, had skipped breakfast, leaving a sparse gathering at breakfast indeed, with just the younger years. However, for lunch, hunger had brought the older students to bear.

"Who?" Neville asked.

"Malfoy," she spat.

"Oh, we were wondering what happened with him," Neville said, motioning to Luna at his side to explain the 'we'.

She got a curious look on her face. "Why? What did you hear?"

Luna smiled in her aloof manor. Neville replied, "We still don't know what he did, but he’s locked up in the Slytherin common room for the rest of the week and that’s not even his real punishment. Apparently the punishment is still up for debate. The professors gave themselves time to calm down and before assigning his punishment."

"Oh," Ginny said, "I guess that it’s a good start for a punishment if this is just for a warm-up."

Neville perked up. He leaned forward, closer to Ginny, whispering, "What'd he do?"

"Assault," she answered, matter-of-factly. "Must not have listened to Professor Dumbledore when he said that the caves were warded to protect the students." She smiled, recalling her treatment of him. "Serves him right."

"Mandy has always had a crush on him," Luna said with her standard dreamy expression. To the outside observer, it would seem a completely disconnected statement, but Ginny's eyes snapped to the young Ravenclaw.

She felt more than heard Harry slip next to her. "Hey, Gin," he whispered seductively into her ear, "Ya wanna get some animal practice in today?"

The tickle of his breath on her ear drove her to distraction and caused a momentary misinterpretation of his question. She felt her body thrum at the thought but immediately blushed when she reran his question and realized what he wanted. Oh, the disappointment. Keep going slow girl. Patience.

With a mixture of disappointment and pleasure, Ginny and Harry settled down with colored inkwells and wide rolls of parchment to work on their next task on the road to becoming an animagus. Not exactly the best sort of ‘Animal Practice’ that she could think of, but it would be a nice project to finish. They were to draw, from memory, their animal forms, accurately and precisely. Any shortcuts or inaccuracies in the perspective animals would render the change a failure.

The interesting thing about an animagus transformation was that it’s easier to learn if one had an artistic leaning. Treating the form as an art subject, to be studied from all angles and drawn meticulously, cut down on the learning portion of the transformation, easily the most time consuming phase. Professor McGonagall had said that sculpting would also work, but drawing seemed easier to the couple. Dozens of drawings would be necessary to build a three dimensional model of an animal in the back recesses of their minds, the hair/feathers, the skin, the fatty layers, the muscle and sinew, the heart, liver, lungs, stomach, intestines, throat, eyes, brains and bone, not to mention all of the other minor and major building blocks of a body. Drawings of both the inside and outside of the animal were necessary. It was all a lot of work, which they were happy to do, as the end was on the horizon.

Ginny lost track of her own efforts as she turned her gaze on Harry, his brow furrowed in concentration and a sparkle in his eye.

"Hmm," Ginny purred, "I love watching you work on this project. You seem to enjoy the art aspect of it."

"Yeah, I like the art stuff," he said, "but the thought of being able to transform into something new is what drives me. At this rate we should be done in another month." He shot her a brilliant smile.

That smile warmed her; heart and soul. She could live a happy life staring into those smiling emerald eyes.

She looked over at his stack of drawings. Once drawn, they had nearly outlived their usefulness. The important part was the act of drawing in the first place.

"Harry?" she inquired. "What are you going to do with your drawings when you're done?"

"Harry?" she inquired. "What are you going to do with your drawings when you're done?"
He entered the dungeon potions laboratory where he needed to attend to a few potions that had simmered over night, hopefully thickening to the potions book that he had been given by his container of basilisk powder, often to the effect of having several tables full of softly simmering cauldrons turning out the contents of the ancient separate from the unclean, pockmarked classroom the students of the school used. In the four full days since the ball he had nearly emptied the dried up thoroughly with his ‘Slytherin Prince’ locked up. To his surprise, he had even found time to sometimes reverting to some of the more obscure written Professor Snape’s week had improved greatly after the day of the ball. He had managed to follow the letter of his agreement with Potter, Harry’s eyes grew big. “Mrs. Malfoy agreed?” he asked in surprise. “I would have loved to be a fly on the wall for that.” Headmaster said with satisfaction. “His mother, as he is underage, has agreed to this punishment.” Slytherin common room. He may be escorted to the library twice a week but otherwise he is to be decided that, for the remainder of the first term, “Ah, yes,” Dumbledore said, “After discussing the matter with Professors Snape and McGonagall, and conferring with Miss Brocklehurst, we have "Very good progress, Harry," Harry said, not wanting to give up his independence. Dumbledore smiled through his beard. “Good, Harry. I believe that you are learning more spells now than you would be if your lessons were more structured. At this point in your training, it would be best to learn all of the spells that you are able. In a duel, a large repertoire of spells can keep your opponent on their toes and afford you more time to gain the advantage.” “Thank you,” Harry said. “I’d appreciate any suggestions of spells that you may think that I haven’t found yet.” The Headmaster stroked his long beard in contemplation. “I may have just the book that you need.” He flicked his wand and a small book floated from the shelves to the right of the fireplace. “This book, Harry,” Dumbledore said, “contains a great many spells, displaying their incantation and their wand movements only.” Dumbledore smiled. “You will find this book different from your standard book of spells. These are combat spells, both defensive and offensive, by an author that believed in knowing a great depth of spells as well as a great breadth of variety. Each spell is grouped by effects, such as stunning spells, with the power of the spell increasing the further into the group that it is listed. Unfortunately, you will not find the tips and information on each spell that you are accustomed to, but you may find that if you need it, you can look each spell up in the library.” Dumbledore smiled again. “I sincerely doubt that you will have any trouble with the spells listed. Just do be careful.” Harry reached forward and took the offered book reverently. “Thank you, sir.” Not a problem, Harry,” Dumbledore said. “Just remember to note the spells that you attempt in your remarkable journal. Miss Granger really must think of producing these commercially. I am sure that Madame Bones would be interested in the idea for her Auror trainees.” Harry grinned. “I’ll pass on the advice to Hermione.” "Very good." "Sir," Harry said, "May I ask, what are you going to do with Malfoy?" "Ah, yes," Dumbledore said, "After discussing the matter with Professors Snape and McGonagall, and conferring with Miss Brocklehurst, we have decided that, for the remainder of the first term, young Mr. Malfoy shall be on restricted movement. He will attend classes and take his meals in the experiment in his personal access potions lab, Professor’s perusal. "Hello Harry," the Headmaster said, beginning the pleasantries that helped to cement their relationship after the strains of the past. Friendly banter ensued on the goings-on of the school. This broke to the progress reports on Voldemort and the Order before transitioning to Harry himself. “May I see your progress, Harry?” Dumbledore asked. Harry handed over the black leather journal and watched expectantly as the Professor read through his accomplishments. "Very good progress, Harry, one hundred and fifty four minutes of casting is a remarkable feat," Dumbledore said. “If, someday, you get tired of your independent study, I would be glad to bring in some tutors to assist you several times per week.” "I think that the current arrangement is working fine, sir," Harry said, not wanting to give up his independence. Dumbledore smiled through his beard. “Good, Harry. I believe that you are learning more spells now than you would be if your lessons were more structured. At this point in your training, it would be best to learn all of the spells that you are able. In a duel, a large repertoire of spells can keep your opponent on their toes and afford you more time to gain the advantage.” "Thank you," Harry said. “I’d appreciate any suggestions of spells that you may think that I haven’t found yet.” The Headmaster stroked his long beard in contemplation. “I may have just the book that you need.” He flicked his wand and a small book floated from the shelves to the right of the fireplace. “This book, Harry,” Dumbledore said, “contains a great many spells, displaying their incantation and their wand movements only.” Dumbledore smiled. “You will find this book different from your standard book of spells. These are combat spells, both defensive and offensive, by an author that believed in knowing a great depth of spells as well as a great breadth of variety. Each spell is grouped by effects, such as stunning spells, with the power of the spell increasing the further into the group that it is listed. 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To his surprise, he had even found time to experiment in his personal access potions lab, separate from the unclean, pockmarked classroom the students of the school used. In the four full days since the ball he had nearly emptied the container of basilisk powder, often to the effect of having several tables full of softly simmering cauldrons turning out the contents of the ancient potions book that he had been given by his least favorite student. He entered the dungeon potions laboratory where he needed to attend to a few potions that had simmered over night, hopefully thickening to the
correct consistency. He had already rediscovered a healing potion that would improve care for the insufferable brats that landed themselves in the hospital wing and hoped to explore the addition of the last of his powder in a wolfsbane potion, which Arithmancy dictated should improve the palatability and could have effects on the pain of transformation for werewolves. Only testing on his favorite werewolf guinea pig would give true scientific results.

He rounded his desk in the front to see a large jar, nearly half a meter in height, sitting on his stiff wooden chair. Seeing the greenish grey powder that it contained, his face nearly broke as the corner of his lip turned up into the faintest of smiles. Who would have guessed that Potter would fulfill his side of the bargain?
A couple of weeks after the mostly successful Halloween Ball, Harry sat down to breakfast at the normal time, surrounded by most of his friends. Not escaping his notice, however, was the absence of his lovely girlfriend, Ginny.

“Ron, where’s Ginny?” Harry asked.

“I d’no,” Ron mumbled around his eggs and potatoes.

“Oh, Ron, honestly. Don’t talk with your mouth full,” chided Hermione. “That’s really disgusting.”

Ron swallowed hard before replying.

“Sorry, Mione,” said Ron with a freshly empty mouth, “But he asked.”

“Yeah, Hermione, I’m sorry,” added Harry. “After all, I should have known better than to ask Ron a question without making sure, for him, that his mouth was already empty.”

Hermione tried her hardest to place a stern look on her face as she peered at her boyfriend and best friend, but soon lost it and was laughing deeply through her chest, causing Harry to lose his composure and join her.

“Hey, be quiet you two,” said Ron with a scowl.

This only had the effect of making them laugh harder and clutch their sides in pain from too much laughter. In their merriment, they failed to notice the flock of owls that were swooping through the rafters.

Nearly everyone, however, noticed when an angry red envelope was dropped in front of Harry. The din in the hall instantly dropped to a murmur.

Harry saw nothing else he could do; so he decided to be a Gryffindor and just open the thing.

“HELLO HARRY,” boomed a great voice in the hall.

“Bill,” muttered Harry.

“YES, IT IS I, YOUR SOMEDAY TO BE BROTHER-IN-LAW, BILL.”

Harry blushed to the roots of his hair.

In the pause of the howler someone female a couple of tables over yelled, “What?! Harry’s engaged?!”

“No, but give it time!” someone else yelled to peels of laughter. Harry didn’t recognize either voice.

“AS YOU MIGHT HAVE GUessed THIS IS MY OWN CONTRIBUTION TO THE GREAT WEASLEY PRANK FEST. BY NOW A CURSE HAS ALREADY BEEN CAST ON YOU THAT WILL LAST UNTIL CURFEW TONIGHT, AND NO, IT CAN’T BE BROKEN.

“DID YOU KNOW THAT THERE ARE NOT ONLY FEMALE VEELA, BUT ALSO MALE VEELA? I BELIEVE THAT THIS MUST HAVE BEEN AS OBVIOUS TO YOU AS IT IS TO THE REST OF US. THE INTERESTING THING ABOUT THAT IS WITCHES RESPOND DIFFERENTLY TO MALE VEELA THAN WIZARDS RESPOND TO THE FEMALE. WHERE THE WIZARD TRIES TO WIN THE AFFECTIONS OF THE FEMALE THROUGH BRAGGERY AND FEATS OF DARING, THE WITCH WILL TRY TO WIN THE AFFECTIONS OF MALE THROUGH MORE DIRECT MEANS.”

Harry blanched during the pause in the letter.

“This can’t be good.”

“Don’t worry, Harry, I’m sure that the girls will leave you alone,” offered Hermione.

“WELL, HARRY, I DECIDED THAT THE BEST WAY FOR US TO BE SURE OF YOUR SINGULAR AFFECTIONS FOR OUR SISTER, WAS TO LET YOU EXPERIENCE ONE DAY AS A MALE VEELA. THE ONLY PROBLEM WAS THAT I WASN'T ABLE TO TEST THIS, SO IT MAY BE A LITTLE OVERPOWERED. SO, EXPECT VERY DIRECT MEANS OF SEDUCTION TODAY, HARRY. THE MOST COMMON IS A PASSIONATE KISS ON THE MOUTH, BUT IT CAN VARY. IF YOU, AS THE VEELA IN QUESTION, HAVE NO INTEREST IN THE SUITERESS YOU WILL, INSTINCTIVELY, SEND A WHISP OF MAGIC THAT WILL LEAVE THE AFFECTED PARTY WITH JUST ENOUGH STRENGTH TO STAGGER AWAY WITH A SMILE PLASTERED ON HER FACE. AND GUYS, DON’T GET MAD AT YOUR GIRLFRIENDS; THEY’LL BE BACK TOMORROW SOMEWHAT HAPPIER BUT NOT ANY MORE IN LOVE WITH HARRY THAN BEFORE. AND DON’T
GET MAD AT HARRY; HE HAS NO CHOICE. I'M SURE HE'D RATHER BE KISSING MY DEAR SISTER, BUT I COULD NOT HAVE THAT HAPPENING, SO SHE'S SECRETED AWAY IN SAFETY FROM THIS LETCH."

Harry was not looking very courageous at this point.
The teachers at the head table were looking a mixture of angry, appalled and amused at the breakfast revelation.
The range of emotions from the students in the hall were wide, with anger, disgust and decidedly dangerous feral want, with the grin of a predator in their eyes.

"OH, BEFORE I GO, FOR PROPRIETY SAKE, THIS IS SPELLED TO ONLY AFFECT TEENAGE FEMALES. SORRY DRACO. ALSO, HARRY, JUST SO THERE IS NO HARD FEELINGS OF YOU BEING INJURED, I HAVE LACED THIS WITH A PAIN RELIEVER FOR THE NEXT DAY OR SO, JUST IN CASE ANY GIRLS OR WOMEN GET AGGRESSIVE AND, OH YES, A SPELL TO PREVENT CHAPPED LIPS. ANYWAY...IT'S NICE TO HAVE YOU AS A POTENTIAL PART OF THE FAMILY, HARRY.

"YOUR FRIEND, BILL WEASLEY."

"P.S. THE EFFECTS OF THE CURSE START...NOW!"

At the final pronouncement, the letter reduced itself to ashes, leaving behind the, now standard, calling card so that Harry can identify the prankster.

Harry lost no time in getting up and grabbing the card. He didn't have to look around to know that he was the center of attention. Nor did he have to look to tell what looks the audience had on their faces.

He moved slowly so as not to startle anyone into action.
With his head down, he addressed Hermione.

"Hermione," Harry asked, "can you go to my dorm and get the map and find Ginny?"

"Sure, Harry," replied his best female friend, "Oh, and Harry?"

Harry looked up at the inquiring tone.

What he saw scared him a little. Hermione had a look of a feral predator. She reached forward, grabbing his head and kissed him deeply before he momentarily returned the kiss and whisp of magic as the curse required.

She broke the kiss and staggered back slightly before skipping off.

Harry turned his attention to his best friend. Ron simply had a look of utter shock and disbelief on his face.

"Ron, I am so sorry. Please don't blame us. It's Bill's fault."

Ron just nodded, wide eyed and slack jawed.

Harry felt people approaching him from behind. He turned to see several girls approaching him cautiously. Harry looked at the possible avenues of escape and found them all blocked with the great hall doors closed and blocked by a group of girls and the other door, the one behind the teachers, similarly blocked.

Damn Ron's prank, Harry thought, I bet that half of these girls wouldn't give me a second glance, otherwise.

Harry made a split second decision and pointed his wand in the air and repeated a performance from his fourth year in the first task of the Tri-Wizard Tournament.

"ACCIO FIREBOLT," he screamed with not a little power.

At this the assembled girls and, well, women, lost all inhibition and rushed the most eligible bachelor in all of England (as reported by Witch Weekly).

Meanwhile, his girlfriend found herself locked in the room of requirements with naught but a note from her favorite brother, Bill.

Dear Ginny,

I'm sorry to do this to you, but I've been forced to lock you in this room until tomorrow due to a prank being played on dear Harry. At this moment Harry has been cursed so that every teenage girl will be affected as if Harry were a male veela. I thought that this would be the best way to test his loyalty so we can be confident he is the best for our little Ginny.

Now you won't be able to get out, as it'd take an Egyptian curse-breaker to unlock the doors before six, tomorrow morning, so just sit back and relax. This room will provide anything that you may need for the duration of your stay. Just think it and it'll be yours, Ginny. I recommend books on male veelas.
Have a good time. Harry will be returned to you better than new tomorrow morning...well, as long as he is faithful.

Love,

Bill

Ginny was fuming. If the letter and her limited knowledge of male veelas were correct, her boyfriend was being touched and kissed by females that were not her, and that made her mad.

Was it mentioned already that Weasley women were scary when they are mad?

Ginny grinned sadistically when a thought came to her mind.

She cleared her throat, "Hmmpm, hmmpm...I need..."

At that moment, Hermione was tearing through the Gryffindor common room and up the Boy's stairs to the sixth year's dorm room. She had barely made it out of the great hall before she heard the definite click of the doors locking behind her.

She opened Harry's trunk, removed the Marauder's Map and quickly activated it.

Finding Ginny was easy, due to the fact that nearly everyone in the school was in the great hall still.

Hermione wiped the map clean and ran back down the stairs to go retrieve her other best friend from the Room of Requirements.

"How can this get any worse?" she muttered.

Harry was not having fun. The doors to the Great Hall were closed shortly before Harry was set upon and surrounded by a horde of admirers, convincing him that the main door would not be his avenue of escape. The teachers were on the periphery trying to control the mob with little luck.

Harry was passed from female to female, some decidedly women, others most definitely still girls. The Gryffindor benches were littered with girls now too weak to want to walk away; a smile as bright as the sun filling their faces. He only had time in transit for a breath and maybe a comment.

"Hello..."

"Oh, my..."

"Hey, watch the hands. No exploration."

"Oh, boy..."

"Hey, I happen to know that you are a first year young lady. The curse won't affect you."

The girl in question decided to return the comment before enjoying the kiss. "I know, but when else will I get the chance?" she said before kissing him strongly.

"Must be a Gryffindor," Harry mumbled.

Throughout this, Harry had been listening intently for the telltale sound of his broom flying through the air. It had just been a minute since he called it and he was already looking for his escape. A whole day of this treatment would not bode well for Harry's sanity or health.

Ginny's experience over the summer with Harry watching the muggle movie came to be useful. She was very glad that she had spent time with Harry, having him explain everything muggle in the movie.

"Hmmpm, hmmpm...I need...a rocket launcher!"

'Aren't muggle action movies great?' she thought.

She picked up the green tubular device up from the floor and read the easy to follow directions displayed with stickers on the tube. Luckily they even were specific as to which direction the rocket came out.

No keeping Ginevra Molly Weasley locked up.

Harry's hopes came true when he heard the sound of his broom's approach, luckily threading its way through the owl entrance in the dormers.

Harry stuck his right arm straight into the air, despite the girls still kissing him and attempting to drag his arm back down for an embrace.

He felt the cool wood slap into his hand and pulled it down enough to command the broom to pull him up.

He finished his last kiss as his feel left the ground. The ladies gasped when he pulled himself up and threw himself over the broom with one arm.
Harry made one lap of the hall before angling upward before disappearing through the sky illusion and threading his way back through the owl entrance and into the open air of the Hogwarts Grounds.

Harry chuckled to himself, steering for the quidditch pitch.

"Pretty good one, Bill," Harry mused to the open air. "But not exactly what I want to be doing on my Saturday."

The professors watched the pandemonium as Harry made his spectacular exit of the hall through the most unlikely exit. They had been trying to regain control, but the event had lasted less than five minutes, and despite their combined power, they were not that quick.

Professor Dumbledore had to chuckle to himself as he realized the ingenuity of his favorite student. Harry had, once again, escaped from the inescapable.

The uncontrollable crowds in the great hall suddenly realized where the object of their affection had gone. In a rush, they all ran out through the freshly unlocked great double doors and out of the school in the quickest manner possible.

Professor Dumbledore heard the distinctive pops of the great seal activating like popcorn, diverting many of Harry’s admirers to other locations around the school. The castle must have been trying to protect Harry to some extent, as the Headmaster was sure that the seals were set to passive when he came down to breakfast. If he were to go to his office, he was sure that he would find it set to random (prank) mode at the moment.

The venerable professor was shook out of his reverie by the sound of a distant explosion. The source was identified by his connection to the wards, as they reported damage to the seventh floor corridor.

The other professors turned to him in question of what to do now.

"Minerva, Severus, please come with me," Dumbledore commanded. "The rest of you, please look after the students outside."

The teachers walked off at a health pace and parted in the entrance hall.

Hermione skidded to a halt outside of the Room of Requirements, finding the hall littered with wood splinters and the wall scorched. She picked her way into the room, astonished.

What she found was an empty room, save for the green tube and a sheet of parchment. She picked up the parchment and started to read.

The sight before the senior professors on the seventh floor was amazing. They tentatively picked their way through the splinters to make it to the door, or at least the doorway, as it could be argued that they made it to the door as soon as they stepped onto the first splinter at the top of the steps.

“Miss Granger,” started Professor Snape in a stern manner, “Do you have an explanation for this?”

Hermione looked up, her eyes wide.

She held out the letter and let Professor Dumbledore read it aloud to the others.

“Albus, if the door was warded like an Egyptian tomb, how did Miss Weasley get out so quickly?”

Hermione cleared her throat to get the adult’s attention.

“I think that I know,” she said while pointing at the device on the ground.

“What is that, Miss Granger?” Professor McGonagall asked.

She bent down to read the writing on the tube.

“RPG-18, anti-tank rocket propelled grenade,” Hermione read for them.

“And what exactly is that?” Severus asked.

“Sir, it is a muggle device that shoots a bit of explosive propelled by a type of rocket that explodes on impact with anything solid.”

Dumbledore just had to chuckle at the absurdity of the whole mess.

“Well,” he chuckled, “it would seem that Miss Weasley has found a way to defeat the ancient Egyptian wards, Minerva.”

Ginny tore down the secret passageways, making her way to the Great Hall, intent on finding Harry as soon as she could. There she found not a soul.
She began her search up and down each hallway, frantic to find her boyfriend.

She found no one until the second floor where she nearly collided with Justin something or other.

"Justin, have you seen Harry?" Ginny gasped.

"Sure," he chuckled, "After nearly getting mauled by the crowd of girls, he summoned his broom and left the hall."

He led her to the window overlooking the quidditch pitch and pointed out the lone figure gliding around the pitch on a broom, while the pitch itself was covered in people standing and sitting, looking up at him. Ginny could not guess at Justin's motivation to find this whole thing so humorous, because she could see nothing funny about it. She didn't have time to worry about the other student's hang-ups, however. She was busy enough dealing with her brothers and boyfriend.

"What?...Oh this is impossible," Ginny declared. "Thanks, Justin."

She ran off to the Gryffindor tower for supplies.

"Albus, what are we going to do about this?" Minerva asked.

"This, the prank on Harry or this, the Room of Requirements?" Albus asked.

"Both," McGonagall replied.

"Well, we certainly can’t give Harry a detention for being the object of a prank," replied Dumbledore, "and, as this is not considered a dark curse, William Weasley won’t be sought by magical law enforcement. And just to be sure, I checked some of the girls for secondary curses."

"And?" she prompted.

"In truth?" Dumbledore continued. "There were none."

"But all of those girls," McGonagall exclaimed. "They were practically tearing the robes off of his back."

"That would be the power of the male veela," Dumbledore smiled. "All those witches who were attracted to Harry before now have an excuse."

"But, but, what do you mean an excuse?" Minerva stammered. "What about all of the veela stuff? And how come I've never seen a male veela before?"

"Simple, Minerva," Dumbledore explained, "they believe they are under a spell, and so they act accordingly. He does have many admirers and Mr. Weasley's prank before Halloween didn't lessen that group. We can only be glad that this was not announced in Witch Weekly or the school would be overrun."

"Quite," Professor McGonagall agreed after a contemplative pause.

Dumbledore continued answering her earlier questions, "And you have never seen a male veela before because of the reaction of non-veela females. They rarely leave their settlements."

"Oh my," McGonagall said, "I guess I can understand, in that case."

Harry floated lazily on his broom, reclining back with his feet about the tip of the handle. He was quite comfortable and relaxed. He was sure it couldn’t last. Eventually someone would figure it out and retrieve her broom and join him. The aerial combat that thought promised made his Quidditch days seem tame in comparison.

He heard gasps from the assembled crowd and assumed it meant that someone had finally realized the solution to his unreachable status.

Before he could think of maneuvering he was set upon and snogged in mid-air. He struggled slightly, but the veela in him wasn’t reacting. No magic, whisp like or otherwise, was reacting to this kiss, nearly the opposite in fact. His magic embraced the woman kissing him. He panicked, knowing that he didn’t want to cheat on Ginny and feeling betrayed that the veela magic had not ended the kiss. He pushed the female form from him, ending the kiss.

"Humph, well if that is how you feel, Harry, I’ll just leave you to the lovely ladies below," the woman said with an obvious glint of humor.

Harry turned then to see the object of his affection.

"Gin," he said then launched himself back at her.

"And the Room of Requirement?" McGonagall asked.

"Well, I am reluctant to punish a student for damaging the school when they have been locked in a room against their will," Dumbledore reasoned. "She was, after all, only trying to affect her own release."
"So no punishment then?" McGonagall continued, wanting to find someone at fault.

"If you wish, you can assign the two to fix the damage and make sure that the room is fully functional," said Professor Dumbledore.

"How is that possible?" asked Professor McGonagall. "The founders made that room and they were some very powerful witches and wizards."

"Harry is up to the task and Miss Weasley can assist him with research." The Headmaster smiled mysteriously at his second in command. "Harry, after all, did redo the ceiling in the Great Hall after a training accident shortly after he arrived."

"He recast the ceiling?" she asked, amazed. "I thought that he had only repaired it. That is very a very powerful charm. Does Filius know about that?"

"No, but you may tell him if you wish," the Headmaster replied with the twinkle firmly set in his eyes.

"He will be proud and impressed," she smiled.

"Indeed."

The aerial couple slowly rotated as they kissed and hugged tightly.

After returning yet another kiss, Harry broke contact to peer into Ginny’s beautiful chocolate eyes.

"Ginny, thanks for coming to my rescue," Harry said sincerely, "but it won't take long for those admirers below to figure out that they can get to me just like you did."

"Oh, shoot...you're right. Where can we hide?" she asked.

"We? Are you saying that you are willing to go on the lam with me, my fiery young lass," Harry flirted.

"Why, yes good sir," Ginny returned.

"Follow me," Harry commanded.

With that he took off on his broom, confident that Ginny would follow and could keep up on her new broom. With a flick of his wand the main doors of the castle opened allowing the couple access to the entry hall.

Harry landed lightly on the great seal of Hogwarts and Ginny came to rest beside him a moment later.

"Where are we going, Harry?" asked Ginny, curiously.

"We can hide in the Chamber if that’s okay," he said shyly, afraid that she would reject the idea of hiding there, cut off from the rest of the school.

"Of course that's okay," she answered. "Do you think that anyone will follow us?"

"I'll shut the seals down right away," Harry confirmed, "and the entrance in Myrtle’s bathroom is already closed."

"What if someone needs us?" she asked.

"We can take a day off," he assured her. "Besides, the Headmaster can send Dobby or Fawkes down to find us if necessary."

"Sure, thanks Harry," she said sincerely with a peck on his cheek. "Let's go."

Unnoticed, they disappeared. Moments later, the stone in the seal seemed to lose some of its glow.
“Why’re we here?” whined Ron. “I already finished my homework.” He paused. He continued quietly with a deep, reverberating voice, “Hmm, can’t we go someplace else?” he whispered seductively in Hermione’s ear, “Somewhere more private?” The soft breath on Hermione’s ear made her shiver and the suggestive nature of ‘somewhere more private’ made her flush, but not bend.

“No Ron,” she said authoritatively as they approached. “It’s because of that silly prank war of you and your brothers that this happened. Now we will help to repair it.”

“You just want to know how the room works!” he accused.

“Never mind that, Ronald!” she responded.

“Hey,” Ron greeted, Harry and Ginny who sat behind a large study table near the back of the library, ignoring Hermione’s last.

“Hey,” they answered in unison.

“Hello,” said Hermione in her usual, slightly more formal tone. “How can we help?”

Harry smiled at Hermione. “I have a treat for you.”

Hermione perked up, her eyes smiling. While she was more attracted to and was indeed dating Ron, her redhead male best friend, her wildly black-haired male best friend always knew what would make her happy and tried to provide it for her, as a friend. That’s just how Harry was. Her Ron was just wired a little differently. He made her happy, deliriously happy, but Ron’s motivations were never as fully selfless.

“Whatcha got?” asked Hermione while she bounced slightly in excitement, personifying the bubbly schoolgirl image that she abhorred.

Harry pulled a large tome from under the one he was currently studying. It was red and the cover was carved in intricate patterns, resulting in a stylized Hogwarts castle etched in the leather cover.

“This,” Harry said, patting the cover, “is the construction and enchanting notes from the Founders for Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry.”

Hermione’s jaw dropped. Her eyes bugged to saucers, white showing completely around the iris.

“This…this is…this is…” stammered Hermione.

“Yes, the instruction manual for building Hogwarts,” said Ginny.

“But…but…it’s…” continued Hermione, still amazingly dumbstruck.

“Old?”

“Valuable?”

“Red?”

“Heavy?”

“Big?”

“Too big?”

“No nearly big enough?”

“Not supposed to exist,” Hermione said finally. “It’s mentioned in the first three editions of ‘Hogwarts: A History’, but even in the first edition it was said to be lost for all time.”

“Apparently not,” said Harry. “Well, while you skim it, would you see if it mentions the Room of Requirement or the ‘Come and Go Room’?” Harry asked.

“Oh yes, Harry,” she said, even more excited than before as she lifted the book and clutched it to her chest. “I’ll, uh…” Hermione blushed, glancing nervously from side to side, “…I’ll just be in my study spot.” She motioned with her head to the corner hidden from their view by several tall shelves of books.

She squeaked in delight before scampering off in a hurry to explore the book’s depths. Harry could only hope that she would try to find the section...
on the Room of Requirements and tell them before she became fully engrossed in the book. If she started to read from the beginning first, she wouldn’t emerge coherent to the outside world until the book was finished.

“I hope you know that you just lost me my girlfriend until Wednesday, at least,” Ron stated. His manner was, thankfully, more aggrieved than angry.

“Just be glad that I didn’t show her where I found it,” Harry said.

There was a pause of a second before Harry and Ginny burst into laughter, followed closely by Ron. They quickly quieted at a look from Madame Pince.

During lunch on Sunday, Harry and Ginny received an invitation to tea with Professor McGonagall. Harry apologized to Ron and Hermione that they wouldn’t be able to help in the library that afternoon while the search for the repair of the Room of Requirements continued. Hermione, her face still in the most ancient of tomes mentioned earlier, just waved off the apology with a muttered ‘no problem’, her nose never straying from the book. Ron simply gave a glare saying that he knew why Harry said he was sorry, as this would leave Ron virtually alone, a bibliophilological widower. His love lost to a book, and not for the last time, Ron sighed at fate.

As four o’clock struck, Ginny knocked genteelly on Professor McGonagall’s office door. It opened with a contented sigh from the door. Harry looked at Ginny with a crooked eyebrow but she just shrugged and walked in holding his hand while he carried two portfolios in his other hand.

“Hello, Miss Weasley, Mr. Potter,” they were greeted by the ever businesslike professor.

“Hello, Professor,” Ginny returned.

“Please sit,” the Professor commanded as she led them to the small fireplace surrounded by an intimate grouping of a chair and a small couch.

“How are you progressing on your animagus studies?” McGonagall asked with a twinkle of interest in her eye.

“Very well, Professor,” Ginny said.

Harry reached forward with the two portfolios, setting them side-by-side on the coffee table. The Professor opened each and looked carefully through the contents making pleased sounds at what she saw.

“This is very good work from both of you,” she said. “It’s clear that you will both be successful in you transformations. Have you figures out which details you need to sketch out before you will be ready to complete the process?”

“No, Professor,” answered Harry. “We saw, in the manual, that spell for helping us along, but we weren’t sure how to do it, and with your warnings about this area of magic, we were going to wait until we were further along to tackle it.”

Ginny nodded her agreement. The animagus transformation was not the safest thing to learn. If you just winged it, you could cause yourself damage both mentally and physically.

“Very good, Mr. Potter,” the Professor said proudly. “Twenty points to Gryffindor for both of you following safety instructions.”

Harry and Ginny smiled.

“If you would like, I can teach you the spell necessary to check for what is yet lacking for a successful transformation,” the aging professor offered. Ginny eagerly agreed with a nod, while Harry politely requested, “Please.”

Professor McGonagall led them through the wand movements for casting the Animus Progressa spell. The wand movement was a bit tricky, as you had to end with your wand pointed directly at your breastbone, causing the question, “Can we just perform this spell on each other?”

“No,” Professor McGonagall answered. “It must be performed on one’s self.”

Harry looked disappointed. Ginny just smiled at him, smugly. Of course, she would have asked if he hadn’t, but that didn’t need to be known.

“Okay,” Professor McGonagall said as the images on the two individual parchments resolved into something that she could interpret. “It appears, Miss Weasley, that you need to work on your form’s internal organs. Concentrate on the liver, lungs and kidneys. Overall, excellent grasp of your form’s physiology.”

Ginny beamed. Praise from a respected teacher was like gold to a student.

“Professor, how can you tell what that,” Harry gestured to the parchment filled with shades and shadows, “means.”

“Years of practice,” she answered. “I am told that it is much like a Muggle doctor learning to interpret their diagnostic devices used to tell if a bone is broke in a patient. There are reference books that assist in the interpretation if you do not have an experienced person at hand.”

“Oh,” Harry blinked. “You mean x-rays?”

Ginny looked on without comment, as she had no experience with Muggle healing techniques, beyond viewing her father’s experiment with Muggle stitches after being attacked by a snake last year.
The crowd visibly bristled at Harry's comment on ramifications. "Surely the ministry wouldn't arrest you for killing a Deatheater in self-defense!"

Hermione blushed from her position in the hall, but didn't comment on being quoted.

Harry paused for the smattering of giggles from the students.

"But, please," he continued, "avoid aiming high, as the ceiling is much harder to re-enchant than the walls are to repair."

Everyone glanced up at the illusion of an evening sky momentarily before returning to Harry their attention.

"Now, while we study the next topic, Auror and Professor Tonks has agreed to assist everyone in something that she learned in her three years of Auror training." He smiled and nodded at Tonks, now in her Auror robes. "As an integral part of auror training, each recruit is taught a much wider catalogue of curses and hexes. The method used is through spell grouping."

Harry waved his wand at the south wall causing concise white signs with clear black lettering to reveal themselves up and down the length of the wall. Listed in many dozens of columns were spell titles, some columns with as few as three listings, some with as many as twenty. No other information was given besides yellow and red stars by more and more spells as the list went to the right and clustered at the bottom.

"This list of combat spells," Harry addressed the Defense Association, "is organized into groups of spell effect. If you look at the spells at the top of each column, you will probably see ones that you already know except for the last couple of columns on the right. These columns are spells that have little use in society, good for only death and devastation. I hope that none of you ever need to learn any of those spells."

Tonks stepped to the front as Harry took a step back, giving her the floor. "On this list you will notice many spells marked with a colored star. These spells are considered either restricted or downright illegal. Do not perform the yellow starred spells outside of this regulated schooling environment or you will be arrested and have to justify your actions before the entire Wizengamot as an accused on trial. That would be unpleasant," she smirked. "The red starred spells are not just restricted; they are downright illegal. If you are found to have performed these spells without written permit from the Minister of Magic, you will be sent to Azkaban for a lengthy stay, maybe for the rest of your life."

"But they're trying to kill us!" a seventh year at the front said loud enough for everyone to hear.

"Yes," said Hermione from her place at the opposite side of the front of the crowd. "But you can kill just as effectively with a good bludgeoning spell or a well aimed cutting curse, if that's what you need to do."

"Yes, people," Harry said, raising his voice so that he could be heard over the murmuring voices. "We're not asking that you stun and arrest here. If you need to kill to save lives, then it may be the right thing to do. In a decision between the life of a Deatheater or his innocent victim, choose the innocent."

"Could you?" asked a girl a couple of rows back. She looked young, maybe a fourth year.

Harry ran his hands through his hair, clearly nervous and searching his soul. "Oh, man...this is a conversation that I was hoping to avoid having with myself, much less with fellow students, but..." he took a great breath and let it out slowly through pursed lips. "If it was someone I cared about, or, I guess, someone innocent in all this, I guess that I would. I couldn't let them die," he stared at the floor stone six feet in front of him. "Someone once accused me of having a 'saving people thing'. I think that they were spot on. I wouldn't stand back when I could help. I guess that I would just deal with the ramifications after it was all done."

Hermione blushed from her position in the hall, but didn't comment on being quoted.

The crowd visibly bristled at Harry's comment on ramifications. "Surely the ministry wouldn't arrest you for killing a Deatheater in self-defense!"
Harry laughed. “Arrest me for self-defense?” Harry said sarcastically. “Of course they would! Minister Fudge would insist on it. I might make it out of conviction, but you can never be sure. Whatever the consequences, it would be worth it. But what I was really referring to was, until you can come to grips with what you did, no matter what kind of scum you killed or who you saved, your mind will torture yourself with nightmares of guilt and regret. The shakes and the nightmares will eventually go away, along with the guilt after you’ve had some thought and support from people that care about you.”

Harry smiled at his friends, knowing that they were responsible for him feeling better after the rocky start of the summer when he was doing just as he said and torturing himself with guilt ridden nightmares, only brushed away with comforting and reaffirming letters from his friends and compatriots within this room. He looked into each of their eyes, written plainly with love, friendship, strength, kindness, intelligence, desire (!), and dreaminess. His friends would keep him safe and whole through the tests his life and fate would provide.

Harry took a cleansing breath. “Okay,” he said, deliberately chipper. “Enough of that maudlin stuff. We need to wrap up this session so that dinner can be laid on. Next session we will begin to learn the spells a step down from basic on the lists. I want you to practice what you already know from the lists. Do avoid the last columns of spells; they are dangerous, not only for your opponent, but also for your own soul. They’ll eat at you and should be avoided,” he said with all seriousness. “Everyone should pick up a book at the back of the hall,” he gestured to a stack of leather bound books, nearly identical to the book Harry was given by the Headmaster. “These are copies of a book that the Headmaster gave me; I found it so useful, I ordered enough for everyone. These are all spelled to only reveal their content to Defense Association members, so do be careful with your copy. If someone else finds them they could think them useless trash and you could lose yours. Anything that you learn from this book will be part of your learning with the Defense Association. If you need any help, the library is an excellent resource or you can ask Professor Tonks or myself. Remember, this book,” he said, holding up his own copy, “contains listing of darker spells as well as regular ones. Anything that you see on the board with a star, your books have only the listing, not the instructions. If you look anything up in the library and you don’t find it in the regular sections, come ask. It might mean that it is in the Restricted Section due to being dark or exceedingly dangerous, or it may just be older or more obscure than you can easily find in the Hogwarts library.”

Hermione stepped to the front and turned to address the students at Harry’s nod. “Okay, everyone! Clean this place up. Younger students, patrol for trash and older students, work together to levitate the house tables back into position. Trash patrol, don’t forget Evanesco, but be careful of your aim.”

Draco sat at his makeshift dining table and chair in the Slytherin common room, angrily grumbling to himself. He was humiliated and he knew just who was to blame. His thoughts had turned increasingly angry and violent since he had been given his punishment. The whole of Slytherin knew he had been caught and punished. The continued humiliation took the power that he lorded over the lesser Slytherins from his grasp. He was the Slytherin Prince no longer. His voice raised above a grumble when he came to a decision.

“It’s down to that redhead bitch!” he roared. “If she wasn’t such a muggle-loving bint, I would’ve just been able to have some fun and toss the mudblood to the side like the last one. But no!” he screamed, “She had to come along and bring the Professors,” he spat. “Well, I’ll show her. She won’t survive this year and the Dark Lord will reward me for removing another blood traitor from the world,” he screamed to the rafters.

In the shadow of the entrance to the common room, a young woman decided that she didn’t need to get her new hairpin from her trunk to show off to her friends. She decided, instead, that she needed to warn her favorite teacher instead. She knew that he wasn’t a professor, but he was her teacher and a threat against him and his was a threat against her.
Young Phillipa Stone entered the Great Hall for dinner. Something had just set her off enough to make her forget her normal activities. Normally she would be happy and bubbly, talking with her friends, showing off a new bauble or piece of jewelry that her esteemed father had gotten for his little angel. She was a proper daughter, respecting her father while she twisted him around her little finger. Not that he would be anything but happy with the situation, he loved his daughter more than life itself. He had ever since his beloved wife of twenty years had died at the age of fifty-one, just four years into their lovely daughter's life.

He had always provided the best for his family, first just he and his wife and then at the age of forty-seven, his wife blessed him with a daughter. This made his work even more important, as now he had to ensure her future, both financially and the mere continued existence. Years ago, before gaining a daughter, even before gaining a wife, he had chosen his career with care. The wizarding world needed protection from itself and from the magic it used. That's why he chose to become an Unspeakable in the Department of Mysteries. He would protect the community through research and learning. Most of the stuff that he learned was not fit for the public, but that would not be a problem, as no one entered the Unspeakable's bastion.

His obsession with his career ended when his wife died. His wife had been a wonderful mother to his little Phillipa and he had done his all to provide everything that they could ever need, rising to the top of the department in record time, one of the few well paid, honest positions in the ministry. Without his wife, he realized that his daughter needed him, not his money, now. He continued his work, but kept it to working hours, preferring to come home and spend a quiet dinner with his little angel. On the times that he had to spend more time in the department, he would just bring his joy with him, letting her meet the others in the office. He worked while she played and learned. The smile on her face was enough to delay any fears about her playing in such a place as the Department of Mysteries.

This time spent with the most rare of learned people was formative for the young girl. She learned to be observant and unseen. At that moment, reentering the Great Hall, she needed the skills to find Harry Potter.

As she walked to the Slytherin table, she calmly looked up and down the length of the Gryffindor table for the patch of unruly raven hair that should be beside the flowing red. What she found was just one patch of red and it was the wrong one. That patch of red in the sea of browns, blonds and blacks, was huddled rather close to a bushy brown and too short shorn to be the companion to the one she wanted to find.

Obviously, as Ronald Weasley and Hermione Granger were alone at dinner, Harry Potter and Ginevra Weasley were elsewhere enjoying dinner. Their dates were famous amongst the Hogwarts students, both in their romance where few other couples could achieve anything but a broom closet, and in their mystery, as none of the curious students had a clue where they were or how they got there. This left Phillipa with naught to do but sit and eat.

"Hey," she addressed her friends, "what's up?"

"Not much," they answered around the current gossip that they were circulating.

"Anything special happen while I was out?" she asked.

She was answered with a cacophony of rumors and gossip, but one piece of information filtered through that was actually of interest to the young Slytherin.

"Harry and Ginny skipped this," she motioned to the dishes laid out on the table, "lovely dinner again?" she asked sarcastically. "How can that girl be so lucky to get such a good boyfriend?" she asked, making sure that her voice had a good amount of jealousy in disguise her true intent. Her friends would understand jealousy. Ambition was often fueled by a covetous nature.

"Bet she's just giving it to him good," said a girl across the table from them, butting in on their conversation.

"Not what I heard," Phillipa's friend Marra said. "I heard that one of those pranks from Ginny's brothers was for McGonagall and Pomfrey to give Harry 'The Talk' and Harry decided that he wanted to wait until marriage until 'it' comes up."

"So, what," said Terri, her other good friend, "Ginny's been happy with that?"

"Didn't say that," said Marra. "She'll change the situation when she gets the chance."

"As if," said the girl who butted in, "he wants it and he is probably getting it from her good. That's all boys want and that's what you have to do to get what you want," she said with a disgusted but assured look to her face.

"Maybe the boys that you hang on," said Terri, "But we, at least, consider boys from other houses not the just leeches that are in our house. Slytherin boys are all ambition and no respect."

"Terri," Phillipa sighed, "I'm sure that there are a couple of decent guys in our house. We just haven't found them yet."
Well, wait for some snakes to get off their bellies if you want," Terri said, "but I'm going to look for some warm blooded meat."

Phillipa's growl at not finding the Gryffindor turned into laughter at her friend's predatory statement.

"Okay, Phi," the young Slytherin said to herself, 'got'ta find him today. No choices.'

Phillipa walked down the corridor at breakfast time. She entered and looked slyly at the Gryffindor table as she walked between the Slytherin table and the wall. She didn't see him there until she saw movement at the last end of the table that she was to check. Harry stood and gave a short kiss to Ginny before turning and exiting the hall.

Phillipa swore and reversed her direction as covertly as she could.

It looked like breakfast today would be forfeit.

She entered the entrance hall in time to see the tale of his robes whip around the corner leading to the transfiguration classroom. Frustrated, she picked up a jog as she cleared the vision of the students in the Great Hall, casting a silencing spell on her feet to prevent anyone from getting suspicious from hearing her run in the halls.

Two flights of stairs and three corridors later, she saw Harry standing on the beautiful stone seal, rifling through a book-bag hanging from his shoulder.

"C'mon, where is it?" Harry said in frustration.

Phillipa reached him just as he pulled a book from the bag, "There it is. Thought someone took it."

Phillipa reached up to grab his shoulder, trying to get his attention. Harry's startled to find a companion just as they disappear from the transfiguration corridor.

When the displaced Phillipa came to her senses in a different place than she was a fraction of a second previously, she did the only thing that came to mind. She screamed.

Unluckily for Harry, he was beside her and she was faced mostly into his ear.

Alarmed and dazed by the appearance of an unknown person and the loud noise in his ear, Harry spun around, a Stunner fired before he could be further assaulted. Harry's training worked overtime for his safety.

Harry blinked and found a student that he was unfamiliar with lying prone on the ground at his feet, her eyes closed. One glance told him that she didn't have her wand out and she did not have the sheen of sweat that could be expected if adrenalin had been flowing to prepare her for a fight.

She must have been completely surprised.

"Oh, bollocks," Harry said.

Harry conjured a comfortable chair and gently placed her in it. She probably wasn't going to be happy.

"Enervate," Harry cast, awakening her.

Her eyelids fluttered. She shook her head quickly to the side several times before fully opening her eyes.

"What's going on?" she began slowly. "Where are we? What happened?"

Harry grimaced at the sitting girl.

"Um," he started brilliantly, "It seems that you grabbed me just as I was transporting down here and you came for the ride."

"But..."

Harry continued, "When we got here you screamed in my ear and I reacted, thinking it to be an attack and stunned you. Once I realized that I was wrong about the attack, I woke you up," he said. "Sorry."

She looked at him with calculating eyes. "Where are we, then?"

He smiled back, despite her untrusting glare. "We're in my training area. The Chamber of Secrets," he said, gesturing to the Chamber surrounding her chair.

"How did we get here?" she asked.

Harry's smile held for a second before a frown slowly graced his features. "First," he said, "why were you sneaking up on me? Why didn't I hear you? What do you want?"

This caused a grin to grace Phillipa's face. "Inquisitive, aren't you?" she joked. She held up one finger and said as if reading a grocery list, "I
"needed to meet you." She raised a second finger, "I cast a silencing charm on my feet." She raised a third finger, "I needed to warn you," she said, as if it were the most natural thing to say in day-to-day conversation.

"Warn me about what? And why did you silence your feet?" he asked shaking his head to clear it.

"No," she said with authority, "First you answer my question. How did we get here?"

Harry retreated inwardly. "Um," he stalled, "That's a secret. I can't tell you."

She smiled an all-knowing smile that told him, more than anything that she was used to getting everything that she wanted. And yet that did not make her give off an air of a spoiled child, more a self-confident young woman.

"I see," she said succinctly. "Let me take a guess then."

She smirked. He frowned.

"This is a secret that your girlfriend knows," he listened and tried not to give anything away. "And can use," he tried not to react. "And yet your friends, Ron and Hermione, don't know," he was having a harder time not reacting to that revelation. "Why don't they know about it?"

Harry didn't answer.

"Ron wouldn't understand the effort it took to learn how," she stated certainly. "And Hermione might think herself superior to you even after the effort, but in truth, you want your smarter friend to go through the effort to figure it out herself. Maybe you have disappeared or reappeared right in her sight?" she considered, the question completely rhetorical. "No, you wouldn't reappear in front of her, because then she would ask questions directly. No, you will slowly pique her interest until she has to find out for herself. She has to figure it out on her own with minimal hints from you." She watched the slight smile that graced the corner of his lips. "No, you won't make it as easy on her as you made it on Ginny; just a couple of hints if she needs them. And the more hints that she needs, the more disappointed you'll get. You want her to figure it out, because in the end, when she figures it out, she'll realize that you are intelligent, more than she understood before."

"Damn you, witch," he cursed, jokingly. "You should contemplate becoming a mind healer or a wizarding psychologist or something. How did you do that? Have you been stalking me or something?"

She smiled, "No. You don't realize that you're in a fishbowl here. People like to watch other people. It's a form of entertainment. I, however, watch everything and everyone. I like to observe. I'm really good at seeing things that others don't."

"Very good," said Harry. "But you still don't know how I do it."

"True," she acknowledged. "But with one more piece of information, you will tell me yourself."

"Not likely."

"Likely," she calmly countered. "If you don't tell me, I am going to tell Hermione your secret. That the transportation is through the Hogwarts Seals."

"How did you…?" Harry fumbled.

"Easily. It just came together for me moments ago. First evidence is the Halloween Ball. Everyone was concentrating on the ancient looking archways as how we got to this very Chamber, but they were all wrong. That was just a red herring."

"And here I thought that all Slytherins shunned muggle literature," Harry quipped.

"Not all," she replied. "The next time I saw you transport, you took me for a ride with you minutes ago. The common factor is that, despite the arch or lack there of, both times were directly over a seal."

Harry gave a noncommittal grunt.

"I do love your work, by the way," she complimented him. "Ever since the beginning of the term, I have been admiring the stonework."

"Thank you," he said, no longer bothering to deny it.

"You probably don't want people to think about each one being slightly different, after all, they are just art, right?" she asked. "Now, do you think that it might cut your fun short if I just told all of that to Hermione? She will be on it like a bloodhound and then she will tell me how it works when she is done. Either way, I will know."

Harry grimaced. He didn't want Hermione to have that much help in the matter. That much information would render his efforts to give Hermione a puzzle, moot.

"Fine," Harry said. It really didn't matter. The Slytherin would probably find out anyway. "The seals are made of all natural stone and gems with certain magical potential. They are made of thousands of blocks carved precisely into rune blocks and fitted together so the seam is nearly invisible. The runic combination enacts a transportation spell between the crests." Harry smiled. It actually felt good to tell another about what he had done. "The key is in the differences between the crests. That is how you make it work, by knowing the differences…the correct differences."
“Brilliant,” she proclaimed. “How did you find time for this?”

The first thing to spring to mind was Harry’s start of the previous summer and the flesh searing ritual that Voldemort mistakenly put him through. Meant to increase the Dark Lord’s power, he only succeeded in unlocking all of Harry’s and damaging the natural containment for his magical power. This caused the snowball chain of events that forced him to spend half his summer sequestered in the castle with nothing better to do than study, train and contemplate ways to make that easier. The transport system had been born out of laziness more than ingenuity. All this went through Harry’s mind and was promptly dismissed as the stated reason for his available time to modify the castle. Instead, he went for a more generic answer that the ‘Junior Detective’ couldn’t read anything classified into. As his experience with the Wizengamot had been outlined in effect, if not detail, in the press, he was safe in using those circumstances to explain away his unusual summer accommodations.

“Where I was living was no longer suitable,” Harry told her after his contemplative pause without lying, “so the Headmaster allowed me to stay in the castle for half of the summer until I could join my friends. I found the books on runes and stones and just mashed the things together so I could come down here without using the horrid normal entrance.”

“I may be a year behind you,” Phillippa scoffed, “but I’m pretty sure that you are not in Ancient Runes. It seems invention is a bit more than mashing things together. Care to explain?”

Harry laughed. “This is definitely a case where being able to read the language of Runes is not necessary. The only thing necessary is to find the right instructions or five and combine them in the right manner to get the correct result. A whole dictionary of runes isn’t necessary.”

“I don’t know about that,” she said with skepticism. “I’m in the class and I don’t think that I’m anywhere close to even thinking about something like that.”

“Ah, yes,” Harry smiled, “but you have not read the necessary primer. I found a book that detailed the lost art of runic construction. When you have the right tools, the task doesn’t even need a master to complete.”

“Right,” she drawled.

“Back to the question, before we got distracted,” he said. “What was the warning?”

She shook her head clear. “Oh...yeah. Draco wants to get revenge on Ginny for getting him punished. I wouldn’t put it past him to hurt or kill her. He’s a right sociopath, that one,” she said. “I overheard him ranting about how it was all her fault and she would pay for his loss of power in Slytherin.”

“Hmm,” Harry contemplated, tapping his chin with his index finger. “Thank you for warning me. Ginny and I will take precautions.”

“Good,” she said. “Now, get me out of here.”

“Ginny,” Harry said in a private alcove, “We have a problem.”
Late Thursday evening, Wilhelm Vaisey, seventh year Slytherin chaser, was returning to the common room when he heard shouting from an unused classroom. He approached and put his eye to the cracked door. Inside he could see an incensed Harry Potter facing off against a determined Ginny Weasley. This struck him as very unusual, as they were widely known as the perfect couple by the school, their temperaments blending famously. He stilled to listen closely, being the Slytherin that he was.

"...for the best, Harry," Ginny stated. "We both know it."

"I don't care, Ginny," Harry ruled. "I won't have you hurt."

"Harry, we both know what the new prophecy says," Ginny sighed, as if this point had been bandied about for far too long. "If 'the Dark Lord' or one of his followers hurts the love of your life, me, you get more powerful in fighting for me."

"What?" Harry asked sarcastically, "and the more you get hurt the more powerful I become? I won't have it!" he yelled. "I won't have you getting hurt!"

"Harry, it’s the only way," Ginny said in a frustrated tone, tears pricking the corner of her eye. "We can put me in danger and one of those idiots, she spat, "will hurt me and you get the power. Once you have the power you can save me."

"Is that what you think is best?" Harry asked, his voice rising in pitch and volume. "Maybe if you get a broken arm, I could have enough power to cast silently. With a broken leg, I could cast multiple patroni. With a skull fracture maybe I could have wandless magic. What? Brain damage? That gets me a vegetable for a love and mage sight?" he yelled. "Maybe if you were to die I would be all-fucking-powerful and could just wish old Voldemort vanquished!"

"Harry, it’s not..." She was cut off.

"Ginny, can’t you see?" Harry pleaded, his voice suddenly trembling and tearful. "I can’t have you hurt at all. I love you too much! It would kill me inside to have you injured." Tears bubbled to Harry’s eyes.

"Harry, it’s all right," Ginny soothed.

"I can’t let those bastards get a hand on you," Harry cried, obviously blinded by love and tears, "just because some prophecy says that if I do, I would get the power to vanquish 'the Dark Lord'. Some things just aren’t worth it," he said with conviction through his tears.

"Harry," Ginny said in a comforting soft voice, "I might be hurt anyway."

"Just promise me that you won’t do it on purpose," Harry implored. "Promise me that you will try to keep yourself safe."

"Promise me, please," Harry pleaded again.

"Harry, you know what Dumbledore will say," Ginny informed him, trying a new tack. "If a prophecy says that me getting hurt will make you powerful enough to kill Voldemort, he would say that the needs of the many outweigh the needs of the one."

"Sod Dumbledore. We’re not telling him! Not now. Not ever," Harry paused, gathering himself for his argument. "I won’t let him make the decision to sacrifice the woman that I love. He is all too willing to sacrifice others for the good of the many. But what has ‘the many’ done for us? Why do we always have to be on the sacrificing end of the bargain? I don’t want him to be in a position to make that decision. I don’t trust him to make the right one," Harry ranted. "And I don’t want you to make the decision yourself. Promise me."

"Harry," Ginny said in a normal, everyday voice, "Maybe this time he would be right. Maybe this would be for the best."

"Ginny," Harry said through blinding tears. He dropped to his knees, pleading overtly. "Please. I have nothing to live for without you. Sure, I’ll have the power to kill the bastard, but then I’ll want nothing more than to die myself to join you and my parents in death. Whether there’s an afterlife or not, this life won’t be bearable without you in it. I can’t have you hurt. Please promise me that you’ll keep yourself safe. Promise me that you won’t tell Dumbledore about this new prophecy."

"Okay," she conceded with tears in her own eyes. "I...I won’t tell Dumbledore."

"Promise me," Harry continued, mindful of her partial promise, "that you won’t put yourself in danger. Promise me that you will try to keep yourself safe. Do it for me."

"...Oh, Harry," Ginny said, dropping to her knees and embracing him in tears. "I love you. I promise. I promise that I’ll try to stay safe."
Thank you, Ginny,” Harry cried, hanging on to her for dear life. “Thank you. I love you more than life itself.”

Wilhelm backed away from the partially open door in shock. This was important information. He’d have to get the information out. He had to get this to the right person. This could possibly mean a turning point in the war, a turning point that wouldn’t go well for his Lord. Plans and machinations bandied about in his head. His future could ride on this information. His standing in the Death Eaters could depend on this reaching the Dark Lord in the right fashion. He needed to get this to the Dark Lord himself. He had a plan.

Wilhelm Vaisey walked briskly through the empty corridors away from the Slytherin common room and to his new destination, the owlery. If he could get a letter to his father tonight, his father could pull him out of the school tomorrow for the weekend. He couldn’t trust this information with any owl. They were right. If Dumbledore found out, he would ensure that the prophecy was fulfilled. Yes, he’d have his father say that his mother had taken ill and asked to see him. This would work as no one in the school, not even his fellow Slytherins, knew of the blood-traitorous bitch’s incarceration in their own dungeons. After all, his father and himself had to keep her disgrace from both sides of this most righteous of causes. To think, a pureblood such as her, planning to speak publicly against their master. Absolutely disgraceful.

Ginny and Harry were still clutching each other on the cold hard floor when they heard the door click shut and a murmured silencing spell. They didn’t break their hold until they were interrupted with the slow beat of one person applauding.

“That was brilliant!” exclaimed Ron, now identified as the clapper.

Harry and Ginny were still coming down from their emotional highpoint they had reached at the end of their little ‘play’.

“Did it work?” Harry asked, holding Ginny’s hands, lovingly.

Hermione did not look up from the large piece of worn parchment that she was peering at.

“He’s turned around and is going to the Owlery. He just reached the bottom of the stairs and is climbing,” Hermione said. “I would say that it worked.”

“Brilliant idea, Hermione,” Harry said.

“Yeah,” said Ginny, drying her eyes. “No wonder they say that you’re considered the brightest witch in Hogwarts.”

Hermione blushed and stammered, “Thanks.”

“How did you two get so good at that…acting stuff?” asked Ron.

Harry and Ginny grinned at each other. “Well,” Harry said, “It’s just lying. We just got really carried away in the emotions. You have to say it like you believe it. You have to be a character, someone for whom what you are saying is true for.”

“When it was really going well,” Ginny said, “when it really heated up, the emotions just flowed from me, and it just…worked. Felt really good when it was going right.”

Hermione smiled at the couple with pride for them.

“So, you invented a false prophecy on Friday evening,” Ron said, “That sure makes the rest of the weekend pale by comparison. What ya got planned?”

Harry and Ginny both looked excited, practically bouncing in their seats. “We have an appointment with Professor McGonagall tomorrow afternoon,” Harry said, “for our first attempt at the full animagus transformations.”

“Fascinating,” Hermione declared, “Can we come and watch?”

Ron shot her an amused glare.

“Sure,” Harry and Ginny both answered.

Ron met up with his friends for an early lunch that Saturday morning after he had a lie in through breakfast. Ron, not normally one to miss meals, attacked his lunch with enthusiasm. Thus happily missing the conversation between Hermione and the perhaps soon to be animagus couple. Hermione was fascinated with the animagus transformation process, one generally known as an arduous one. If Ron were cognizant of the conversation, he would have been glad to not have his breakfast spoiled by the gruesome talk of flesh, bone and transformations.

After Ron finished with his lengthy repast, the group of friends stood from the Gryffindor table and proceeded happily to their afternoon appointment with Professor McGonagall. No sooner had they entered the classroom than they were met with a tabby cat sitting on the teacher’s desk, looking at them with unblinking, steely eyes.

“Hello, Professor,” Harry said to the cat.

The others quickly greeted her as well.

The cat leapt from her perch on the desk, transforming into the normally stern Transfiguration Professor.
Harry felt tightening in his body, his arms and his legs. He felt the changes roll through him; closing his eyes to distract himself from the changes he could feel in his face.

He felt his jaw narrow and lengthen. His teeth rearranged themselves, becoming sharper and longer. His tongue lengthened and turned from the fleshy and wide to something different. His tongue was longer and thinner; easily wrapping around his teeth when he opened his mouth experimentally as he was still changing.

His shoulders pulled in to his chest, which had started to change shape. He involuntarily pitched forward, perching on his fingertips and toes automatically. He could feel his rib cage contract in a manner completely different from breathing; stretching forward and in from the sides, rather than expanding and contracting. His torso retracted as his organs shrank. His hips and thighs narrowed while his thighbones shortened. His knees moved from halfway from his hips to the floor to level with the bottom of his ribcage. The bones in his feet lengthened as his feet drew from a flat contact pad to the balls of his feet. His toes contracted together and his nails grew into thick claws, narrowed and extremely sharp. His arms had a similar transformation. His upper arms and shoulders contracted in toward his chest, while his forearms only narrowed as his tendons narrowed while his thighbones shortened. His knees moved from halfway from his hips to the floor to level with the bottom of his ribcage. The bones in his feet lengthened as his feet drew from a full contact pad to the balls of his feet. His toes contracted together and his nails grew into thick claws, narrowed and extremely sharp. His arms had a similar transformation. His upper arms and shoulders contracted in toward his chest, while his forearms only narrowed as his tendons shortened and became more taut. His fingers contracted and shortened forming paws with four fingers, while his thumb retreated up above his wrist, becoming ancillary. All over his body the fine hairs that cover the human form grew and filled in, forming a rich black fur that rippled with concealed strength. His face was broad and regal. His eyes changed from an emerald green with round pupils to an even more haunting, deeper.
bottle green with a panther’s unfathomably deep black, round pupils. On his forehead appeared a light grey in the sea of mottled black in the shape of a lightning bolt. Without close examination, it would never be noticed.

As his transformation completed, his mind having catalogued the changes, he opened his eyes to realize that his transformation held no pain. He had expected the transformation of his bones and muscles to cause excruciating pain at first. He thought that he would have to get used to the changes before his body could adapt. Yet, it didn’t fill him with pain. His mind catalogued the changes without his pain receptors dancing wildly in his mind. He looked around and found the details sharp in the lit room. He could smell his surroundings. There were four living smells in the room. He lazily licked the air, drawing it in and rubbing it across the roof of his mouth. He was assaulted with the more intense flavor of the others in the room as the scent molecules traveled from his mouth up his Jacobson’s organ where he tasted the smells in the air. He was now able to analyze the scents around the room.

He walked around the room, stopping at each person. ‘The older one smells like a feline, a cousin,’ his instincts told him. His intellect recognized that he could smell Professor McGonagall’s cat form. He merely passed over the next figure. He could smell another feline on her, but it was not a threat to him, or so reported his instinct. His intellect knew it was Hermione and her cat, Crookshanks, that he could sense.

The next person did peak his interest. This one was male, but he was concealing something. Harry’s panther instinct identified the smell as food. This one held food that it wanted. Harry’s intellect was equally fascinated. The smell that he was trying to identify was only reported by his current instincts as what could only be translated as carrion, or Harry guessed, dry meat.

Harry raised his large paw to the pocket of the robe that Ron was wearing. He batted it a couple of times, letting a low rumbling growl before he opened his mouth and turned the growl into a little verbalization, almost a whine.

Ron was startled. No one had said anything as Harry had stalked down the line of friends, being torn between fascination and instinctual fear.

“Ron,” said Hermione, “What’s in that pocket?”

“Um,” said Ron, “Just some beef jerky.”

Professor McGonagall snickered to herself before gaining composure. “Mr. Weasley,” she said, “He seems to want it. I would suggest that you give it to him.”

“But that’s my snack,” whined Ron.

“And the instinctual part of him is probably telling him to rip you to shreds because he can smell it on you,” she advised him.

“What!?!?” screamed Ron.

This scream startled Harry, who jumped back in a defensive crouch, ready to pounce, emitting a warning growl.

Ron jumped back as well. He quickly reached into his pocket and pulled out a large piece of peppered beef jerky that his brother Bill had sent him from a recent trip abroad.

The black panther pounced on the thrown meat and proceeded to devour the morsel while stretching out on the floor and holding the piece between his large paws.

The others watched with fascination as he ripped dried strips from the small mass.

After he finished satisfied, he stood and walked to the last person in the room. This female had a wonderfully familiar scent, his panther instincts registered. His instincts quickly identified this woman as his mate, as she smelled of his human form blended with her own wonderful natural scent. Harry’s intellect was happy to note this from his instinct, that Ginny smelled of him, was marked as his. He rubbed his sleek body against her legs, causing her to giggle. She knelt down and stroked his smooth fur.

“Mmm,” she purred for him, “Aren’t you pretty,” she complemented, “And so strong feeling,” she continued as she stroked his lean, powerful body.

Ron bristled. This just seemed so wrong to be seeing his little sister stroking a big cat who was really his best friend. The whole scene just seemed so…obscene.

“Perhaps it’s time you changed back, Mr. Potter,” Professor McGonagall stated.

Harry’s cat form turned to acknowledge the Professor. The group watched the transformation in reverse as he stretched upright changing back into a wizard in school robes. His glasses were back, perched on the bridge of his nose and all of his clothing back in exactly the same place it had been before it became part of his transformation.

“Very good, Mr. Potter,” the Professor said with pride in her student. “Fifty points for Gryffindor.”

Harry blushed, “Thank you, Professor.” He smiled at his friends as they congratulated his achievement. He hugged first Hermione with brotherly enthusiasm and then Ginny with other than brotherly intentions. In his excitement he captured her mouth for a quick celebratory snog.

They broke apart at Professor McGonagall’s clearing of throat. “Enough, you two,” she said without a hint of disapproval in her voice. “It is now Miss Weasley’s turn for her transformation.”

Ginny looked nervous. She smiled to the Professor in acknowledgement of her turn before closing her eyes and scrunching her face in concentration. It was a bare minute before the Transfiguration Professor observed Ginny’s fervent nod.
Professor McGonagall raised her wand and performed the complex pattern with the expertise of long years of practice. "Hominis Instar Muto Animus!" she intoned for the second time that afternoon.

Ginny immediately began to shrink rapidly. Her robes melted into her body, changing to a sheen of healthy feathers across her back, black tiled with white edges. Simultaneously, her body morphed to a compact form supporting two strong pointed wings, which she flexed out from her body. Her face changed, becoming quite small and covered with a mottled grey with nearly a red under-tone that seemed to come out in the reflection of light from its surface. Her eyes were unfathomable black orbs surrounded by stark blue-grey skin giving way to the feathered face. Her whole new skull seemed to be made for the sole purpose of supporting the powerful beak. The top half was hooked and sharp to the down turned point. The bottom beak nestled into the top, concealing the sharp hard tongue of the species. Her chest feathers were white dappled with deep grey that shone in the light with a red hue. Her legs and feet transformed into thin, but powerful, appendages with blue-grey skin over bone and tendon below the knee and above the knee, her feathers gave the impression of fluffy legwarmers, the same color combination as her chest. Her feet were now powerful, clawed grippers, useful for picking rodents from field grass and mercilessly breaking their necks before their beak ripped the flesh from the bone.

After she finished her rapid transformation, she stood on the floor in her falcon form eyeing the other occupants of the room. Her instincts served her, reporting the occupants of the room as neither prey nor predator.

Hopping a couple of times, she extended her large wings to their four and a half foot wingspan and gave a couple of large experimental flaps before taking a leap forward and pushing herself into the air. She vaulted to the top of the ceiling and circled the crown several times, letting out a high screech.

Her friends and mentor below looked on in true awe.

After several laps she glided down and alighted onto Harry’s shoulders, her high vantage and keen eyes having no problems identifying her mate.

Harry grinned broadly. They had both been successful. He reached up and stroked the soft feathers on Ginny’s falcon breast. After several minutes of calm bliss, Ginny sprung from his shoulder and transformed midair. She came down hard onto her feet, bending at the knees. She immediately launched herself into Harry’s waiting arms, ecstatic at her success.

"Very good, Miss Weasley," the Professor said proudly. "If I might suggest, until you get used to the form and the transformations, stick with the solid ground for the change." She smiled at the happy redhead. "And fifty points to you as well for a magnificent transformation on the first try."

Ginny squeaked happily and launched herself into a group hug with her brother and her friend, pulling Ron and Hermione together in celebration.
Wilhelm Vaisey was dragged before the Dark Lord at his own request. He and his father had gone to see Voldemort to pass on the information that seemed more important to the young man than anything else pressing. His father, Gunter, knew nothing of what Wilhelm was to tell the Dark Lord, only that it could mean a bad turn in the war for their side if the information was not passed. While Gunter was able to walk unharrassed, Wilhelm, as a non-member had to be escorted, and Death Eater escorts were not known for their wont to do anything easily, as such, he was dragged before their Master as they did with all others.

"What is this whelp doing before me?" hissed Voldemort.

"My Lord…" Wilhelm started only to be interrupted with a cruciatus curse inflicting unbelievable pain throughout his body.

"Do not speak until you are spoken to, child!" hissed Voldemort.

"Sir," Gunter said bravely, "The boy overheard something that he thought you would need to know, Master," he dropped to his knees, not wanting the same curse on himself.

"Very well, young Wilhelm," he said, showing that he did know who this was, but did not care. "Tell me what it is you overheard."

"Sir, there is a new prophecy," he said with a definite tremble in his voice. "It says that if you harm Harry Potter’s love, Ginny Weasley, he will gain the power to defeat you."

"Doubtful," Voldemort said, "But worth considering. Come forward. I wish to hear exactly what was said."

Wilhelm cautiously approached. As soon as he was in reach, Voldemort grabbed the young man by the back of his neck, holding him steady with his surprisingly strong left hand.

"Show me what you heard," he hissed, pointing his wand at Vaisey’s left temple and cast Legilimens.

Wilhelm Vaisey screamed at the anguish of the Dark Lord’s brutal intrusion to his mind. It seemed an interminable amount of time before his head was released from its prison. When released he hadn’t the strength to stand after Voldemort’s harsh raping of his mind. He collapsed to his future master’s feet, spent.

"Thank you, my loyal servant. You will do well in our organization. You show great potential," Voldemort praised.

The Dark Lord turned his attention to the boy’s father, "And you, Gunter. For aiding in bringing this forward, I shall spare your wife’s life and your family position."

Gunter sputtered in shock.

"Yes, I am aware of your wife’s attempts at my denouncement," Voldemort said. "You did an admirable job of restraining her and preventing her betrayal. I will overlook your weakness in not ending her blood traitor existence. When this is all over, she will be bent to your will."

"Thank you, my lord," was all the pureblood patriarch could say.

"Spread the word," Voldemort addressed the sea of white masks in attendance. "No one is to bring any harm to the Weasley girl. Strong magics fuel this prophecy and we shall crush Potter long before it comes to pass."

Harry was sleeping quite soundly, snuggled deep under the warm covers on his bed. He drifted slowly away from a very pleasant dream with one other main character, one that his conscious mind knew that he loved and his unconscious mind obviously wanted to explore a lot more. Hmm… Harry definitely wondered if she really looked like he imagined under those robes. The soft skin. The gentle curves. The plump…

Harry shook himself from his remembrance of his dream and the last vestige of his slumber but had to stop suddenly. Something was wrong. He had that prickly feeling in the back of the neck. Someone was watching him. Harry stopped deathly still and slowly parted his eyelids. His naked vision presented him with a smiling Weasley, one of the twins, who was actually close enough to be just somewhat blurry rather than just clouds of color without the aide of his glasses.

Now, waking to see someone less than an inch from your face is not a pleasant experience. Some would say that it is quite startling. Watching, you would have guessed that Harry would be one of those people to vote for startling if given a choice, when he scrambled back from the looming figure to the top corner of his bed in a defensive position.

Really, his discomfort was not solely at waking up to find someone there, which only was part of his distress. To wake from an erotic dream to find yourself faced with a brother of the other starring member of said dream and with visual evidence of the incomplete fantasy…evident, well, it could
easily explain why Harry was balled up defensively, covering any…evidence. He really didn’t want to have to explain what he had been dreaming about. The twins were corkers and all, but no brother is that corking.

"Nice boxers."

"Um…thanks?" Harry said wearily as the last threads of consciousness came into his grasp and he took his glasses from the nightstand.

"Hearts?" the twin asked.

Harry blushed. This really was not someone that he had envisioned seeing his new silk boxers.

Oh, dammed. There was that other time with Ron’s prank (the berk) but those had not been as embarrassing as they were solid color, not one of the patterned ones that Ginny and Tonks had selected for him.

Harry steeled his resolve and swallowed back the unusual, sticky taste in his mouth, reminding himself that he really needed to brush his teeth before he talked to anyone civilized. But first, he would give as good as he got.

"Your sister seemed to like them," Harry said bravely.

The Weasley’s face in question stormed over at the implication.

"And why has my sister had the opportunity to be admiring your choice of undergarment?" he asked dangerously.

"Normally," Harry said after viciously pounding his fear to the back corner of his mind. "I’d say that that subject was none of your business, but I could just point out when your dear youngest brother put me displaying my undergarments in all of their glory to the population of the school as one instance, but I’ll confess that she saw these when she picked them out for me."

A smile crept onto the twin’s face, "What would mum think of such a thing?" he asked slyly. "Doesn’t seem right proper, a young girl pawing through boy's unmentionables in a store."

Harry smiled, "Your mum knows perfectly well. I’m sure that they shared that piece of girltalk sometime during the summer. She knew that Ginny was going with me to help select clothes and those are clothes."

"Okay, loverboy," the twin replied, "Just don’t let me hear about you doing anything inappropriate with my baby sister now, you hear?"

"Sure," Harry said. He really would, he’d make sure that the Weasley boys didn’t hear about anything inappropriate. What actually happened and what they heard about could be two different things. "What are you doing here, um, Fred?" Harry asked, guessing as to the identity of his assailant.

Fred presented his hands to Harry. Fred flipped his hands over and over before showing his bare arms in an exaggerated muggle magician shtick. He held his hand in front of Harry’s face and flipped it a couple of more times to show nothing there and then with a flick of the wrist, he brought a card from nowhere clutched between his thumb and forefinger.

Harry groaned, "Not you too."

Fred smiled broadly. Harry knew who this was with certainty now. Fred was the only Weasley left to prank him and the deadline was looming. They had less than two weeks until the end of the fall term and the start of the Christmas Holliday.

"But of course," Fred affirmed. "Save the best for last, I say."

"What now," Harry groaned in dread.

"And spoil the surprise?" Fred beamed.

Harry reluctantly took the gilded card and read his fate.

"Fred Weasley," he read aloud, "A bit more than a pocketful of posies."

Harry stared at the card in wonder, recalling a children’s rhyme he had heard the merrily playing children of the schoolyard singing.

"What does this mean, is it dung bombs?" Harry worried. "Am I going to stink? Is that your prank?"

"Why would you think that?" a bewildered Fred asked.

"The child’s rhyme," Harry said as if it were incredibly obvious. "Ring a Ring O'Roses? About the black plague?"

Bewilderment reigned in Fred’s uncomprehending eye.

"Ring a ring o'roses,' Harry sang, ‘A pocketful of posies’, ‘ah-tishoo, ah-tishoo’, ‘We all fall down’?" Harry finished questioning at the end.

"What in the name of Merlin does that have to do with some plague?" Fred asked.

Harry huffed. "Ring a ring o'roses' refers to the mark a muggle disease of several hundred years ago left on the skin when someone was infected," Harry informed him. "People would carry a pocket full of flowers, posies, to cover the smell of death and disease and some believed they would ward off the disease itself. ‘Ah-tishoo, ah-tishoo’ is like a sneezing sound and refers to people getting sick when they advanced in the disease and
died, you know "We all fall down"? It killed a third of the British population at the time. It took more than a hundred years to return to pre-plague levels."

"And Ron says that Hermione is the smart one," Fred said as Harry blushed. "Angelina suggested it when we came up with the prank. Sounds awful gruesome when you think about it."

"Sorry," Harry apologized. "Can't help it. Gruesome is hand in hand with my life."

"How maudlin," Fred deadpanned. "Oh well, have fun today," Fred piped up, suddenly chipper.

Without even a cursory glance about the room, Fred disappeared through the door.

At the thought of the day ahead, Harry groaned and slid himself under the covers pulling them tightly over his head. Maybe this day would go away if he was just able to ignore it.

His thoughts of a blissful day of ignorance were interrupted with a poking to his side. He cautiously lowered the covers to which he was greeted with the sight of another redheaded male. Why, just once, couldn't it be a redheaded female that greeted him in his bed? Thoughts of waking up to Mrs. Weasley made him shudder.

"Time to get up, Harry," Ron said. "Was that George that I saw leaving?"

"No," he said handing over the card, "Fred."

After a breakfast full of speculation by the surrounding Gryffindors as to the meaning of the prank announcement, Harry found himself in transfiguration with the Slytherins. He had been frank with his friends at the table about what little information he had. In total it didn't add up to much. Now he could just go about his day waiting for the action to start. Perhaps the waiting was the best and worst of pranks, the nervous anticipation.

"Hello class," Harry was broken out of his thoughts. "Today," said Professor McGonagall, "we will be continuing with transfiguring inanimate objects into living objects. Today's task is to transfigure a portion of the dirt in a small pot into a plant. Can anyone tell me a difficulty of this?" she asked looking around for any volunteers. "Miss Granger?" she prompted to the ever-present hand.

"Judging the correct amount of dirt to transfigure, professor," Hermione said confidently.

"Correct," the teacher said. "And another, Mr. Potter?" she said, skipping the thought of asking for volunteers.

Harry winced, "Um…the…dirt being many different pieces instead of just one?"

"Very good Mr. Potter," the teacher said. "An aggregate base material requires more care than a single cohesive base. Mr. Malfoy, can you tell me another difficulty?"

"The…uh…roots professor?" Draco answered with a guess.

"Yes, indeed," she answered. "The roots have to be made at the same time as the rest of the plant or you will not have a living, viable plant. Now class the general incantation for this transfiguration is Novota Florae. Recall your wand movement from the beginning of this term for the change from stone to bird as it is the same except for a less dramatic jab at the end. Pay attention to me and then proceed with the pots in front of you."

She waved and jabbed her wand while saying the incantation, causing a fern to grow from the reducing mass of soil in the pot.

"As you can see," Professor McGonagall said, "I pictured what I wanted before and during the casting of the charm. As with all magic, it is important that you maintain your concentration in order to achieve the correct results," she advised. "If anyone needs an idea for a clear picture of what plant they wish to transfigure, you may either copy what I have done or may come to the front and find what they wish in one of these catalogues. Proceed."

As the class bustled around him, Harry searched his recollection for a suitable plant. Beside him, Hermione was lost in a look of contemplation. On the other side of the bushy haired genius, Ron looked lost in his scrunched up version of a concentration face.

Harry settled on the pot of gardenias that he noticed at the Burrow. He had never seen anyone but Mrs. Weasley tend them and the results were amazing. A healthier plant could not be found.

Harry was the first in their little group to attempt the incantation, as the other two were still concentrating on the images in their own mind.

"Novota Florae," he said as he tried to precisely wave his wand at the pot in front of him.

From his wand sprung a bouquet of flowers. Harry knitted his brow at the misfire of the spell. There was no way that this should be happening. He thought that he said the spell right. He did the wand movement as prescribed. Yet he ended up with a bouquet of white roses. He didn't even get the right kind of flowers that he was concentrating on.

He looked to his left to ask Hermione what she made of it, but did not have the heart to break the concentration of either of his friends, as Hermione would be unhappy to have any distractions before she successfully completed the task and Ron just looked too…well, too intent to interrupt.

Harry decided to use an old muggle adage. If at first you don't succeed, try, try again.
“Novota Florae,” he said with more force, this time picturing red roses, their stems, leaves and roots. Again from his wand sprung roses, again wrapped as a bouquet in fine tissue paper and a silver translucent cloth. At least they’re the right color, Harry thought, staring at the red roses. How about another color?

Harry concentrated on all aspects that he could imagine of a yellow rose as if it were living in the barren pot in front of him. He concentrated on changing the dirt, in all of its varied glory, into the plant of his imagination.

“Novota Florae,” he said with determination. From his wand, as he was looking very closely now, came not one but two bouquets of yellow roses, each perfect in their detail.

Frustrated with his failed efforts, Harry picked up one of the bouquets of roses and stalked up to the professor where she sat at her desk, taking a moment to grade some of the parchments turned in at the beginning of class. Harry stood in front of her and cleared his throat as she had when interrupting him so many times before. She stopped her marking with the dreaded red-inked quill and looked up at Harry.

“Yes, Mr. Potter?” she asked. “How can I help you?”

Harry held the bouquet of flowers that he had mistakenly conjured and held them up for her inspection. “Look at these, Professor.”

A confused look crossed her face. “Really, Mr. Potter,” she said quietly, “This is quite inappropriate and as I recall you already have a girlfriend.”

Harry was forced to shake his head and look from the Professor’s confused face to what was in his hand…a bouquet of red roses. Oh, damn. Harry stammered, “This…Oh! No Professor…this, I mean, this is what happened when I tried to cast the spell,” he blurted out amidst a furious blush.

Professor McGonagall’s brow raised in query, “Did you manage to miscast the spell as an amorous spell on yourself by accident, Mr. Potter?” she asked at barely above a whisper.

Harry’s entire face heated to resemble a Weasley at their best. “N-no Professor. This was conjured when I attempted the spell.” Harry surreptitiously looked around to find, to his relief, that none of the students were paying him any mind.

Professor McGonagall had to struggle to maintain her stern face. The situation was just too comical, but years of dealing with intentionally and unintentionally humorous students had built a fabulous immunity to expressed emotions. After all, one Saint Valentine’s Day a straight-faced James Potter had presented her with a similar bouquet of red roses and a heart shaped box of Honeyduke’s Best without her ever breaking into the laughter that was threatening her inside. She was nearly certain at the time that it had been the result of a lost bet with Mr. Black.

To cover for the cracking façade that was surfacing in the corner of her lips, she turned to retrieve another dirt-laden pot from the table behind her desk. Professor Sprout had been gracious to supply many spare pots for Professor McGonagall’s sixth year students. By the time she returned to the emerald-eyed student with the pot her demeanor was that of a strict professor not an amused adult.

“Now, Mr. Potter,” she said to the student, “Perform the spell again so that I may observe. Picture a pot of bluebells this time, if you will.”

“Yes, Professor,” Harry said. He concentrated on the image of the potted bluebells and pushed as he said, “Novota Florae.”

From his wand, once again, sprung a fresh bouquet of wrapped roses, this time blue in color.

“Bloody hell,” Harry exclaimed.

“Language, Mr. Potter.”

“Sorry,” Harry said sheepishly. “Looks like the only thing that I can change is the color of the bloom.”

“Yes,” she said. “I do not believe that I have ever seen quite that blue of a rose before.”

“Well,” said Harry, “You’re welcome to it.”

“It would seem that you have been pranked again, Mr. Potter,” she stated. “It would seem,” Harry said. “It was Fred Weasley this time. Caught me asleep in my bed in the dorm this morning.”

She smiled at the humor in his voice. “I do believe that Albus has said that you have been practicing at putting more power behind your spells at will? Try putting as much force behind the spell as you can manage. This will, most likely, break the enchantment that has been placed on you.”

“O-Kay,” Harry said dubiously. He concentrated on something that he thought might help. Maybe if he were to picture a mixed color flower he would be successful. He decided on a pot of Harlequin Flowers, a mixed color bulb that his aunt had ordered through the mail in an attempt to best her neighbors in the unofficial ongoing neighborhood competition for the best yard. Harry slowly opened his reservoir for the spell, something that he would normally never do, but there was little chance of a bouquet of flowers killing or even severely harming someone.

Once his power was opened fully, he cast, “Novota Florae,” to the surprise of the rest of the class. Where, before, they were not paying attention to anything but their own potential potted plants, they were now staring around them as the entire class was coated in thousands of roses in all colors and varieties. A four-foot deep layer of beauty covered the room with a rich, pungent smell of fresh roses. Albeit pleasant, the smell was almost
“Mr. Potter,” Professor McGonagall said, “I do believe that today you shall be excused from classes. Let us hope that the problem is routed by tomorrow. See me after this lesson concludes.”

“Yes, Professor,” he said only to be met with the background sound of several girls giggling.

The giggling was broken with the violent sound of someone sneezing. The sneezing continued as all eyes turned to one Draco Malfoy with his droopy eyelids, bloodshot eyes and beet red nose. He looked pathetically to the teacher in a moment of respite before continuing his sneezing.

“It would seem, Mr. Malfoy,” Professor McGonagall said, “That you are allergic to rose pollen. Miss Parkinson, please escort Mr. Malfoy to the hospital wing for treatment.”

A brief look of disgust crossed her face in nothing more than a brief glimpse before the sneering queen was back with a mask of compassion. She led him through the sea of roses on the way to the door. Their movement must have only stirred up more pollen, as he launched into a fresh bout of sneezes.

After a short bit of instruction, the class proceeded to vanish the flowers by the dozen. Covertly, several girls in the room set one or more bundles into their book bags for a purpose known only to them.

After consulting with the Professor, Harry discovered that he was still able to transform into his panther form, causing him to decide on a day of running and terrorizing any small woodland creatures that he could find in a snow covered glade hidden from the rest of the school by the Quidditch pitch. The day probably would end up rating better than most for the fun that he had exploring the instincts of the large cat.
After her last class of the day, Ginny decided that she had enough of exercising her gray matter and wanted some fun. Her day hadn’t been going how she would have designed it, had she a choice. Her classes were the most evil combination of boring and difficult that made your brains want to retreat through whatever orifice is available. As if to compound the dreadful day, she had missed Harry at lunch and not seen Ron or Hermione to be able to find his whereabouts.

She decided that, by now, either or both of the lovebirds should be back in the Gryffindor common room, and would be able to point her to her boyfriend so that he could do his duty and comfort her after a bad day.

Sure enough, both lovebirds were in the common room acting in a manner that should have been saved for somewhere more private. Ginny really had to get Hermione to a healer to see if she was brain damaged. How she could find her brother attractive enough to do that with is a mystery. Just the thought made her shiver.

Unfortunately neither Ron nor Hermione were any help, as they both spouted the same drivel about Fred’s prank resulting in a room full of flowers and Harry with a day off. If she knew that that was all she had to do to get a day off, she would have paid more attention to the twins earlier in life. And what was this, a room full of roses and none for her? She huffed. All that and they could not give her a clue as to where to find Harry.

Ginny trudged out of the common room on her trek to find her wayward boyfriend. Her search brought her to all likely corners of the great school but with no results in the positive. He was not haunting any of his normal locations and she knew that she didn’t have to check any of their joint locations, as they both found them boring without the other.

Her final place to search within the school was the astronomy tower, where Harry occasionally liked to find his peace. She smiled at the memory of his peaceful expression that normally was reserved for only during non-Voldemort enhanced sleep. The nightmares were not frequent, but did rob Harry of his rest on occasion. That peaceful expression could only be seen during waking hours if Harry could find complete personal peace, something that both Harry and Ginny knew from experience to be all too rare.

It didn’t take long for Ginny to search the classroom tower and discover no sign of Harry. She heaved a calming breath of the frigid air and felt an inner urging to spread her wings…well arms. This reaction was new to her and took her by surprise. She had never felt her animal self brush her mind while she was in human form before. She stared out over the clear blue sky and felt the urge to soar grow in her chest, pushing to be released. The thought of unaided flight in the open appealed to her and her current need for relaxation. Maybe while she was up she could find where Harry had gone.

She stood on the edge of the parapet and opened her senses. She embraced her animal self and let the transformation take over. The falcon in the back of her mind came quickly to the fore, her human instincts replaced by the avian raptor instincts, as her body and clothes were replaced by the light and nimble falcon with spotted feathers. She unfurled her wings and gave a mighty heave as she launched herself from the stone into open air two hundred feet from the unforgiving ground beneath, really a silly thing for a fifteen-year-old girl to do.

Her wings caught immediately as the momentum created by the vertical force of gravity interacting with the mass of the falcon was translated to forward motion by the horizontal wing surface, causing air to move from the front to the back of the feathery wings, creating a localized low pressure zone overpowering said vertical force of gravity and causing flight. Luckily she didn’t have to understand any of the physics of flight to safely navigate the airflows, her instincts serving her well.

It was some minutes after the stress of the day has melted away before she pulled herself from the thrill of soaring in the open air, riding the rising thermals as if an expert, to the task at hand of finding Harry.

She drifted quickly from her vaulted perch on the top of a thermal back to the castle. The snow was nearly virgin over the dormant lawns. The only evidence of living humans beside the path plowed by trudging students to the greenhouses or Care of Magical Creatures was a single, solo set of tracks leading to the Quidditch pitch. It was obvious to her at that point. Harry had gone there to relax and play. She would have to aid him in this pursuit.

She was surprised to find the tracks change half way across the pitch. Gone were the two booted feet of a wizard, only to be replaced by the staggered sign of a large running cat. The tracks seemed alive with the bounding joy their maker had while forging them. She consciously followed the tracks out of the field and past the structure to a concealed meadow beyond. It was an image from a storybook. A wide meadow blanketed by fluffy snow, surrounded by picturesque pines. Later Ginny would realize how out of place a small forest of pines surrounding a meadow is in the Scottish highlands. The forest had been magically planted centuries before when a headmaster had fallen in love with the idea of Christmas trees and garlands during the festive season. Ginny would realize that the Christmas trees Hagrid always dragged in for the Christmas celebration had come from somewhere, even as out of place as they were in Scotland. The blanket of snow was only interrupted by a strangely unfrozen stream cutting a swath diagonally through the pristine meadow.

Harry was easily the most noticeable current feature of the meadow. Where else would you see a midnight black panther standing statue still staring at the snow?
The panther launched into the air soundlessly and plunging into the white surface in a dive, startling Ginny. Moments later he pulled himself from the subzero blanket with a small animal within his jaw’s grasp. The mouse had built itself a home in snow tunnels, plucking and consuming the foliage left abandoned to whither and die below the snow blanket.

Seeing her mate kill and consume the rodent caused her falcon instincts to react with need. The falcon instincts wanted food, wanted prey. She scanned the surrounding area with her keen eyes as she circled, seeing no other living creature but her and Harry. This caused her Weasley half to assert itself and demand retribution in the form of mischief. She gave in to her newest option and dived at his unseeing back. She gathered speed before extending her taloned feet and driving herself into his broad shoulders. She bounced off and resumed driving her wings to gain back her altitude and momentum.

Harry felt the hard impact throw him to the side. He continued the roll and landed on his paws in a fighting stance. His claws extended, he looked for any threat, but confusion set in when he found none. His confusion abated when he heard the distinctive call of a raptor. He swung his powerful, furry head skyward and immediately found the source. Everything in him, both instinct and intellect, reported the identity of that particular falcon as his mate.

As he marveled at his orbiting girlfriend, his instinct told him to see to his mate’s needs. Harry realizes that, as a panther, he was capable of hunting the hidden prey but the same could not be said of his girlfriend. The snow drove all small rodents underground and unavailable to the falcon. Harry slinked several meters away from his last catch before stopping dead and cocking his head to the right and then left. He heard the distinctive skittering of a small rodent in yet another Warren of tunnels in the soft snow. Sensing the rodent pass into his kill zone, Harry coiled his muscles, preparing for his strike.

He loosed his coiled muscles and struck into the air, diving into the ground fang first, crashing through the snow and closing his mouth around another morsel. The entire move was not natural by any means to a panther. To learn this hunting style more common to snow bound canine, Harry had taken the report from his animal senses that there was a something below the snow and his intellect had connected this with what it had seen on the telly of a snow fox using this method for capturing prey below the snow and the instincts of the cat had answered with a plan.

All of this resulted in the stunned rodent in Harry’s jaws.

Ginny was fascinated intellectually and hungry instinctually as she circled the cat. She watched Harry fling the live rodent into the air, causing her instincts to curse her lack of ability to catch a mouse in the same way.

The large cat sprung forward to corral the rodent and started to bat it around, playing with the poor creature. The cat reached forward and recaptured the frightened mouse with a small nod of recognition to the falcon. Curious, the falcon swooped from its orbit toward a closer location for better observation. As she approached, she could feel time slow as the big cat flung its head sharply and released the mouse back into a high arch. A moment of bafflement was quickly replaced with understanding, causing her to change her swoop into a power dive for the flying morsel. It had dawned on her that her mate was providing for her the prey that she couldn’t obtain on her own. The feelings of love and gratitude outshone the pride that wanted to refuse the charity. Her warmer feelings reminded her that a meal provided by her mate was not charity.

She shot forward with her talons at the fore and snatched the mouse from the air, her instincts guiding her flight on an intercept course. For its last moments of life, the mouse provided the falcon with the distinct pleasure of a predator, the feeling of the desperate struggle from prey within its grasp. Just before landing, a casual twist of its talon ended the life of the rodent, turning it into simple food.

She wasted no time in consuming the rodent by tearing it with her powerful beak, the hooked upper making short work of the soft flesh and brittle bone. This meal, while minute for a panther was quite satisfying for the falcon, satiating her hunger and her instincts.

She hopped to the reclining feline and nipped at his lips affectionately, the closest to a kiss that could be achieved between the disparate species. With a soft lick from his rough tongue, he accepted her thanks. He curled up into a tight ball, to which she answered by hopping into the nest that his curled up form provided.

It was not long before the cold of the surrounding snow got to them and they both transformed to their human selves, as if by mutual agreement.

“I don’t think that either of our animal forms is meant for the winter snow,” Harry laughed.

Ginny laughed in return but agreed. She leaned into him and they shared a light kiss. The kiss heated up in no time as her hands found residence on the back of his head, tangling themselves in his hair. Harry’s hands moved from her shoulder to the small of her back as he pulled her against his torso, suddenly enjoying her salient features, even through the bulky robes.

Ginny’s hands, as a matched pair, moved from the back of his head, past his shoulders and spine to new territory. With a bold flair, her hands stray past his beltline and found positive purchase with two handfuls of flesh that made Harry gasp into her mouth. She wasted no opportunity and deepened the kiss, thrusting her tongue into his in an aggressive move. Harry recovered from her continuing purchase on his bun and returned the aggressive kiss with his own tongue coming into the action. Pleasure flitted throughout both of their bodies as he massaged her tongue with his own.

Ginny used her position to pull them flush together using her hold on Harry’s posterior. Moaning, Harry moved his attention from Ginny’s lips and mouth along her jaw until he nipped at the ridge of her ear causing a sharp intake of breath from the teenage witch.

The slowly flickering flame within Ginny roared to life with his kisses, but it was the warm breath in her ear and the nibbling on her ear that weakened her knees. Seeking a more advantageous position, Ginny pushed him suddenly, sending him to the soft snow. Their grip on each other pulled Ginny with him, sending his breath out in a whoosh as her body landed on his. She moved immediately to the junction of his neck and shoulder and attacked his pulse point. She nibbled, kissed and sucked the spot, causing him to moan in pleasure, all of his attention focused on her none too gentle ministrations.
Before he could return the favor, he became aware of the damp condition of his freezing back. He grabbed her shoulders and pulled her up to capture his burning lips. He poured every last ounce of his very soul into the connection for some long final moments. Her writhing on top of him was causing many pleasurable reactions in his body, but the frigid condition of the surrounding environment couldn’t be ignored.

Ginny was enjoying every moment, every caress, when suddenly Harry’s tight grip pulling her into himself, was changed to a soft push away from his body. After a moment of resistance, she stopped her activities and pulled back, looking in his eyes with an unspoken question.

“Ginny,” Harry said, “despite my body screaming how brilliant that was, we have to be going in.”

“Why?” Ginny asked breathily.

Harry chuckled strangely at the mix of outrage and lust in her eyes.

“It’s late,” Harry said, “and I’m freezing.”

She looked down on him in sympathy before the real world reinserted itself into her consciousness, registering the cold she was now feeling in her extremities.

“I guess,” she acknowledged. “And you do have a DA meeting tonight.”

“Yes, we do,” Harry agreed.

“Thanks for the snack,” Ginny smiled back.

“You’re welcome,” he said, “we’ll have to continue this in a warmer setting later.”

Her heart gave a flutter at thoughts of later activities in warmer settings, involving less clothing encumbering their efforts.

Harry happily entered the Room of Requirement that night; the night of its grand re-opening. This was to be the first DA meeting in the magical room after its rebuild and re-enchantment.

It surprised Harry that he was able to complete the complex enchantments. The activity left him proud of himself and his friends. He had certainly gotten a sound sleep during the night after the hours of enchantments that were necessary to rebuild the room’s abilities.

When he finished making requests of the room for the ideal setup, it had ten rows of objects covered with sheets, concealing their identity, and an observation platform that would allow him to see the progress of the students. He had gotten the idea for the new equipment from a book that Hermione had shown him regarding casting dummies that Aurors used in training. The only problem had been that the casting dummies had actually been too violent for a school setting, as they fired back harmful spells that were stored in them by the instructor. His idea was slightly different.

After his preparation, he waited for Ginny and his friends to arrive. Ginny had bid him to go ahead to set up the meeting, as she was going to take a long hot shower and get ready. He agreed, as he would be ready at least twenty minutes before her, even with his own hot shower.

Harry smiled in greeting as Ron and Hermione entered the room hand in hand.

“Hey Harry,” Ron greeted enthusiastically.

“Hey Ron, Hey Hermione,” Harry answered. “Brilliant job on enchanting that dummy. The room copied it perfectly.”

“Thanks Harry,” she said.

“Blimey, what happened to your neck, Harry?” Ron asked, pointing to a spot at the base of his neck to the right.

“What?” Harry asked in confusion. He silently asked the room for a mirror and one was provided immediately. There at the base of his neck was a decidedly noticeable mark left by his enthusiastic girlfriend. He had a hickey.

Harry did not answer the original question, but simply covered the spot by buttoning his uniform shirt to the top button.

Ron laughs at his best friend and said with the biggest smile he has to offer, “Not to worry there, Harry. It’ll go away in a day or three,” he said. He continued in a stage whisper for Harry’s benefit, “Hermione sometimes gets a bit overzealous too. I think that it’s their way of marking territory.”

Harry laughed as a blushing Hermione socked Ron in the arm for his poorly concealed comment.

“Too much information, man,” Harry grinned.

Ron was saved as students started to flood in through the doors. Harry motioned for them to stop and gather just inside the doors for the explanation of the day’s activities. He was momentarily distracted when Ginny glided up to his side and gave him a hug, the clean fresh Ginny scent sending his mind on a holiday. He shook himself from the distraction when it became evident that the entire Defense Association had turned up for this special session.

“Hello,” he greeted them. “Welcome to the reopening of the Room of Requirements. With this area back open, we’ll be able to use one of the
Harry motioned to Hermione with a nod. She smiled and waved her wand in a practiced movement. The sheets on the hundred’s of practice dummies flew off to an unused corner.

“I ask that we suspend our class learning from the book. You’d be best served to continue with the book on your own outside of class. If you have any questions on one of the spells just ask me or one of the professors,” Harry said to his class. “Today, however, we’ll start using practice dummies that Hermione conjured. They will dodge spells and return simulated spells back at you. I want you to treat this as a duel, despite the returning spells only being simulated.”

Harry smiled at the goggling expressions on the students when faced with the wooden mannequins.

“These practice dummies,” Harry said, “will shield themselves and send simulated spells at you as practice. In their hands are sticks to simulate wands. If you manage to hit them with an expelliarmus, they may lose their wands. They will move to the right and left and can duck. Try not to get hit with their simulated spells and to disable your opponent.”

“How can you have simulated spells?” Asked someone disbelievingly.

“Simple,” Harry said, “magic. They will fire different color sponges with dye to show that you were hit. You’re successful if you can go unmarked. The sponges will travel at the same speed as their colored spell. Okay, everyone in front of a dummy and wands out.”

The previous week Harry had put a lot of his power into the spell for recreating the Room of Requirement, thus allowing for enough space to allow a couple of hundred students to have duels with their dummies at the same time.

Harry blew a coach’s whistle once the students were in place. The students began sending spells at the dummies and all learned that it wouldn’t be as easy as any had hoped. Harry could see from his vantage point that many were having trouble keeping up with the simulated opponents. This would be good for practice.

While Harry had his attention focused on the students, Tonks entered the room and looked on approvingly. She made her way to Harry’s side without a sign showing that he noticed the young metamorph professor.

“Looks like a good use for the new room of requirement,” Tonks said approvingly.

“Thanks,” Harry said after a small flinch. He scolded himself internally for not paying enough attention.

“But won’t some of those spells be too much for the students. Those things can be dangerous,” Tonks said, waving toward the practice dummies.

“I remember when I was in the academy. Those things kicked my tail way more often than I would have liked.”

Harry chuckled and bent down to grab a blue sponge ball that had rolled to his feet.

“No,” he said, “they will just get temporarily messy.”

Harry beaned Tonks in the middle of the chest with the dyed ball.

“You prat,” she yelled, “this is a new silk blouse.”

“Yes,” Harry smiled in return, “nice. Has Remus seen it yet?”

Tonks colored, both from anger and embarrassment. “No, and he never will with it stained like this.”

“Tonks,” Harry said, “are you a witch or not?”

“Harry you can’t get stains out of this kind of silk even with magic,” Tonks said with exasperation. “It hurts the cloth.”

“Then do me a favor,” Harry said, “and step outside the room and come back in.”

“Not going to try to run from me are you Potter?” Tonks threatened.

“Just do it, Professor,” Harry smirked.

With a grumble Tonks stepped out and was astonished to find the stain disappear. She reentered and hugged Harry. Luckily for him the other students were much too busy with their mock duels to see his embarrassment.

“How?” she asked.

“The room’s magical,” Harry said. “Everything it creates is magical and needs the room to supply it with magic to exist. When you leave the room, anything that you have, that the room created, disappears.”

“Yeah, uh…remind me to never create clothing in that room,” Tonks blushed. Harry stared at her sideways and shook himself.

“Don’t even want to think about that,” Harry said quickly.
What’s wrong, Harry?” She asked in a breathy seductive voice. “Don’t you find the thought of me without clothing attractive?”

Harry gulped, “Sure, I just don’t want to think of you and Remus and the Room of Requirement.”

She broke down into peels of laughter, joined later by Harry.

After they recovered, Harry turned serious, “So are you and Remus still dating?”

“As much as we can,” she said with an air of regret.

“As he is the closest thing to family that I want to recognize, the Dursley’s don’t count,” Harry proclaimed, “I feel that I should be the one to continue with a tradition.”

“What’s that Harry?” She asked with little concern, her attention on the dueling students.

Harry stood shoulder to shoulder with her and spoke with just enough volume for her to hear. “If you break his heart, they will be finding your corpse for weeks,” Harry said with complete conviction in his low voice.

Tonks blinked in surprise. She had not expected that from Harry. When she looked into his eye, she gulped and quickly reassured him that it would not become a problem.

“Good, then I can say that I am happy that you two have found happiness,” he said with a sudden jovial expression. “You are happy, right?”

She let a smile break through her intimidation at the hands of the teenager.

“Yeah, I am,” she said matter-of-factly.

“Good,” Harry said with finality.

“Why aren't you out there with them?” Tonks asked.

Harry withdrew his wand for the first time in hours and waved it with a clear enunciation of the gong charm. What happened was not the resounding gong that would have interrupted the practicing students, but a beautiful bouquet of roses. Harry caught them and handed them to the perplexed Professor.

“Fred pranked me,” Harry said. “Now…no useful magic for a day.”

Tonks immediately answered, “This seems plenty useful to me.”

Harry blushed and stammered that he didn’t think of her that way.

“You know,” Tonks said changing the subject and taking pity on the occasionally bashful teen, “the dummies are good and all, but they all do the same thing at the same time. It would be useful if they adapted to the level of the opponent.”

“Yeah, I noticed that,” he said. “I guess that’s because Hermione made the first one yesterday and I just had the room copy it. I’ll try to make them more unpredictable next time.”

“Good,” Professor Tonks said. “See if you can make them more reactive to their opponent, too.”

“I will,” Harry agreed.

“Can they be modified to work like the Auror dummies?” she asked after a moment of silence. “Can they have free movement around the room and send real spells?”

“Hmm,” Harry contemplated. “Yeah, I think they can. Eventually we’ll get to the point that we’re going to need some active opponents.”

Okay. Keep that in mind.”

Simultaneously, the two defense experts moved from their perch to the rows of practicing students and began to offer pointers to improve the performances.

A/N: When this chapter was originally posted, it ended right here with a poll of my readers for which prank was the best. I received hundreds of votes from people with their favorites and many gave reasoning for why one was better than another. Their votes served as the voices in Harry’s head, telling him which one was best when he sat down to decide.

I wish to take this opportunity to thank those, my original readers, for their votes and support. Their encouragement brought me to a stage where I could post it here and share my story with you after it was deleted from FanFiction.net.

Thank you, also, to my new readers for your support and reviews.

And lastly, I believe that we all owe a vote of thanks to the Betas that have given their effort to parts of this story. Thank you to Donalddeutsch, Kat Armstrong, Cateagle and Sparky40sw.
Stay tuned for more story to follow. There is much still to come.
Thank you to my Betas; Cateagle and Sparky40sw.

Ginny entered the Gryffindor common room, thankful to find Harry in the corner at a study table poring over a stack of parchments in concentration. She smiled, proud of him and his hard work, and decided that they both could use a break. She had, after all, just spent two grueling hours in detention with Professor Hagrid for a minor thing. That slimy Slytherin deserved what she got when she said that about her. How could she imply that the only reason someone like Harry would stay with someone like Ginny was if she were shagging him? The nerve! And what about getting a detention? It's Care of Magical Creatures; bats are creatures and the ones she created that came out of Mutty's nostrils were certainly magical, so, magical creatures. What's the problem?

The detention, though, hadn't really been torture. Hagrid had heard the comments by Mutty or whatever her name was. Mutty just seemed to fit. And so, instead of raking up thestral dung, she had spent two hours feeding various forest creatures by hand to ‘Get em use'ta people.’ It hadn't been bad, and her brothers would probably like to know that the unicorns had come right up to her to eat the sweet grain from her hand. If she had her way, she would have to be careful of her interaction with them in the future. The only frustrating thing was Harry's noble streak.

With a smile she sat down hip-to-hip with Harry, glancing at his work.

“What’ya working on, Harry?” she said with a playful voice.

He turned and smiled at her. “Well, I remembered your outing flying the other day,” Harry said. “And I wished that it was something that we could do together, so…” he gestured to the stack of parchment sitting face down to his right and the beginning sketch in front of him.

Ginny squealed, “Oh that's great Harry!” she exclaimed loudly and hugged the stuffing out of him. It was obvious to Harry, as he felt his ribs creak, that the female Weasley hug had passed successfully from mother to daughter.

Harry smiled when he was released, though slightly missing the tight contact. Ginny picked the stack of finished parchments up to find it larger than she had thought, at least thirty parchments tall. Harry returned to his drawing as she first turned the stack over. A look of confusion creased Ginny's brow. She flipped from drawing to drawing getting more confused at each turn.

“Harry,” she said to draw his attention.

Harry, in the middle of a movement didn’t interrupt his drawing, merely giving an acknowledging, “Hmm?”

“I thought you said that you wanted to fly with me,” she said, disappointed. “These are all of a black housecat.”

“Hmm? What?” Harry asked, dragging his attention from his drawing. He looked at the parchments in Ginny’s hand and ran what she had asked in his mind. “Oh,” he said finally, “I figured that, as a panther is my natural form, it would be easier to first change size within the same family and then, once I know that I can do multiple forms, I can change to the avian family and become a falcon just like you.”

“Oh,” she said. “Makes sense.”

Harry smiled at her before returning to his drawing with his head down. Ginny rifled through the drawings, fascinated by the process even though she had successfully undergone it with him over the prior months. What she saw in the pictures was a medium sized housecat in midnight black fur that didn’t seem to agree on a direction to point with only a few clumps resting sleek along his body.

“Harry,” she said, gaining his attention again, “Even in your magical animagus form your hair won’t stay down,” she said with a broad grin.

Harry signed in frustration. “Yeah, I know,” he breathed in consternation, “But if I draw it in any other fashion it just doesn’t seem right. I tried to force myself through several drawings, but the whole process just wouldn’t let me keep the drawings with this project. If I try to draw the hair sleek and smooth, it looks like a five-year-old’s primary school drawing. It seems that all of my artistic talents are tied to my animagus forms, nothing else.”

Ginny reached up and ruffled Harry's hair vigorously. “Come on,” she said, “It’s not that bad. I like your hair.”

Harry reached up and batted her hand away and tried, in vain, to smooth his hair down any.

Grinning at his response, Ginny reassured him, “I’m sure that this talent’s just specific right now because you’re trying to draw your Animagus form. If you were concentrating on something else, you’d be able to draw something else,” she said with confidence. “Just look at your drawings for your summer project,” she said in a conspiratory tone, “You know, that summer project? As I recall your drawings for that were fantastic, as was the finished result. You remember Hermione saying how beautiful they were.”

Harry's praise-won grin was interrupted by Hermione's emergence from the girl's stairwell and coming over.

“What’s up?” she asked. “What was I saying was beautiful?”

“Oh, it’s nothing,” Ginny said after receiving a warning glance from Harry not to spill the beans on the identity of his summer project. “I was just trying
to convince Harry that he had good drawing skills.” Ginny handed Hermione the top parchment that had the side profile of the black housecat.

“Oh, isn’t she beautiful?” Hermione gushed.

“I think so,” agreed Ginny. She handed Hermione the front view of the same standing cat with striking emerald eyes and a rough tuft of fur over its right eye in an eerie rendition of the lightning bolt scar on Harry’s head. Luckily for Harry, Hermione didn’t see the shape and didn’t recognize the drawing for what it was.

Hermione cooed over the second drawing as well.

Harry’s masculine pride reared its head. “It’s not a she,” he said, “It’s a he. And he’s not beautiful, he’s handsome.”

“Sure Harry,” Ginny said.

“Who’s cat is it?” Hermione asked.

“Well,” said Harry, “It might just be Ginny’s some time after the Holidays if I can manage it?”

Ginny smiled at the connotation.

“Oh?” Hermione asked in surprise followed by a repeat in comprehension, “Oh!” She adopted a worried expression. “I hope that I haven’t spoiled your Christmas present to Ginny,” she said with an apologetic look for both Harry and Ginny.

“No,” Harry said, “This would be a treat for after the Holidays. I don’t think that I can manage it by Christmas.”

“Oh, okay, that’s fine then,” Hermione said, not missing the smiles on her friends’ faces.

Hermione was brought out of the moment with the chiming of the clock on the other side of the room. “Oh my lord,” she exclaimed, “is that the time? I have got to get to my ancient runes class.”

Without even a good-bye she sped out the portrait hole in a trice.

“Ginny,” Harry hissed, “You’ve got to be more careful. You almost gave away two secrets there.”

“Sorry,” she said a little too chipper to seem sincere. “Now, enough of this. Let’s go find something better to do.”

His annoyance lifted, Harry just looked at her with a raised brow.

“Something better!” Ginny prompted, causing him to jump up and pack his things away at lightning speed.

Ginny could only laugh as he returned moments later, his supplies stowed in his dorm room.

The Thursday before the end of the term marked the last Gryffindor Quidditch practice for the year. Ron looked over his teammates with a proud smile after they finished flying.

He stilled his pacing to address the team.

“I am very proud of everyone on this team. We had a fantastic opening match and didn’t let that go to our head. Even with three months until our next game, everyone here kept the fighting spirit and practiced like it really mattered and we may find, come February, that it truly does matter. We’ve practiced so hard, that there is no way for Slytherin to beat us with skill, there is no way to beat us on teamwork and there is no way for them to beat us on dedication. I am proud to call you my team members and to call myself a member of the Gryffindor Quidditch team.” This was met with the approving cheers from the team as they all rose to pound each other on the back and grasp their fellow teammates in friendly hugs.

“And, everyone, just remember, if you’re able to practice your maneuvers over the holidays, please do, and if not, please just review your playbooks to refresh your memory,” he told them as the last act of Quidditch Captain before the Christmas Holiday. “Happy Christmas and see you all next year.”

The crowd of Quidditch players was apparently in a party mood; loud and rambunctious as they make their way, slowly, to the exit of the Gryffindor changing room.

With a sudden gong sound, everyone stopped and turned back to the cabinet lined room. There they saw Harry standing on one of the changing benches gathering everyone’s attention.

“I think one more note before we all go back to the tower is in order,” Harry said. “I want to congratulate Mister Ronald Weasley on a fine Quidditch season at the end of the first term. He is doing a bang up job as a rooky captain and we owe him a round of applause.”

They turned as one to Ron and brought their hands together in applause, which devolved into the cheers and whistles of the six starting and four reserve members of the Gryffindor Quidditch team. Ron broke into a giant smile from the praise, punctuated with the traditional Weasley blush to the roots of his hair.

“Okay, everyone, lets wrap it up a little bit early this evening,” Harry said to the full session of the Defense Association. “Everyone come over here
Hermione stepped forward, her earlier question not forgotten, but tabled for now. “Harry,” she reminded him, “the second table.”

“Oh, okay,” Seth said. “um, thank you.”

“Anything that is threatening you, Seth,” Harry said. “If it is threatening you and you need to get away from it or get help, use it. We’ll support each other.”

The boy, either a first year or a very small second year, stepped forward and asked, “Is-s this only for V-v-volde-m-m-mort’s D-death Eaters or is it for other trouble?”

“On behalf of my brilliant team,” Harry said, “Thank you.” Harry turned to his ‘team’ and was startled at the intense expression on Hermione’s face. “That’s brilliant,” exclaimed a fascinated Ravenclaw.

Harry motioned to Ginny and Ron who whipped a white sheet off a long table and Hermione who removed Harry’s invisible cloak from a smaller round table. Revealed to the students were hundreds, if not thousands of velvet boxes in a rainbow of deep colors.

“These,” he said, “Are DA necklaces. They are made to help you get to safety if you are being threatened.”

“How can they help us in a fight?” asked a young Hufflepuff.

“How many people know what a portkey is?” Harry asked.

Three-quarters of the room raised their hands.

“Good, most of you,” Harry said. “How many people know what a protean charm is?”

Only a small portion of the students raised their hands, mostly from Ravenclaw.

Harry turned to Ron and joked in a private voice that carried to every student nonetheless, “Does Flitwick give the Ravenclaws extra classes or do they all like to read as much as Hermione?”

Ron shrugged, Hermione glared while Ginny, along with a good portion of the students laughed, as they were all familiar with Hermione’s reputation.

“Anyway,” Harry moved on, “Wear your necklace and if you are in trouble, clutch it. If you’re on one of the school crests, it’ll move you to the hospital wing.” This was a new revelation to Hermione, who thought that she knew everything that the necklaces did. She gave a sharp look at Harry, but his back was turned. “If you are already there, it will move you to the Headmaster’s office. If you are not near a school crest say ‘help’ and others will be alerted through a Protean Charm that has been embedded in each necklace. If you feel your necklace grow warm and vibrate, one of your classmates is in trouble. The necklace will help direct you to their location. If you are near a responsible witch or wizard, alert them to the location of the needed assistance. If you are capable of rendering assistance and are close enough, help them. If you are away from Hogwarts, are in trouble and can’t wait for help, yank the pendant from the chain and the chain becomes a portkey that will send you and whomever is touching it immediately to the entrance hall. Keep a hold of the pendant; it can still move you from the main crest to the hospital wing.”

“That’s brilliant,” exclaimed a fascinated Ravenclaw.

“On behalf of my brilliant team,” Harry said, “Thank you.” Harry turned to his ‘team’ and was startled at the intense expression on Hermione’s face. Harry reviewed what he had said to cause it and came to the problem. Ah, damn. He had told her, in a round about way, about his knowledge of the transportation crests. Oh, well. Couldn’t be helped. Harry ignored the piercing glare and turned back to his audience. “The necklaces with the crests on them, either for a specific house or the Hogwarts crest, are capable of the movement on the crests. These are for students of Hogwarts, or future students. All of the others are not capable of this and may be given to non-Hogwarts family members. Each has an instruction parchment so that you may familiarize yourselves with the functions. Please, though,” Harry pleaded, “Don’t just experiment with these or you will have me and others running all over the country and not helping where we are needed if something happens,” Harry paused to let that concept sink in. “Any questions?”

Harry paused for a second waiting for questions, before remembering another thing he had to tell the students. “Also cast on these necklaces are security and secrecy charms to prevent the recipients from telling others what they are really for,” at the questioning looks on people’s faces Harry hastily continued. “This won’t prevent them from saving others. It just means that anyone they save with the portkey feature might be in for a surprise,” Harry smiled as if it were a funny thought. He had certainly been surprised by too many portkeys, but he could still appreciate the thought as long as it saved someone. “Any questions?”

A timid hand raised in the back, barely noticeable through the sea of robes. Ginny came forward and poked Harry in the shoulder and pointed out the lone hand.

“Yes,” Harry said pointing, “In the back there. Make way so that I can see them,” he said to the crowd, making a parting motion with his arms. The sea of black parted to show a diminutive student with Slytherin robes. “Yes, um,” he paused while Ginny whispered in his ear. “Seth,” he said after her whispered prompt. “What is your question?”

The boy, either a first year or a very small second year, stepped forward and asked, “Is-s this only for V-v-volde-m-m-mort’s D-death Eaters or is it for other trouble?”

“Anything that is threatening you, Seth,” Harry said. “If it is threatening you and you need to get away from it or get help, use it. We’ll support each other.”

“Oh, okay,” Seth said. “um, thank you.”

Hermione stepped forward, her earlier question not forgotten, but tabled for now. “Harry,” she reminded him, “the second table.”
Oh?” Harry said, “Oh, yeah! How many of you have muggle relatives?”

Several dozen hands went up, presumably those of muggle born and half-and-half students.

“For any muggle who will receive the necklaces,” Harry said, “please choose from the last table.”

“Why?” asked a curious Gryffindor.

Hermione stepped forward and gave a questioning look at Harry. He motioned for her to go ahead, by all means.

“These necklaces have portkeys and protean charms in them. Who knows why muggles would need a special necklace?” she asked in her best teacher voice.

The room was quiet while it contemplated this question. Suddenly, many Ravenclaw and a few from each other house, shot their hands in the air, several of the Ravenclaws looking quite eager to answer as their hands waved in the air.

“Luna?” Hermione called on the strange but eager girl beside Neville to the side of the students. Having never had a class with the fifth-year, Hermione found it very curious to have the odd girl so eager to take part.

“They have no magic, or not enough to operate magical devices,” Luna said. Hermione was happy for her to drop her dreamy persona and participate. “The portkey and protean charms use a little bit of magic when they are activated from the person using them. The muggles don’t have the magic in them. That’s also why they don’t have trouble with nargle infestations. The nargles are drawn to magic.”

Hermione just dropped her head into her hands at the elaboration from Luna. Harry seeing Hermione’s reaction quickly congratulated Luna on a correct answer.

“Very good, Luna,” he said. “And that is why the necklaces on the last table have power crystals that are charged with enough magic for up to four adults to portkey.”

“What about the muggle repelling charms on Hogwarts?” Seamus asked.

“Those charms are only on the perimeter wards of the castle, and so, once they are in the castle, they won’t be affected,” Hermione said, rejoining the discussion.

“Any other questions?” Harry asked.

Seeing no hands, Harry moved on.

“Okay, if everyone will line up single file along the wall,” Harry prompted, “you’ll all be able to collect your necklaces and proceed to dinner. Remember, there are plenty for your entire family, anyone close enough to you that they could be threatened and knows about magic.”

Ron joined Hermione, Ginny and Harry near the front door as the students collected the necklaces, some taking just two or three, some taking more. They were joined by a contrite looking Justin Finch-Fletchley.

“What’s up, Justin?” asked Harry, still in charge of the meeting.

“Well, you see,” Justin said, “I have a very large family, aunts and uncles, cousins, brothers and sisters and they all live in the same group with me and they all know about my magic, but I am the only wizard in the group. If we were attacked, they would all be in danger, but it would just be too much.”

“Nonsense,” Harry exclaimed. At his side, Ginny gave him a loving hug. “How many are there?” Harry asked with confidence.

“Um, well, you see,” Justin said, “there are thirty-one of us, and as you can see that is just too many. Those necklaces look like gold and really expensive. I just can’t ask that of you.”

“No need,” Harry said, “Easy enough. There are plenty. Take enough for your whole family.”

“But why?” Justin asked. “I treated you so badly in second year. Why would you spend so much helping me?”

“You apologized,” Harry said simply. “I won’t hold a grudge and condemn you or your family over something that happened four years ago.”

“Thank you very much, Harry,” Justin said, shaking his hand. “It’s better than I deserve.”

Before Harry could respond, Justin had left and joined the queue.

“Harry,” Ginny said, “I’m proud of you.”

For the next half hour the two couples accepted thanks from the students before packing the empty room up and joining the leaving feast.

Harry was able to fend Hermione off for the rest of the evening and throughout the morning until they made it onto the train and found an empty compartment for the friends. When Harry, Ginny and Ron were with her in the compartment, Hermione waved her wand and cast a complex locking charm that Harry was not familiar with, followed by one of the stronger privacy spells that Harry had ever seen. He responded with merely a raised
“Harry,” she said, demanding his entire attention, which he gave with amusement. “Those necklaces you made…”

“We made,” Harry interrupted her. The look on Ron’s face held one of caution for Harry, warning him not to interrupt Hermione when she was like this.

“…you made,” she insisted, “are able to interact with the school crests that happen to have been created during the summer when you seem to have had free reign throughout the school, mostly unsupervised.”

“Did you have a question, Hermione?” Harry asked with a smirk.

“On top of that,” she said building steam, “the transportation to the Halloween Ball was right on top of the school crests both in the entrance hall and in the Chamber of Secrets.”

Harry smiled genuinely, “Yes?”

“And furthermore,” Hermione continued, “on several occasions I have witnessed either just you or both you and Ginny,” she said turning her piercing gaze onto the youngest Weasley sibling, “disappear while standing on one of the crests.”

“Quite possible,” said Ginny in a very prescribed manner.

“Well?” Hermione asked, clearly at her wit’s end. She turned her attention back to Harry, finding more luck in the amused expression he had rather than the tight expression of his girlfriend.

“Well what, Hermione?” Harry said with a huge grin, “You haven’t asked any questions yet.”

Harry could now see the color flooding her cheeks.

“Well, what did you...how did you...why did you?” she sputtered.

“Ah, well, those are the three I won’t answer,” Harry said. “For the when, you already know that one, over the summer. For the who, that would be me. For the where, I built them in the Chamber and then transported them up piece by piece and assembled them and installed them at night when the castle was completely empty. But the questions you asked...What did I do? I found books that told me parts and when I put them together, I knew how to make the crests. What are they?” Harry asked the previously unasked question. He had the rapt attention of both Hermione and Ron. Ginny had her attention focused on Hermione, enjoying the amazement from the smartest witch in Hogwarts. Harry continued, “They are decoration and a linked runic transportation system.”

“A linked runi-whoozerwhazit?” Ron asked in utter confusion.

“Honestly Ron,” Hermione said, coming back into familiar territory. “A linked runic transport system would mean that all of the crests are linked and they use runes to affect magical transport from one crest to another,” Hermione said confidently. “But why, Harry? It all seems to be a lot over one half a summer and you strike me for someone not too interested in invention for invention sake.”

Harry considered her point, but couldn’t find any contention with it. “Really,” Harry said after contemplation, “it was just luck. I needed a better way into the Chamber and I happened to read the right books in the right order for the solution to be simple. The only hard part was sneaking into the Headmaster’s office to install his control crest. From there he can change how the crests work and even shut the whole thing down. Without the right books, the Ball would have been in the Great Hall and I would have been flying down the stinking, dirty pipe in Moaning Myrtle’s bathroom each day when I practiced.”

“Yeah,” Ginny glared, “And you would probably be dead from heat exhaustion from when you passed out on the crest in the Chamber while you practiced that fireball.”

“Oh, well,” Harry said, “That’s neither here nor there. That safety feature paid off.”


Harry smiled at her. “Now Hermione,” he said, “three-quarters of the Ancient Runes class heard about the crests last night and you can bet, when they get back from holiday, your professor will hear all about it, as the crests will have been found to contain thousands of runes. It will probably turn into a hands-on project for the class. It would be cheating if I just gave you the answer.”

“But...” Hermione said.

“Come on, Hermione,” Harry said. “This is for you to discover, but if you want me to ruin it for you, whatever.”

“Fine!” Hermione said, “Don’t tell me. I’ll find out on my own.”
Harry and Ginny snuggled together for the long haul.

“Harry,” Ron said, interrupting snuggle time. “Who won the Weasley Prank competition?”

“Aren’t you two supposed to be doing some sort of prefect thing?” asked Ginny.

“What?” screamed Hermione. “Oh blast! We forgot all about it with the distraction and all,” she said. “Come on, Ron. We have to go do our rounds.” She cancelled the privacy and locking charms and dragged an unenthusiastic Ron out of the compartment after her.

“You’re a genius, Gin,” Harry rumbled into Ginny’s hair. “I thought they would never leave us in peace.”
Harry and Ginny had barely enjoyed an hour of peace on the train, when an unwelcome visitor interrupted them. They pushed apart from their embrace as the door to the compartment slammed open.

"Ah, Potty and the Weaslette," came the drawling, annoying voice from the open doorway. "I'd say that you're defiling your station, but I wouldn't know which of you to address. You really are the dregs of the wizarding world; the son of a Mudblood and the daughter that her Blood Traitor, Muggle Loving parents couldn't afford. Have they finally decided to sell you off to a betrothal, Blood Traitor? Too bad that Potty's Godfather's not around anymore to approve the sale. He'd have given several galleons to your parents for a good roll for his Godson, I'm sure."

Throughout this, Harry's temper had been burning shorter and shorter. By the end, Ginny was holding him back and having to remind herself why she would want to do such a thing. Only Harry's respect for her prevented him from breaking her grasp, shortly followed by Malfoy's jaw.

"Only your parents," Harry seethed, "would have to buy their son a girlfriend. Where's Parkinson, Malfoy? Wouldn't she stick around you after you lost your power in that snake pit? Aren't you going to have your dark wedding with Pansy in her black wedding dress and you with your hood pulled tight over your head?"

Draco rumbled in anger. Beside him, his goons cracked their knuckles in threat.

"Shut up, Blood Traitor," Draco screamed. "You had better watch out for your slut. When we get back to Hogwarts, I'll have full reign in the school. I can get her anywhere and at any time. She put me in trouble and I'm going to make sure she pays."

Harry's wand arm flashed up, his wand pointing to the Slytherin's throat. "I'd think by now, Draco, that your mother would be tired of having to take you to St. Mungo's after each train ride to counter the consequences that your mouth earns for you."

Draco was still pulling his wand when Harry cast a series of spells, resulting in a loss of consciousness for the now green blob of goo with purple hair sticking out at every angle from what used to be his head. Harry quickly shifted his wand to the advancing Goyle. To his right, he could see Ginny covering Crabbe who was a bit slower, but stopped his advance just the same.

"If you know what's good for you," Harry stated coldly to the goons, "You'll just take this wanker out of my sight and make sure that his mother gets him to a good healer. If you advance on us, I'll give you worse than I gave to the Ferret."

Crabbe and Goyle considered him for a second with evil intent, but soon did the sensible thing, and carted Draco away, using his robes as a sling.

Harry quickly closed and locked the compartment door before he and Ginny took each other into their arms and held on while they both shook in anger. Ron and Hermione found them somewhat calmer after their prefect rounds with just a half hour left to the trip. The remainder of the journey was calm in comparison to anything in Harry's schooling career.

The gang exited the train onto platform 9 & 3/4 to see Mrs. Weasley being accompanied by the twins. Harry and Hermione hung back, letting the matron greet her children who she hadn't seen for months. They both knew that they were like family, but it would never be the same.

"Is it the same with you and your parents?" Harry asked quietly of Hermione. "I know you're an only child, but we haven't discussed your home life much."

Hermione smiled, they both left their gazes on the mini-Weasley reunion. "Well, it's naturally different, with just my parents and I, but it's still good to be back with them each year."

"It must be hard then," Harry commiserated, "leaving for more and more of the summer each year."

Hermione turned serious, but didn't frown. "It is hard, but it's not just on my side. Summer is the season for professionals to continue their education and my parents are very respected in their field, you already know that they're both dentists." She looked at him and continued on his nod affirmative. "Well, they seem to spend more time educating others than staying at home on their own practice. We get our time together and write each other a lot. It's hard though. Our lives seem to be separating, going on different paths."

"I guess that's normal for people and their parents," Harry said.

"Yeah," Hermione agreed, "I guess. It just started a lot earlier for us than most. It seems to have started when I got my letter."

"That first letter does seem to change lives," Harry offered.

"For the better, let's hope," Hermione said.

"I think I can chalk one for the better column," Harry chuckled, "even with the Dark idiot after me."
"I'm glad that you do see it as better," Hermione said.

"Oh, and you dears," boomed Mrs. Weasley moved to them with force, stopping their conversation, "It'll be so good to see all of my children together under one roof again. And that includes you two. I may not be your birth mother," she said, "but you're both my children anyway where it counts."

Harry and Hermione hugged the affectionate mother silently, each enjoying the near smother of a full Weasley hug.

"Come along, everyone," Mrs. Weasley said. "Time to get back to the Burrow. We have a family meeting. Something about settling all of this ridiculous pranking nonsense."

Harry started to the exit of the platform, but was suddenly encased with identical bookends.

"Yes, Harry," said one.

"We really must get back..." said the other.

"As the question really has been floating too long..."

"You need to put everyone out of their misery..."

"And declare..."

"Me," they both said together.

"The winner."

"No, Gred, I'm going to be the winner."

"Beg to differ, Forge. 'Tis I who shall be the winner."

"I'm afraid you are wrong..."

"Guys," Harry said from between them. "Enough. We're leaving now."

They arrived at the Burrow to a hail of hugs, handshakes and slaps on the back. They didn't pause long, as they were ushered in. After a quick trip to their respective rooms, luggage stowed, they made their way back to the Weasley living room.

"Okay, everyone's here," Arthur Weasley declared as he surveyed the collection of redheads Weasleys and two dark haired guests. The family had gathered in the living room of the Burrow for the long awaited news. "And as this family meeting was called by our male children, Molly, I will turn it over to our oldest," Mr. Weasley said to his wife.

She simply nodded with a broad smile. She was happy to have her whole family, including the two additions not born by her, in a family meeting once again, really for the first time with Harry and Hermione joining them.

Harry sat back and enjoyed the gathering of those he cared for. He knew that he was up in a short time to satisfy both the Weasley curiosity and their competitive nature. Until then he would hold Ginny and relax.

"Bill?" Mr. Weasley invited, handing the floor to his eldest.

Bill stood from his seat and walked to the front of the fireplace; the traditional platform for addressing a Weasley Family Meeting.

"Thanks, dad," Bill said. "To begin this meeting, I have just one question," he stated. "Harry, who is the victorious prankster in the first Weasley Family Prank Championship?"

With that question, Bill walked back to his vacant seat and motioned Harry to the place in front of the fireplace. Harry dutifully released Ginny from his arms and walked to the offered spot.

"Well, um," Harry began, "do you want me to just say who the winner is, or what?"

Molly Weasley answered for the whole family, "Well, I don't know about the rest of you, but as my youngest two don't write nearly enough," she said with an accusing glare at the redheads in question, "I think that you need to tell us at least what each one of my sons did to you."

At the enthusiastic nods from his audience, Harry pulled his wand. "If I have to go through all of that, I better have a seat." He waved his wand and whispered the incantation, causing a plush forest green chair to materialize just to the right of the fire. He had barely sat when Ginny was standing in front of him, entreating him with her smile. With another wave, the chair became just wide enough for the two skinny teenagers to be very friendly with each other.

"What?" Ginny asked her family incredulously. "Just because Mum and Dad don't cuddle," Ginny said. Hermione almost broke into laughter when she thought she heard Harry say quietly, "All evidence to the contrary." Ginny, however, didn't take notice, "doesn't mean I can't get me some."
“Ginny!” her mother chastened. Her father responded, however, by pulling his wife into his side, where she leaned in to him, her outrage forgotten. Hermione, not one for missing a chance, sidled into Ron much the same way.

“All comfy?” Harry asked. Bill and Charlie just looked amused while Percy looked his normal prim and proper self.

“Gred?” Forge asked.

“Yes, Forge?”

“Why didn’t we think of bringing cuddle partners to this gathering?”

“It appears that dear Harry has one-upped us once again.”

“How did he one-up you before,” Mrs. Weasley asked suspiciously.

“Ask your daughter…”

“About the ever lasting roses…”

“Beside her bed…”

“In Hogwarts.”

Mrs. Weasley’s eyes flew open in surprise.

“It’s nothing bad, Mrs. Weasley,” Harry said rapidly, heading off the eruption. “Besides, we’re getting off track.”

Everyone settled with Molly trusting Harry and Ginny for the moment.

“Okay, pranks,” Harry started again. “First to get me was Percy,” Harry said looking at the prankster in question. “He hexed all of my boxer shorts to freeze whenever I thought of Ginny.”

“Yes, I did,” Percy said, “how did you remedy the situation. I have it on good authority that the charm couldn’t be broke.”

“I didn’t even try to break the charm,” Harry said. “I simply went commando.”

The older brothers’ eyes went wide in comprehension, but Ron was hopeless. “Commando?”

“I went without, Ron,” Harry said deadpan.

After a beat, comprehension adorned his face as well.

“Ewww,” Ron exclaimed, “that’s just…ewwww.”

“Anyway,” Harry tried to ignore his friend, “Continuing on… I guess that it was Charlie next. He changed me into a dragon on the first Wednesday of school. I couldn’t break the curse, so I had to spend all day outside the school. Luckily, it ended before dinner.”

“We all agreed, one day per prank,” Charlie said. “Else one of us could take advantage and make a prank last so long that they would be the default winner. Just one day a piece.”

“Oh,” Harry said, “that makes sense.”

“A dragon!?!?” Molly asked.


“Oh, I didn’t know that,” said Harry, “I never could see and didn’t ask, I guess. Fitting; I think that my family comes from Wales.”

“Think?” asked Ron.

“Well, no one has ever told me much of my family history,” Harry stated. “Seems I’ve got to know which questions to ask to get an answer from people that knew them, because nobody volunteers anything new about either family. This summer I’m going to go through my family vaults and see if there’re any books with a Potter family history in them. Cut to the chase.”

The Weasleys looked horrified. The Weasley family history was told and retold so many times to each generation that it was an ingrained part of their psyche’s, as much a part of their heritage as their red hair. None of them could imagine going through life without both the Weasley family knowledge and the stories of the Prewett family heritage.

“Come on,” Harry said, “it’s not that bad. Considering my family vault number, there’s got to be history books in there, along with a lot of other interesting things. Remus hinted that there was a veritable library in there.”

Hermione perked up and looked interested in helping him to explore the tomes. Harry smiled at her and gave a slight nod, settling her down with a satisfied grin.
“Harry,” said Bill, “What is your vault number, if I might ask?”

“The main family one is number forty-two,” Harry said, without concern for his privacy with this group, “but I think that I have some others in the low hundreds for family business.”

Bill sat back awed. “That makes sense,” he said. “Those are the oldest of vaults. They’re in the original caves dug by the goblins a couple of thousand years ago. Ancient magic and probably dragons guard that whole system. I hadn’t realized the Potter family was that old.”

“Couldn’t the goblins have given the Potters the vault after another family vacated it?” Harry asked.

“No,” Bill said simply before offering an explanation. “The first vaults, all of the ones in the old system, are owned by the family in question, only to be passed to the next head of the family. Even if they died out, the goblins could never release the vault to another family. It’s in their charter. I think that if the family has been extinct for five hundred years the bank will absorb the assets left and the vault will just melt into the surrounding rock like it was never there.”

Harry blinked in surprise, as did many others.

“How many family vaults have gone?” Ginny asked.

“Don’t know,” Bill said. “All information about that is restricted as part of the security measures for those vaults. The curses and ancient magic on that system makes the curse breaking that I did in Egypt seem like child’s play. It would take most of my career to map it out and break into there.”

“Why don’t they use that kind of protection more often?” asked Percy, his curiosity captured. “It would make things much more secure.”

“Things are secure enough,” said Bill. “They can’t do that type of ancient magic again because it was done by the head goblins with the head of each of the families in question that received one of the original vaults. Nearly fifty wizards and twenty of the most powerful goblins combined their magic to seal the entire area. It has stretched over the millennia to include the rest of the vaults to a lesser extent, but the full strength and affect of the magic is only around the first caves and vaults. The goblins wouldn’t even contemplate changing anything because the magical pact that created the bank, with the cooperation of the great wizarding families, is also what protects vault number one, their own bank vault.”

“Oh,” Harry said, flabbergasted. “And I have one of those?”

Bill nodded, causing Harry to utter a stunned, “wow!”

Harry shook his head to clear the distracting thought. “Okay,” he finally said, “So next was Ron’s prank just before our first Quidditch match. Since you were all there, I don’t think that I need tell you what happened,” Harry said to the group.

“After that…” Harry was cut off.

“Wait,” George said with a mischievous glint in his eye. “We only saw you until our little Gin-Gin here escorted a man every girl in the school, including herself, was lusting after out through the doors with no more than his boxers and wand to his name. I notice that you aren’t continuing that story.”

“Noticed that did ya?” Harry grinned. “Anyway, the next prank…”

“But Harry,” the other twin interrupted, “If you don’t tell us more then we’ll just assume the worst.”

“Never assume the worst of your sister,” Harry said with steel in his voice but an amused sparkle in his eye. “She happens to be a fine young woman. And I will have you know that she has not seen me in less than Ron himself provided for her viewing pleasure.”

“Really,” drawled George, “and what exactly has been reciprocated, my dear compatriot?”

“Fred, George,” scolded Mrs. Weasley, “stop that this instant. We will leave private matters private.” She turned to her daughter, “Young lady, perhaps we should talk later.”

Harry and Ginny, both horrorstricken, gulped loudly.

“Anyway, moving along,” Harry squeaked. He cleared his throat and tried again. “Moving along,” he said in his regular nervous voice, “the next prank was by dear George. I suspect that only a few of you know what he did,” Harry said accusingly. “I think that he did it in more out of impromptu inspiration, than careful planning. It seems that he tied together the looks that I was receiving from the female portion of the school,” Harry said. Bill laughed lightly when Charlie whispered into his ear, “And some of the males if I saw right.” Harry continued, having not heard the commentary, “and a comment from Ginny to her mother about some sort of spells,” Harry continued, ignoring the deep blush of his suddenly shy girlfriend. “And decided that one certain portion of my wizarding upbringing had been lacking. However the remedy to this…situation wouldn’t normally been a prank, until you figure that he went to Professor McGonagall and conned her into giving me The Talk,” Harry said, clearly pronouncing the words in capital letters for the room. “And so, at his suggestion, not only did I receive The Talk before I could be discharged from my white linen prison from the previous day’s Quidditch accident, but I received it, not only from Professor McGonagall, who makes it a point to impress on each first year, within moments of entering the castle, that she is not a witch to be trifled with, but also accompanied by Madam Pomfrey and her evil, evil diagrams,” Harry finished with a theatrical shudder for everyone to see.

Curiously enough, Mr. and Mrs. Weasley both had a very sympathetic look for Harry. Percy however was confused. “I don’t understand,” Percy said. “How can diagrams be evil? I have found them quite useful when giving presentations.”
"Percy," Harry sighed, "When you made the diagrams for your cauldron bottom presentation, did you make them muggle or did you act like a wizard about it and make them animated?"

Percy was cautious, as he had been teased mightily about that report. No one in his family seemed to take his work as seriously as it really deserved. He was safeguarding the wizarding consumer, after all. "I made them animated, of course."

"Okay," Harry said, tying it all together, "Now picture two stern witches giving a talk about sex to a young wizard using moving drawings to illustrate the salient points."

Suddenly all of the Weasley boys were glad they had received The Talk from their jovial father. George had realized that the prank would be good, but...wow.

"Ginny," Mrs. Weasley said, "Wasn’t that the same day we..."

"Yeah," Ginny said, "the same day we completed our conversation. Harry and I made it to the portrait at the same time with the same looks on our faces."

This revelation was met by silence. None of the males would make a comment after that.

Harry cleared his throat again. "Okay, where was I?" Harry asked with a false smile. "Oh yeah, Bill turned me into a male Veela."

Charlie was the one to ask the requisite question, "Harry, what, pray tell, are the effects of a male veela. I recall that a female veela causes intense attraction in all surrounding males, but what’s the difference with male veela?"

"Well, the difference," Hermione chimed in, "is not really in the veela themselves," she lectured, "it’s more in the response of the affected persons surrounding. When a male is affected by a female veela, he tends to use braggadocio and feats of daring to impress the veela in order to win her affection. However, when a female is affected by a male veela, she wins his affection in a more direct manner, through physical contact and kissing."

"So..." said one twin.

"Are you telling us..." said the other.

"That, ickle-Harrykins here..."

"Had to endure..."

"Two hundred witches..."

"Rubbing their hands and their..."

"Fred!" exclaimed Mrs. Weasley.

"All over him?"

"Lucky dog!"

Harry blinked at the tennis match.

Hermione continued for her friend, "No, most of them only stole a kiss before the veela magic rejected them."

"Some didn’t stop at a kiss," grumbled Harry.

"Hey," said Bill with a smile, "At least it only affected teenage girls."

"Hmmpm," Ron cleared his throat, "I know at least one firsty Gryffindor who took advantage of the situation and got a Boy-Who-Lived kiss while they were available."

The family chuckled at the brave anonymous girl who, apparently, got what she wanted.

"Okay, where were we this time?" Harry asked, growing uncomfortable, "Oh, yeah... the last prank was Fred’s," Harry groaned and shook his head. "I woke up one morning to find his freckles inches from my face. Eventually, I found in my first class; Transfiguration, that he had messed with my wand or my magic or something. Whenever I tried to cast a spell, all I got were bundles of flowers."

"Hmmpm," Fred said clearing his throat, "bouquets of roses."

"Anyway, yeah roses," Harry said, "Well, cut to the chase; Professor McGonagall gave me the day off from classes."

"Did you try giving it more power?" Bill asked.

"Oh, yeah he did!" Ron said with glee, "it was great! He filled the room with the bouquets. It turns out that that git, Malfoy..."

"Ron, language," Mrs. Weasley said.
"Did you say that for him saying git…" Fred said.
"Or for saying Malfoy?" George finished.

"Oh," Mrs. Weasley blustered, "quiet you two."

"Anyway," continued Ron, ignoring his brothers and mum. "Malfoy…"
"Ron, language," Fred imitated.

"…started sneezing," Ron soldiered on. "It seems that he was allergic and Pansy Parkinson had to take him to Madame Pomfrey. It was brilliant!"

"How in the world, did you change Harry’s magic like that?" asked Hermione.
"Quite simple…"
"My dear Hermione…"
"Brand new to Weasley Wizard Wheezes."
"All new…"
"Floral Scented Wand Polish!"

"Guaranteed to produce rose bouquets for exactly twelve hours without waver!"

"Just apply it to your enemy’s wand…"

"And give him a customized potion…"

"And presto, he…"
"Or she…"

"Will be smelling roses…"

"For half a day!"

Harry shook his head. "Doesn’t it bother you guys," Harry asked, "That your instructions will have to include the act of ‘polishing your enemy’s wand’?"

Several snickers were accompanied Ginny hitting Harry’s shoulder and Hermione blushing.

"Fred, George," Mrs. Weasley said, "You can’t sell such a product. What would have happened to Harry if he had had to defend himself and his wand didn’t work? It is much too dangerous!"

"Oh, Harry would have had no problems, Mum," Fred said. "I stood watch all day and he was quite safe. Could have taken care of himself, he could. Isn’t that right Harry?"

"I hadn’t thought about that," Harry admitted, slightly mortified.

"I had you protected there, Harry," Fred said. "No worries."

Harry shook his head with a smile, "So that just leaves the final results. And the winner, with the most creative, the best use of unsuspecting accomplices, and the longest lasting consequences is…" Harry paused for dramatic effect, "George Weasley with The Talk. I will be shuddering after that one for years. I almost disqualified you, George, for the long lasting psychological trauma."

Harry pulled his wand and summoned a piece from his trunk upstairs. Catching the zooming object, Harry then presented it to George, who had misted up in a fit of over-dramatics. The small trophy was in the shape of a traditional trophy cup, but instead of the normal tacky gold color, this was in a lurid red marble that clashed horribly with George’s Weasley hair.

George stood and started to give his acceptance speech to his imaginary auditorium when he was struck down with flying pillows from all angles.

The family had a good night in the Burrow after the meeting concluded. Harry and Ginny made the rounds in discussions, telling her brothers and parents stories of their school-year to date. Ginny had to recount why she had everlasting roses beside her bed, and how that constituted Harry having bested the twins; altogether, a great evening. Harry was hopeful that he could find some time with Ginny, privately, when the others started to go to bed.

"Harry," Ginny said after they managed to get some alone time that evening. "How did you pick George’s prank over the others?"

"The voices in my head, Ginny," Harry said with a straight face. "Some wanted Percy or Charlie, more of them wanted Fred or Ron to win, but in the
end, even though many wanted Bill to win, George had the most support by a large margin.”

Ginny was looking at Harry wide eyed and stunned. “Voices, Harry?”

“Yep.”

“In your head?” she clarified.

“Just this once. I needed their opinion of which prank was best. That’s all,” he said. “They’re more of a comfort than anything.”

“Oka-a-a-ay,” she drawled, settling back.
Mrs. Weasley was surprised to find Harry waiting in the kitchen when she went down the first morning of the Christmas Holidays; drinking his morning cup of tea. While Harry had started a habit of morning exercise the summer before, even then he hadn’t been waiting for her at the breakfast table when she came down each morning, and now his presence surprised her.

“Harry,” she said when she saw the mop of raven hair, “Why up so early? You didn’t have any more nightmares, did you?”

Harry smiled. It was nice to have a motherly figure on occasion. “No, Mrs. Weasley,” he said. “I just had something to do before everyone else got up.”

Mrs. Weasley, who had been taking pots and pans out of the cupboards, halted her progress at the mischievous smile in Harry’s voice. Surviving the twins’ childhood, she had long learned to recognize a prank in progress by her children’s voices alone.

“What have you done?” she asked. “I thought that the pranks were over.”

Harry beamed a smile directly at the matron. “They all had their chance. Now it’s my turn. I can’t let it go without an answer.”

Mrs. Weasley set the knife down that she had picked up to start on breakfast and wiped her hands on her apron. “Harry,” she said, “Please don’t hurt my children.”

Having heard the plea, Harry took it in the joking manner that it was meant, but he couldn’t help but notice the underlying worry in her voice or forget her experience with the boggart.

“They’ll be perfectly fine, Mrs. Weasley. By the end of breakfast, they won’t be able to miss the effect of the prank and in some time they’ll have figured out what’s causing their problems,” Harry said confidently.

“What’s going to happen?” she asked.

“Just wait for the surprise,” Harry said. “Oh, and take one of these pills,” Harry added as he reached into his pocket for a small velvet satchel of small pills. “Just put it under your tongue.”

She eyed the small white object warily. “It’s not that I don’t trust you, Harry,” she said slowly. “It’s just that…”

Harry cocked his eyebrows in amused inquiry. “…raising the twins taught you not to eat unidentified things?”

She smiled, “I learned that lesson as a child. My brothers were nearly as bad as those children.”

Harry meant it as a child. “I see,” Harry said. “This is the antidote for the prank. Hermione, Ginny and Mr. Weasley get one too. I already took mine before brushing my teeth this morning.”

She slowly took the offered pill. “I suppose I’ll just have to trust you in this,” she said before doing as instructed and placing the pill under her tongue. “Hmm,” she commented, “not bad. Almost sweet, what little I can taste.”

Harry smiled, “Yeah, after five years of foul tasting concoctions, I was glad to find that this only required a tincture of potion and that sugar wouldn’t affect the dose. Wish that worked with all potions.”

“What sounded like a hundred stampeding elephants descending the stairs heralded the arrival of the rest of the Weasley clan. Harry was amazed by the naked enthusiasm with which this family could greet each meal. They were all, save Percy, tussled and tired after their night’s sleep, but had, at bare minimum, brushed their teeth before approaching the table in their dressing gowns and, in the case of Fred and George, matching pink bunny slippers.

Harry got up and gave Ginny a peck on the cheek and went to the cold cupboard and retrieved the pumpkin juice and glasses. He quickly poured himself and Ginny each a glass of the sweet orange liquid. Under Ginny’s curious eye, he then went back to the dry cupboard and brought back two spice jars. Into his and Ginny’s glasses he sprinkled some nutmeg to cover dosing her glass with a magic pill. Ginny looked at him askew but stayed silent.

“Hey, where’s ours?” Ron asked groggily.

“She’s my boyfriend, not yours, Ronald,” she said with a giggle in her eye. “If you want a boyfriend, go talk to Malfoy.”

Ron looked appalled and sickened for a moment as Ginny sipped her dosed drink. The older brothers were cracking up; even Percy had
displayed a rare smile.

"Mmmm, Harry," Ginny said. "This is good. What's that you added?"

"Hmm?" Harry looked at her. The look told her more than when he answered, "Nutmeg."

"Ooh, let me try some, Ginny," Ron commanded.

"Ron," Harry sighed to cover his quick maneuvering to prevent Ginny's drink from being shared. "Hold your horses and I'll get drinks for everyone."

Harry got up and went about getting more glasses for the rest of the gang and filling them with the juice. After a short question, Hermione and the Weasley parents decided on tea instead of the sweet juice.

Harry tried to ignore the twins performing detection spells on their pumpkin juice, if only to keep him from laughing at the table.

"Cinnamon?" Harry asked Hermione choking back his chuckle. He had dosed the teacups before filling them with the steeped liquid, something that he couldn't do with Ginny's clear glass, so no further manipulation was necessary, but he liked to add confusing clues none-the-less.

"Please," Hermione said brightly.

A shake of the powdered bark later and breakfast proceeded smoothly on.

Within four minutes of the dishes being served, the point Percy had been trying to make through some very serious waves of his fork laden hand was interrupted by a popping sound as Ron was replaced by a startling mass of feathers with a long beak. Percy froze mid-gesture with a piece of bacon on the end of his fork dangling, still pointing at Harry. Their discussion on the suitability of the Ministry in general, forgotten by everyone as they all gazed wide mouthed at the bird.

Harry was gob smacked for mere seconds before he doubled over in laughter. Had the others been listening, they would have heard Harry gasping breaths between laughter and comments about the excellent blue heron Ron had made of himself.

The Weasley boys didn't have long to contemplate this before there was a staccato of popping, resulting from the transformations of Bill, Charlie, Fred, George and Percy into different animals.

Ginny and Hermione were still awed by the sight in front of them, seeing a grey hound in Bill's seat looking around like the world had been pulled from under it. Ron's heron was no better, swinging its long beak left and right, trying to figure out what was happening. Charlie's place was filled with a large lizard, flicking its tongue, apparently trying to figure life's changes out through the taste of the air. A pair of tiger striped felines replaced Fred and George; perfect mirror images of each other. Percy, always the odd duck in the family of pranksters, was absent, with a rather odd creature in his place.

Harry saw the new Percy and nearly fell to the floor in his continuing laughter.

Ginny was the first to gather her wits enough to speak. "What in the heck is that, Harry?"

"That, I believe," Hermione said as she brushed tears from her eyes from her own concealed bout of laughter, "is a duck-billed platypus," she said with authority, belied by her grinning expression.

"Okay," Ginny said, "is there a non-duck-billed platypus?"

"No," Hermione said.

"So the duck-billed part is..." Ginny prompted.

"Because it has a duck-like bill on its face," Hermione stated.

"O-o-o-ka-a-a-ay."

Most of the animals, by now, had slipped off their chairs and were exploring the world from a new perspective. Bill was sniffing around the cabinets, lingering at the cold cupboard, as he smelled something interesting and, no doubt, edible. Charlie was nowhere to be seen. Harry had a sneaking feeling that if he wanted to find the dragon keeper; he would have to look in a warm, dark place, remembering reptiles from his muggle school days. Ron was walking slowly on the floor around the table, his head bobbing with each step. Percy was still to be found sedate in his seat, causing no trouble.

The troublemakers, as always, were the twins. Fred and George were off their seats and on the prowl. As they jumped on the countertop, Mrs. Weasley sprung from her chair.

"Oh, no, no, no..." she said, "Off the counter boys. That isn't a place for cats or adults."

She shooed them off the counter and rounded on Harry.

"Harry dear," she said sweetly with a smile, "As entertaining as your prank is, when will it end."

Harry smiled in return, "Well, they have to figure it out," Harry said, "but they'll transform back in any minute now."
“Any minute? Where are Fred and George?” she asked, twittering about in search for the pair, which had disappeared immediately after being relegated to the floor.

She was concerned with reason. Those two could find trouble in an empty room.

With a pop, Ron was perched in an impossible position on the floor. His position became a lot more possible when he fell into a heap with a shrill cry.

Shortly after Ron’s embarrassment, the cacophony of pops was recreated, this time spread over a larger area. One pop with a matching exclamation of, “ouch,” was accentuated by a heavy bang from the underside of the table. Harry laughed as he realized where Charlie had gotten to in his lizard form. The underside of the table was, apparently, a bit cramped for a grown adult.

Bill’s pop came from his hound-dog stakeout of the cold cupboard, leaving him sprawling against the cabinet. Percy was left lying across his chair, where he scrambled to right himself in a dignified manner. That left Fred and George; however, they were nowhere to be seen in the kitchen.

“Where are Fred and George?” Mr. Weasley repeated Mrs. Weasley’s earlier question.

Everyone looked around but didn’t see them.

“Everyone get up and go find them,” Mrs. Weasley commanded. “Who knows what trouble they were getting into when they changed back?”

Everyone filed out of the kitchen to a sight that had everyone clutching his or her side. One of the startled twins was lying over the back of the couch while the other was only able to stay on the mantle for two seconds before he toppled to the wood floor below.

After everyone settled down and started eating breakfast once again, it was a full seven minutes before a disruption this time. With a pop, Ron, being the faster eater, was nowhere to be seen. Hermione, sitting next to him, pulled a white rabbit with a fluffy tail from his seat to her own lap. She was laughing without reservation while she stroked her boyfriend’s fur.

The meal was to be further interrupted by the seemingly random transformation of a Weasley male and subsequent transformation back to their original form. Harry was positive that they would figure out that the trigger was eating by the end of lunch that day. Harry was sure that they wouldn’t starve, but he still couldn’t help but be amused at the short time it took them each to consume five-hundred calories.

Harry sat in the living room with Ginny snuggled into his side as he read a book he had borrowed from the restricted section of the Hogwarts library. Bill and Hermione sat in opposite chairs near the warm fire, both reading as well.

Harry noticed that Hermione was not her usual tranquil self as she thumbed through the book in her lap. Harry attempted to leave her be as she fidgeted around her seat, but that was becoming harder and harder. Several times Harry caught her sending him an evil look, which he attempted to ignore.

Hermione shifted again, this time unfolding herself and placing both feet on the floor as she slammed her book shut. She turned a baleful eye to Harry in an unwavering glare.

Harry slowly closed his book and set it aside.

“I get the feeling, Hermione,” Harry said, “that you wish to discuss something.”

“Harry,” she said, “Do you know what I have been reading ever since we got off the train three days ago?”

Harry smirked, “It would only be a guess, but as I haven’t seen the Prophet or Quibbler lately, I’d have to guess that you have been reading books.”

Hermione growled…actually growled, “I have been reading every book that I possess on the subject of Ancient Runes,” she said. “And do you know what I found?” she asked, menacingly.

“By the tone of your voice,” Harry said, “Am I to assume that you haven’t found what you are after?”

“Yes,” she said through her teeth, “I haven’t found what I am after.”

“I might have some more books on Ancient Runes if you need some more material,” Bill said helpfully without lowering his book. He had apparently missed the tone of the conversation, causing Harry to nearly laugh and the amusement on Ginny’s face to become somewhat less passive.

“Thank you, Bill, for your consideration,” Hermione said with strained sweetness, “but, unfortunately, I can’t be sure what I am actually looking for, as the objects in question are still at Hogwarts and Harry won’t tell me how it was done.”

Bill put his book down with an interested eye for the conversation now.

“Well, Harry,” Bill said, “I know some about Ancient Runes with my work for the Goblins and all. Maybe if we could bring these things here we could work on them.”

Harry smirked. “Well, that could be a problem. See, they’re all rather firmly attached to their current location.”
Bill stared at him for a second. “Okay. What exactly have you made?” he asked. “I assume, since she’s giving you the evil eye, that you’re the one that did it?”

Harry and Ginny exchanged a look. “Yeah,” he said, “I made ’em. They’re the crests that you probably saw at the school when you came for a visit.”

Bill leaned forward and placed his elbows on his knees. “Oh, yeah,” He said, “I saw those. Mighty fine work you did. Those were beautiful. That’s quite a talent you have there for stonework. Are they conjured?”

“Nope,” Harry answered. Hermione settled down, thinking that the answers would come now that a non-student was interested. “The stone had to be natural for the magic to be focused and channeled correctly. Conjured or even transfigured stone won’t ever have a perfectly natural crystalline structure, according to the translations that I found.”

“Well, Bill replied, “You may not have invented the original runic phrases, but taking existing parts and making a completely new whole is still invention if it hasn’t been done before. I’d really like to see your work.” Bill sounded more the professional adult now than Harry or Ginny had ever remembered him before. Normally when he spoke of his profession, it was more in an enthused boyish manner. What they saw now was a combination of his professionalism and a curious nature that had won him a good reputation amongst his peers and superiors.

“What we need is for Harry to show us what he did,” Hermione said, still trying to steer the conversation to her goals.

“Bill,” Harry said, “What about it, Harry? Will you show us your notes so that we can all appreciate it? I’d love to see it. There are some Runic protections in the more sophisticated tombs that no one has ever been able to break without destruction of the key.”

Well,” Harry said, “I really wanted Hermione to figure it out on her own.”

“Bill is here now. After the holidays he has to go back to work and London. Show us now, please?”

Harry exhaled a large breath. “Okay, I’ll get the notes, but…”

Before Hermione could object, Bill had grasped the necklace chain and both had drawn their wands. They disappeared as soon as Harry said, "Portus."

Hermione was left gaping at the spot Harry had been moments before as the whole family rushed into the living room.

“Where’d they go?” Ginny asked frantically.
“Um…Howitt Road, Camden, North London,” Hermione repeated perfectly to the group, still stunned.

This set the family into motion. “Charlie,” Mr. Weasley said, “Get the apparition maps for London. Quickly. Ginny, Ron, Hermione…stay here and floo the Headmaster. Everyone else…wands in hand. Be ready.” It was a testament to his command ability that his orders were not questioned.
Harry and Bill arrived in the front entry of a flat within a converted town house, ready for a fight for their lives and those of the persons who called for help. Bill had his wand in the up and ready position while Harry’s was pointed forward and glowing orange at the tip in a menacing fashion, a spell poised on his lips.

The scene that greeted them wasn’t what they expected. They had thought to find a pitched battle between an innocent family and a group of death eaters, but what faced them was an empty apartment.

Bill and Harry shared a worried look before they took their first step. Still very cautious, Harry continued to ramp up his power in order to be ready for anything. When they had moved through the living room and into the hallway in their search for who had called for help, they heard a bit of a soft muffled voice before it was cut off by a booming voice.

“I don’t care how old he is,” the voice yelled loud enough to reach the rescuers’ ears, “I will not have a freak in my home!”

This was accentuated with the unmistakable sound of an impact against the wall and painful whimpers. They heard further commotion as they hurried down the hall.

“Stop it, Daddy!” the juvenile voice pleaded. “Leave Mommy alone!”

“Shut up, you freak,” the mature male voice growled with a sharp tongue, punctuated with the sound of another smack. “It’s all her fault that you are the freak that you are. We should’ve drowned you the first time you showed what a freak you were. But no,” he mimicked the silent woman, “‘He is just a boy,’ she said to me. She made me treat you like I would a normal son. She reminded me that you were my son and I held it in. I held in my disgust. I said nothing! Nothing! I thought that, maybe, our love would stave off the unholy power of the demon spawn that has affected you. But no, you continued to be filled with the blasphemous magic!” he spat. “We gave you love and learnt you the scriptures. We gave you every opportunity to leave this vile path of the devil. Magic is the work of Beelzebub! I will not have such an unholy thing in my home!”

Harry and Bill rounded the doorway to see a tall thin man towering over two cowering figures, his fists raised in anger. Harry seethed at the treatment the man was portioning to his own flesh and blood. Behind his eyes, Harry saw all of the mistreatment he received from his own family and knew that he didn’t want the same to happen to anyone else. He realized that he couldn’t save everyone. He didn’t have the power to affect anything but his own little slice of the world, but he was determined to help at least what little he could.

The two wizards moved swiftly to place themselves between the enraged man and his family. The man’s attention switched swiftly from his son to Bill as his view was blocked.

“Who the hell are you?” he bellowed menacingly. “How dare you come into my home! Get out of here or I will call the police!”

“Yes, maybe that is a good idea,” Bill said. “Let’s call the police and tell them what you have been doing to your family tonight. Your son called for help and we answered.”

While Bill was handling the muggle, Harry was kneeling in front of the boy, checking on his wellbeing.

“Bobby,” he said, shaking the boy out of his fear. “Bobby, are you alright?”

The little eleven-year-old boy slowly untucked from his balled up position to see what had happened. Harry saw fear in his eyes as he quickly looked around. As his eyes lit on Harry he sighed a breath of relief before his sobs returned full strength. He launched himself forward and latched onto his savior.

“Mr. Potter,” he sobbed, “you came. Daddy was getting so much worse than normal and he hit mommy and was yelling and angry and I called for help but I didn’t think that you’d come.”

Harry held the boy as Bobby sobbed. “Bobby, it’s allright. We’re here now,” Harry said, “Are you injured?” he asked the scared little firstie.

“N-no,” he stuttered, “but he h-hit mommy and she’s hurt. Can you look at mommy?” he asked with concern. Harry had known the little boy from his lower year sessions of the DA. The boy was intelligent and forthright, but the shock of the situation he had come home to and the events of the night had obviously shaken the boy. Harry was sympathetic as he took in the younger mannerisms Bobby had reverted to.

“Okay, let’s go check on your mum, shall we?” Harry said, soothingly.

Meanwhile, Bill was staring down the tall patriarch, his wand in hand and a stunning spell on his lips. He stood as a pillar of stone against the enraged man.
"I insist that you leave my home at once!" the man yelled. "I will not have freaks in my house! It is an offense against god and I will have none of it."

"It’s natural and it’s what your son is," Bill said through his teeth. "If you do not calm down and back away, I will be forced to knock you out until this is resolved."

The man started forward, cracking his knuckles threateningly, "You’re welcome to try, magicman," he growled. "I’ll beat the living tar out of you."

The man took another step forward, raising his fists moments before Bill flicked his wand. "Stupefy!" Bill cast casually. Upon contact with the red beam of magic, the tall man collapsed like a marionette with his strings cut.

Harry looked up from his start at examining Bobby’s mum. Harry saw the casual way Bill had stunned the abusive man and nonchalantly turned his attention to the remainder of the situation, and was impressed at the casual grace that the eldest Weasley son exuded. Harry raised an eyebrow in question causing a smile to flit across Bill’s lips.

"He was getting too aggressive," Bill calmly stated. "Leave him alone and he’ll wake up by morning with nothing more than a stiff back to show for it."

"O-o-o-ka-a-ay," Harry agreed hesitantly. He motioned to the semiconscious woman against the wall and asked, "Can you look her over for me. I could tell that nothing was life threatening, but I don’t know the medical charms yet so I couldn’t check."

For the next fifteen minutes Bill waved his wand in practice of the healing he had started to learn in seventh year, which had been supplemented during his stay in Egypt without proper access to a healer. The curse breakers and other Gringotts employees around the world used an informal system of mutual support in healing team members when the need arose. At each site they managed to end up with a good mix of extracurricular talents that were fostered by coworkers for everyone’s benefit.

"She’ll be fine," Bill said to the comfort of her first year son. "I’ve healed most of her bruises and cuts. Just let me wake her up and we can figure this out."

Harry was happy to take a back seat. Bill was the older wizard and Harry held no illusion that he would know any better on the subject than Bill would. Sometimes Harry’s youth caught up to him and made him feel overwhelmed. Walking into the room and seeing the all too familiar results of the situation pulled him back to his time on Privet Drive with too much clarity.

The Belsize Park area of Camden in North London was quiet that evening as a group of people arrived simultaneously and quite suddenly in a side alley that a ministry employee had determined a decade ago would be the best local place for visiting persons to arrive by magical means. Unfortunately, not all ministry employees were careful in their jobs. What was once an alley between an apartment building and the Italian restaurant at the end of the street was now a side access to a lush green local park with no cover. In truth, six years ago the Italian restaurant had burned in a kitchen fire that had rapidly gutted the place, taking its owner in the early morning by inhalation before he could call for assistance. The man had been a local staple for two decades and the community couldn’t contemplate some copycat taking over and rebuilding the business. His wife and the community had honored the memory of the man who loved children as the free spirits that they were with the wonderful park and playground on the vacant corner lot where the restaurant once stood.

All of this meant that the first group to arrive found themselves standing beside a well-lit brick wall within easy view of at least six buildings and a large road.

"Well, isn’t this a right bloody cock-up," Charlie exclaimed. "Seems our apparition maps are a bit out of date, Dad."

"Charlie, language!" corrected his mother.

"They were new last year, Charlie. Seems someone missed this section in the last survey," Arthur said. "And listen to your mum, don’t swear."

The Weasley bunch moved from the side alley to the main street in the late evening air in complete cooperation, without a word.

"Any idea where they are?" asked Fred.

"None," said George.

"Anyone?" Percy prompted.

"Arthur," Mrs. Weasley said, "You were always better at this sort of thing."

"I seem to remember you being quite frightful with a wand, Molly," he said with a wide grin. "Spread out everyone and cast detection spells," Arthur took charge. "If there’s trouble, we should be able to pinpoint their location by their magic use."

Arthur’s family moved to obey him without question. The redheads spread up and down the Howitt Road, subtly waving their wands in long ago learned detection spells. Looking from one to another, Arthur confirmed that they didn’t immediately strike gold.

After several minutes they heard the crack of apparitions from the ‘alley’ that they had arrived in. On Arthur’s direction, Fred and George went to see who had arrived, cautiously moving far enough apart that they couldn’t be taken out with one spell, yet close enough together to provide cover if the new visitor was hostile.

They breathed a sigh of relief when they recognized the group of people to come around the corner as wizards and witches from the Order of the
Phoenix, led by Dumbledore, as resplendent as ever.

"Now, Gred," a twin said.

"Yes, Forge?" the other answered.

"Why didn’t we think of coming in camouflage?" the first asked.

The second sighed and said, "Not all of us have the chutzpah to be as fashionable as our dear headmaster."

"Too right, my brother," the first said, "Too right."

Giggling could be heard floating from the group of hardened fighters for the light.

"If you would like, Messer’s Weasley," the grinning Professor offered, "I could give you the floo address of my tailor."

Fred and George’s laughs were mirrored by several of the order members standing behind the esteemed Headmaster.

"Come now," the headmaster said. "We must find where Mr. Potter and Mr. Weasley have gotten too. There is an emergency somewhere around and they need our help."

At Dumbledore’s words, the Order spread out and started their search with the rest of the Weasley’s. Slowly, Order members ventured into the surrounding buildings in pairs and three’s, wands held inconspicuously but available.

"Arthur," Dumbledore said, "Have you had any indication of magic?"

Arthur Weasley turned from his current task at the road’s edge and addressed the Headmaster. "Not enough for a location," he said. "I got a twinge that could have been from a stunner about ten minutes ago and some low level stuff, but nothing that I could find a direction from. The stunner and the nature of the low level stuff make me think that this wasn’t what we thought it was."

"Really, Arthur?" Dumbledore asked. "Explain."

"Just that, Albus," Arthur said, "If this had been a Death Eater attack, we would have heard and detected much more. As it is, with only a stunner, the low level spells could have been healing in nature or possibly some type of warding such as a silencing spell."

Dumbledore seemed to contemplate this. "Perhaps. But could the battle have taken place before you had gotten to the scene?"

"If that’s true," said Arthur without worry, "then I’m not too worried. I have every confidence in both Bill and Harry when it comes to dueling. I have no doubt that they could each last several minutes in a pitched battle with whatever odds from the Death Eaters. If it actually was a battle, then they have already won. If it is something else then we will probably not know until they meet us back at the Burrow when they’re done."

"Yes, I see," said the headmaster. "I believe that you are correct in your assessment. There are far too many dwellings on this street for a comprehensive search. We will have to trust in their abilities in this matter."

They both turned when the heard many feet approaching. Most of the search group had returned with dejected looks of failure on their faces. The Weasley’s in particular looked worried about their lost brothers.

"Dad," Charlie said from his leading position amongst the returning group, "We didn’t find anything magical that we could trace. Where are they?"

It had been a long time since his eldest children had left home, at least it seemed like a long time, around six years since Charlie left for Romania. It amazed Arthur that he was still revered as the leader of the family, even with his eldest away from home. With as strong of a personality as his wife had, Arthur found that much of his leadership of the family came in his steering his wife from some of the more extreme of her judgments and rants and tempering her reactionary decision making style. He was the calmer of their voices.

"I think that if we haven’t been able to detect any magic that there hasn’t been a battle on this block," Arthur said in a sure manner. "It could have been something else that they were crying for help on, besides a Death Eater attack."

"Are we in the right area?" Fred asked.

"Yeah," Charlie said. "Howitt road becomes Glenilla road around the corner. This is it. I saw that much on the apparition map."

"Very good, everyone," Dumbledore said. "I suggest that we all go back to our evenings. I have a feeling that Mr. Potter and Mr. Weasley are handling the situation admirably and will return with news as soon as they are finished."

Reluctantly, the crowd of Order members broke up with a few grumbles.

"We’ll have news for everyone at tomorrow night’s meeting," Arthur said.

The Weasley adults and Professor Dumbledore apparated to the Burrow after their long search, ready for a hot cocoa and a comfortable seat. What they found was some worried teenagers lead by an irate fireball. It did not take long for Ginny to see that there were no raven locks amongst the sea of red hair.
"Where is he?" she yelled.

This caused a quick halt to the procession of Weasleys and the Professor from the kitchen to the living room.

"Woah, Dragonfly," Charlie said in hopes of cooling the normally irrational female Weasley temper, at least, their temper usually seemed irrational to him. "Calm down. I'm sure he is fine."

"Yes, Miss Weasley," Dumbledore said in a soothing tone, "I am sure that we will find both he and Bill to be perfectly all right as soon as they arrive home."

This did not comfort Ginny.

"And you don't know where he is?" she shrieked. "How can you not know where he is?"

"Ginevra Weasley," her mother scolded, "You will not address the Headmaster in that tone, young lady."

"Molly, please let me," Arthur said. "Ginny, we looked around Howitt Road. We used every magic detection spell we could find. There was no trace of a battle. We figured that it was something other than Deatheaters. It could have been anything else," he said trying to sooth his daughter.

"Or it could have been a trap and he could have been portkeyed away or been knocked out or stunned or he could have lost the fight in the first minutes before you arrived or he could have miscalculated his portkey when he left and he and Bill could be hurt…" Ginny broke off in a fit of sobs. She practically collapsed into her father's comforting arms. He held his precious daughter as she cried on his shoulder.

"It's getting late," Arthur said over Ginny's head, as he guided them both to the long-suffering, plush couch. "Molly, why don't you and the rest go to bed? Ginny and I will wait for the boys to get back," he asked. "Professor," he addressed the Headmaster. "Barring any emergencies, we'll contact you in the morning with news of the night's events."

Molly looked forlorn at her daughter. It seemed hard for her not to be the one to comfort Ginny, but sometimes a father was best. After a quiet goodnight to Professor Dumbledore, followed by his own crack of disapparition, Molly guided her children and Hermione up the stairs to their waiting beds, leaving Arthur with his daughter clinging to his chest with her head buried in his shoulder.

Strange that the last time he had been in this position with Ginny, it had been over the same boy, long before he had 'noticed' her at his birthday party. Her heart had been well wrapped up long before any 'noticing' took place on that July day half a year back, and would be for long to come.

Harry and Bill dragged themselves to the Burrow just minutes before midnight. They arrived without grace in the kitchen of the ramshackle home. Bill was able to hold his feet well, but Harry was back to his normal self, in a tangle of limbs on the kitchen floor.

Arthur heard the commotion from his stationary position on the living room couch, but was unable to investigate what he knew to be his eldest son and honorary youngest son.

"Ow…blast it," he heard Harry exclaim through the open door. "Why is it that I'm back to the clumsy bumbling me on portkeys?"

"Harry," Arthur heard Bill say, "Hasn't anyone ever taught you how to travel by portkey?"

"Well, no," Harry said, "But I did just fine when we went to the apartment earlier."

"But you were ready for battle when we got there," Bill said. "When you went, you had your feet spread and your center of balance lowered. You were ready."

"Oh, but…" Harry said.

"And how did you stand for this last trip?" Bill asked.

"Oh, well," Harry said, "I guess that I stood up straight."

"Yeah," Bill said, "I bet that you had your knees straight and locked and your back straight upright." Bill received a nod from Harry. "To ride any magical transportation, you have to bend your knees to be ready to absorb the impact. Floo travel and portkeys both drop you to your feet with a little impact. If you are not ready for it you'll be on the ground before you know what happened. Ride it like you would a full downtown bus. Stand with your knees bent on the balls of your feet and balanced."

As they talked they walked into the living room quietly.

"Hi, Ginny," he said. "Sorry to wake you."

Harry turned to the fiery redhead as she woke up from her teary slumber on her father's lap.
Ginny extracted herself from her father’s lap and walked over to her boyfriend.

“Harry,” she said, the fire in her voice kindling. “Don’t you ever go off like that without me again. You left me at home to worry about you and then the Order comes back without seeing a trace of you where you said you would be. They searched up and down the street and couldn’t find you. What happened? Where have you been the last four hours?”

Harry took the distraught girl into his embrace while Bill told both her and Mr. Weasley what happened that evening.

“When we arrived,” Bill said, “We expected a Death Eater attack, but what we found was a quiet apartment. We found the Brownley family in one of the bedrooms. The wife was slumped against the wall from being hit by the husband seconds before. He was ranting about religion and unnaturalness and was calling his son, a first year, a freak.”

Ginny noticed that Harry was trembling a bit from the recollection of the events, even encased in her embrace.

“It’s alright, Harry,” she said, soothingly.

“Thanks,” Harry said to her, “It appears that it was a new occurrence, at least for the first year. The father said something about her stopping him before.”

“I diagnosed and healed their injuries,” Bill said, yawning. “And then we packed up their stuff. Mrs. Brownley decided that they would go stay with their sister in Manchester until it could all be sorted. We got all of their stuff out and the presents to under the tree at the sister’s house before returning here.”

Arthur stood and placed his hand reassuringly on his son’s shoulder. “Did the father give you much trouble?”

“No,” Bill said, “I had him backed off for a bit, until he forced me to stun him. He should wake up by morning.”

Mr. Weasley embraced his son, saying, “I am proud of both of you. You did a fine job for that unfortunate mother and son.”

Bill hugged his father back and Harry said, “Thank you, Mr. Weasley.”

“You’re welcome, Harry,” Arthur said. “Now come. Let’s go to bed, Bill. I’m sure that we all would like some rest, and I’m sure that Molly is waiting for an explanation, which I can give her and save you two an early morning.”

They left with some good wishes, leaving Harry and Ginny alone in the living room. Harry guided them to sit on the couch where they would be more comfortable.

“Sorry for worrying you,” Harry said with a kiss to Ginny’s forehead.

“It’s alright,” she answered. “Next time, though, you are going to take me with you and save me having to worry.”

Harry chuckled. “I never thought that you would stay here in the first place. I thought that you would come with your family. You, Ron and Hermione at least had pendants already and could have identified where the emergency call was from.”

Ginny pulled back and looked into his eyes. “I’m not sure that I could have,” she said. “You’ll have to teach me to use this thing,” she said fingering the beautiful necklace.

“No problem,” Harry smiled. “Christmas is in two days and then everyone will have theirs and I’ll teach everyone.”

“Good,” she said. She pushed him sideways until he was lying flat against the back of the couch. She turned and removed his shoes and socks. Harry looked on curiously, but cooperated when she removed his jumper and t-shirt, leaving him bare-chested. “Just lie back, Harry,” she said. “You still have some comforting to do after leaving me to worry all evening.”

Harry was amused as he watched her putter around. She put two more logs on the fire and stoked it into a roaring mass. She nox’d the lights in the lower story of the house, leaving Harry to watch her with a smile in the fire’s glow. She returned to him with a thick blanket from the linen closet before stripping her own jumper and shoes, leaving her in britches and a t-shirt. She planted herself on the front of the couch and snuggled into his chest. With a flick of her arm, the blanket was over them and being wrapped around their intertwined forms. Harry simply had to embrace his girlfriend, the thought of what would happen when the rest of the house awoke barely niggling at the back of his mind.

Ginny, for her part, felt she could never feel more secure and happy than in his arms. She and Harry drifted to a happy sleep, a sublime smile on their faces.
As sometimes happens, Arthur Weasley made it down from the bed he shared with his wife before she did. It was a work day for the redhead patriarch and he had a great deal of work to be done if he were to be home in time for the traditional Christmas Eve feast that Molly always managed to put on. He was sure that it would be special this year, as this afternoon all of the significant others of his sons were due. Bill and Charlie were going to spend a good part of the day on wizard space expansions to accommodate the five women in their cozy house. To appease Molly’s sensibilities, no matter what the domestic situations were away from the holidays and away from their mother’s home, none of the boys would be sharing a room, much less a bed, with any of the girls. The only coeducational cohabitation under this roof would between husband and wife. Arthur held no illusion that most of his boys were virgins, but there are just some things that didn’t happen directly under Molly Weasley’s nose.

Arthur came down the stairs silently, missing all of the noisier parts of the old house, drawing on the experience of more than three decades of traversing the stairwell. Entering the kitchen, Arthur waved his wand to start the morning tea. Molly would have her kitchen invaded for no more than tea making if she was around to have a say. The only times that Arthur’s limited kitchen abilities had been tested was during the final weeks of each of her pregnancies, and even then his mother-in-law, while she lived, had stationed herself in their home to aid her daughter. A strong woman, not unlike his wife, his mother-in-law only gave her respect to him in the last trimester of Molly’s first pregnancy; some time after labor started and before the midwife slapped William’s bum to start the babies first breath, followed closely by his first screaming cry. It was a respect that he held dear while Mrs. Prewett lived, due mostly to the years of toil that being granted it had required. Two years he had dated Molly under the woman’s eagle eye before her year of engagement and then a year between their marriage and Bill’s birth waiting for that day. At the time, it seemed to be never-ending.

Arthur rounded out of the kitchen to retrieve his briefcase from the living room, noting the sounds from their first floor bedroom, signaling that he had just minutes until Molly came down to start breakfast. Arthur walked in his normal quiet, unprepossessing manner to his chair where his briefcase rested, waiting to start another day at the ministry. He sat and pulled the valise into his lap. A rustle from the direction of the couch drew his attention. The occupants of the couch almost drew a gasp from the aging father.

What he saw was his youngest child, his only daughter, in the arms of the man that she had loved secretly for years. Their arms were tangled tightly around each other, as he supposed that their legs were as well, somewhere under the heavy blanket that protected them from the cool ground floor of the house. The fire had gone out some time in the night, as it always did from lack of fuel after it burned all of the split logs that had warmed them late after the sun had gone down the night before.

The silent testament to his daughter’s happiness, in the smile he could see from the corner of her mouth that wasn’t pushed deeply into Harry’s neck, warmed Arthur’s heart. That genuine smile of pure contentment had been absent since she had left home for her first year in school. It had pained him privately over the years that she had had such a traumatic entrance into her schooling and magic life, a pain compounded by his inability to succor her malaise.

Arthur rose, once again leaving his briefcase beside his chair, muttering under his breath, “Can’t have them catching a cold.”

He levitated several hefty logs silently into the fireplace and ignited them with a vigorous, silent incendiary spell. His mind satisfied that the fire would have this half of the house toasty warm shortly, Arthur did the same to the fire in the kitchen. His fatherly protection to his family’s health taken care of, he settled himself into his chair once again, his only purpose to enjoy watching his daughter’s happy existence.

Arthur was startled out of his musings as he watched his daughter when he heard what must be his wife descending the stairs to start the day. If he knew her, she would react before she gave herself time to assimilate what was really happening. Arthur truly didn’t have the heart to let his wife wake Ginny and Harry and rant at them for the ‘indecency’ of sleeping together. He shook his head to clear the cobwebs and cast a privacy bubble around the couch to prevent their disturbance.

Molly bypassed the living room just as Arthur had, entering the kitchen directly. She poured herself a cup of the hot tea that her husband had brewed minutes before as he watched her from the doorway between the living room and the kitchen.

“Good morning, Arthur,” Molly said when she noticed him watching her. “Let me get some eggs and rashers of bacon ready so you can go to work.”

“Thanks, Honey,” Arthur said to his wife. “First, though, there’s something that you should see.”

She brought her tea with her as she followed him to the living room. What she saw caused an immediate reaction, luckily at a hushed volume.

“What in the world!” Molly ranted to her husband in a thankfully hushed tone. “Arthur? Why didn’t you put a stop to this? They’re…they’re…sleeping together!”

“Molly, dear,” Arthur said to his wife, “calm down. As you can see, they are fully clothed, their hands are not in inappropriate places and your daughter is smiling. I have not seen Ginevra smile like that since she left for Hogwarts five years ago.”

“But…well, yes it is nice to see Ginevra happy,” Molly affirmed, “but how can we approve of this behavior?”
Arthur smiled to Molly. "Harry and Bill didn't get in until midnight, and so Ginny was worrying about him for several hours. There was no way that
she would have been satisfied with a simple kiss goodnight. They both needed comfort and they were best at giving it to each other. As I told you
last night when I came to bed, Harry had to deal with a domestic disturbance instead of Death Eaters last night. He had to deal with a father hitting
his wife and son, and I believe that it was a little close to home for Harry. They both needed this," he said firmly. "When I get back from work, I'll
take them aside and tell them that this is not to be a normal occurrence."

Molly sighed deeply. "I guess you're right," she conceded. "We can't watch them when they're at school, but I worry."
"They're responsible and we should trust them," he said. "I don't think they'll betray our trust."

Gathered around the couch was the entire younger set of Weasley males. Bill, Charlie, Percy, Fred, George and Ron stared at the couple snuggled
on the couch, oblivious to the world outside their embrace.

"Well, isn't this cute," Bill said with a half smile.
"It's disgraceful," Percy said. "They're not married and are still in school. They shouldn't be sleeping together, much less in mum's living room."
"Percy," Charlie said, "I know full well what you were doing at Ginny's age. You were not quite the perfect prefect that everyone thought."

Fred and George turned sharply to their older brother with their mouths open in surprise.
"What!" they chorused.
"Perfect…"
"…prefect…"
"…Percy…"
"…snuck some nooky?"
Percy started to protest, but Ron spoke up before he could. "Yeah, you said something about Ginny catching you in your fifth year with Penelope
Clearwater," Ron remembered. "Is she the significant other that we are going to see later?"

"I did not do anything disgraceful," Percy finally protested. "And yes, Penelope will be here later with the other guests."
"Very good," Bill said. "I liked her when I met her before. She's good for you."
"Yes, well," Percy started, derailed from his defensive stance, "thank you. I like her too."
"George," Charlie said, "Go get my camera from my bag. This is too cute to miss."

George saluted his older brother and took off up the stairs. George was back shortly, handing the camera to Charlie. Fred and George shared a
devious look and both drew their wands.

Charlie brought the camera to his eye, signaling Fred and George to level their wands for some action in the upcoming photo.
"Fred, George," Bill said, "What are you doing?"
"Just adding some flare to the photo," they answered.

Quicker than they could see, Ginny's arm flashed up from Harry's back under the blanket and pointed behind her back.
"Bates Mocus, Bates Mocus, Bates Mocus," she shot in rapid succession, her voice muffled against Harry's neck.

Fred and George were caught unaware and dropped their wands as they clawed at the slimy bats dripping from their noses. Bill, however,
managed to dive out of the way from the sickly yellow hex, causing it to hit the fireplace rock behind his head.
"Guess that really was a wand in his pocket," George mumbled after he and Fred had managed to dispel the hex. They had gotten good at dealing
with the Bat-Bogey Hex over the years, with as much as practice opportunities at they had.
"Ginny," Percy said bravely, "You shouldn't be sleeping with Harry. It's unseemly!"
"Go'way," Ginny said into the crook of Harry's neck. "M'comftrble."

"Ginny," Bill said, dusting himself off from his foray on the floor, avoiding the hex. "Get up. It's time for breakfast."
"M'fine here," Ginny slurred. "Go'way."
Harry stirred in Ginny’s arms, waking up. He momentarily tightened his grip on Ginny’s back before he made it to a half dazed consciousness.

“What’s go’in on, Gin?” Harry asked.

“My brothers are watching us,” Ginny answered.

Harry’s eyes snapped open, presenting him with the sideways view of the Brothers’ Weasley through his girlfriend’s sleep tousled hair.

Harry panicked and in one swift move was over Ginny and on his feet, bare chested, standing in front of the couch, facing his girlfriend’s brothers.

“I can explain,” Harry defended. “We didn’t do anything!”

Harry was reaching for his discarded shirt while he explained himself to the Brothers.

“Shut up, Harry,” Ginny said. “We didn’t do anything to defend ourselves to them for.”

“But…” Harry said.

“What’s going on?” a voice, Hermione’s, said from kitchen door.

“We found Ginny and Harry sleeping together in the living room when we came down this morning,” Ron explained with just a hint of ire in his voice.

“What!” Hermione exclaimed. “They were sleeping together in the living room!?! And you…wait,” she said, looking around and assessing the situation. “Why are they both dressed if you caught them sleeping together?”

“Harry just put on his shirt,” Ron explained.

“Yeah, but they’re both fully dressed,” Hermione reasoned. “If they were sleeping together when you found them, why is Gin fully dressed? Wouldn’t they be…you know…”

“Starkers?” Ginny supplied. “That is what I was trying to tell them. We slept in each other’s arms, but we were fully dressed. We didn’t do anything.”

“Oh,” Hermione said, collapsing to the couch beside Ginny. “I thought when they said that they found you two sleeping together that you were…”

“No,” Ginny said. “Just sleeping. It was nice until these prats woke us up. They just wouldn’t go away, so I hexed them.”

“You hexed them?” Hermione asked. “You’ll get a warning from the Improper Use of Magic Office. You aren’t supposed to do magic away from school.”

“I’ve been hexing this lot for years,” Ginny said. “Hopkirk can’t tell who’s doing the hexing in an all magic house, so no warnings go out to purebloods. I started to do the Bat-Bogey Hex long before going to Hogwarts. Seems like this bunch would have learned by now,” she finished with a glare.

“Yeah,” Fred agreed, “she is right deadly with that hex of hers. Been doing that to us since before we were sorted.”

“Makes you proud,” George added.

“Well,” Hermione said, “Hardly seems fair that purebloods get to practice magic when the rest of us can’t.”

“It’s practical,” Bill said. “If magic happens in an all magic house, who is to see? But if you are casting around Muggles it’ll create problems.”

“Still isn’t fair,” Harry said for Hermione and himself.

“Well, right,” Hermione switched track, “it’s breakfast time.”

Everyone dutifully let the subject drop and went in search of the promised breakfast.

Where breakfast on Christmas Eve had been a quiet one, especially after Ginny had finished threatening parts off her brothers, by dinnertime, the Burrow was a sea of activity. After lunch, Mr. Weasley had arrived just before his son’s girlfriends. Harry was awash with introductions and greetings. Somehow he managed to remember enough to have polite conversation with the ladies, but tried to not use their names unnecessarily, so he could minimize the chances of getting a name wrong.

By the late afternoon, all of the women had disappeared to the kitchen, much to Hermione’s horror.

“Ginny,” Hermione pulled her friend aside, “What do I do? Is this a test? She called all of us in there like we are supposed to be able to help her in there. I don’t know much about cooking and absolutely nothing about witch cooking!” Hermione exclaimed in a frantic whisper. That she was being tested in a branch of knowledge that she was lacking in terrified her.

“Don’t worry,” Ginny reassured her. “Sure, Mum wants to see that these women have what it takes to care for her sons, but don’t forget, that includes me. She’s testing me, too. She wants to make sure that I can take care of Harry, if it comes time for that. Funny thing is,” Ginny giggled,
Harry quickly cast the hex twice more at the previously hysterical twins. Unfortunately for Harry’s revenge, they had their wands at the ready and managed to cancel the hex in seconds. They had way too much practice with the Bat Bogey Hex for anyone’s good.

Ginny smiled at him and said, “Okay, now you may get dressed and come down for breakfast.” Ginny turned and left the room with her chin held high and Hermione in tow. As a final shot, she called over her shoulder, “By the way, Harry, I like that pair of boxers.”
Harry looked down and noticed his lack of clothes. He looked back at the doorway quickly, but Ginny and Hermione were already out of sight down the staircase. He could only groan before doing as his girlfriend instructed, showing as little embarrassment as he could manage.

After breakfast was served and consumed, the greatly expanded family moved into the also expanded living room and took positions on the furniture, both conjured and original.

"Okay," Mr. Weasley started, "I think this year we need to be a bit more organized for our guests. Ron, Ginny; you two get all of the presents distributed so that we can start unwrapping."

Ron's token protest died with a smile from his girlfriend, while Ginny moved to comply without even that little bit of protest. They quickly distributed the gifts, leaving a considerable pile of gifts that were addressed to people that were not present. Those gifts were slated to leave with the young couples as they went to other houses for Christmas dinner.

Harry, while familiar with the Weasley present unwrapping traditions, was astounded at the unbridled abandon with which the presents were torn into. He looked around and took stock of the rest of the celebrants.

Hermione sat beside Ron, who was, of course, ripping the paper to shreds on his boxes. She, however, was removing the paper in a calm fashion, prying the Spellotape from each fold, removing each bow and ribbon, and placing the wrappings in a neat pile to her left. She was not as prim as Percy across the living room, but still seemed to try not to rip her paper. Once opened, she examined each gift and seemed to take a second to glance at each of the givers and smile, noting who gave what in her organized mind for later thanks.

Angelina and Alicia wore huge smiles on their faces and their eyes sparked as they tore at their presents at opposite sides of the twins on the long couch. They were reasonably more civilized than their boyfriends, avoiding flinging scraps of wrapping parchment at all angles. Their wrappings ended up waddled and thrown under the coffee table, but in a pile so that it could be collected and binned later. Alicia squealed at the trinkets and bobbles that she received, while Angelina was thumbing through *The Compendium of the Historical Holyhead Harpies*, given to her by Hermione, of course.

Charlie’s girlfriend, Harry remembered her name as Sarah or Sally or something, seemed to dance on her chair through the unwrapping of her gifts. When she got to the necklace from Harry, she got an inquisitive look on her face. She examined the pendant and then skimmed the instruction pamphlet. After a couple of blinks, she aimed a smile at Harry that would have had him unsteady on his knees if he had not been sitting. He had not met her before last night and all he knew of her was that she came from the same dragon preserve as Charlie, but had grown up and schooled in the Colonies, what they now called ‘New England’, Harry recalled with a snicker. Harry gave her a nod in acknowledgement of the silent ‘thank you’.

Harry moved his gaze to Percy’s girlfriend, Penelope Clearwater, whom Harry knew was in the same class as Percy, only from Ravenclaw. Harry was emboldened that the pair was still together, considering their graduation and the stresses that must have been at work on their lives since they started to go out four years ago. She seemed to be more vivacious than her boyfriend, but was not messy in the least in her unwrapping technique. A pile was forming behind her chair of the wrapping parchment, but the bows and ribbons were carefully saved for later in a gift bag that had contained the first present that she had opened.

Harry shouldn’t have been surprised to be re-introduced to Fleur Delacour by her boyfriend Bill the day before. Apparently the English lessons that Bill had been giving her at Gringotts were paying off in some collateral ways that were easily predicted. From the way she leaned against his side and touched his leg, Bill and Fleur had a serious relationship that had everything to do with love. Harry had not felt one brush of her veela powers since he had seen her last night, although he had seen Ron look at her and blink rapidly a few times this morning, so Harry assumed that they were still there, if muted. Fleur surprised him with her relaxed tempo with which she peeled her presents, but without concern for the condition of the parchment after the unwrapping, the way that she seemed to take pleasure in each and every gift was enchanting.

In the end, Harry had a good take of shirts, books and sweets, with, of course, the traditional Weasley Jumper. Special to him, Ginny had given him a set of sixteen inks and quills. The variety of colors would make his illustrations for his Animagus transformations easier. Before he had charmed his ink to the necessary colors.

Harry had given everyone present a DA pendant on a fine Portkey chain for their safety. To each of the Weasley’s and Hermione, he gave another, more personal gift. Most were selected in Hogsmeade during one of the outings, but Charlie’s present was special. The black onyx dragon from the fire experiment in the Chamber sat on the coffee table looking around at the activity in the room. Every so often it would blow a smoke ring from its nostril or blow a gout of fire harmlessly into the air. Charlie seemed fascinated with it, as was his girlfriend. Who knew what the odds of finding a woman that shared his interests so thoroughly were?

"Is this a replica of the Hungarian Horntail that you faced in the tournament, Harry?" Charlie asked.

"As close as I can remember," Harry responded. "Professor Flitwick helped with the behavior animation spells. It won’t burn anything with its fire unless you tell it to. I made it from some scrap shards of natural Onyx that I melted and formed it in a fire spell that I was practicing."

"Well, thank you," Charlie said sincerely. "It’s fantastic. I think that I’ll put it on our mantle at home."

"You’re welcome," Harry returned.

By the afternoon, the activity and crowding in the Burrow had died down, leaving Harry and Ginny alone with her parents. Her brothers had for Christmas visits to their girlfriends’ parent’s houses for the rest of the day. The house was pleasantly quiet, save for the comfortable conversation in the living room and the occasional rattle and knock from the ghoul in the attic.
Molly perked up in her seat as she felt a tingle on her shoulder.

"Someone's just arriving, dear," Mrs. Weasley said to her husband after feeling a notice from the Burrow's wards. "Would you go see who it is?"

Before Arthur could move, Harry was half way to the door, closely followed by Ginny. When Arthur arrived in the kitchen, he saw that both Harry and his daughter had taken up guarding positions to the door from the yard, where he could hear multiple footsteps approaching. Arthur's heart rate elevated as he realized that it would be just like that sick megalomaniac He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named to attack his family on Christmas day. At once, Arthur both cursed that the house had no one to defend it besides he, his wife, their underage daughter and her emancipated minor boyfriend, and was glad that his sons had left before lunch to be with the families of their respective girlfriends. They would be spared the agony of battle. Still, their wands would be missed.

"We are expecting Remus and Tonks this afternoon," Arthur reminded the defensive minded youngsters, "sometime about now."

With this reminder not to make any holes in whoever was approaching, Arthur opened the door and prepared to greet possible guests.

"Oh, come on, dear," Remus pleaded with his girlfriend in the living room where they all congregated with fresh tea and biscuits, "you had to be scared, too. I'm sure that I wasn't alone out there."

Tonks laughed at her ferocious werewolf boyfriend. "Remus, dear, you forget that I've had class with Harry for the whole of the first term, including attending some of his extracurricular training and his little club," she reminded him. "I've seen him 'powered up' and with that look in his eye before."

The others looked on in amusement, glad that there had been no threat. Harry and Ginny had truly been set for a major battle to pour through the kitchen door when the wards showed a breach. Good as they were, Remus didn’t always trust them to differentiate between friend and foe, and in these times, caution was something that could not be had after the fact.

"Yeah," Remus responded, "that I don't understand. That look on Harry's face, not to mention Ginny's, when they're pointing their wand at you for the first second, is not something I will ever get used to and push off. That's just terrifying, especially when Harry starts to glow like that. Curdle the milk, that's what he's going to do."

"And I've had training that you haven't had," Tonks said. "All that Auror stuff was good for something, and I count not flinching away from Harry as a good thing."

"So do I," Harry chimed in.

"And," Tonks continued, "I've seen Harry's reactions. I knew that he wouldn't fire on a friendly."

Harry smiled in thanks.

"Oh, hey," Remus grasped for any chance to change the subject about how he had reacted with Harry and Ginny ready to take 'the intruders' out if they were any threat. "Do we have time before dinner, Molly? Harry, I thought that we could go over that estate business while we had a free moment."

"You finished the survey?" Harry asked. "Do I have a home this summer?"

"Oh yeah. I found some great houses in your portfolio," Remus gushed. "Tonks and I visited this great place that belonged to your great-great aunt on your father's mother's side last week. It was an old farm cottage straight out of a fairy tale. Sort of reminded me of the Burrow."

Harry smiled at the effusive werewolf. With all of his best friends dead or better off dead, Remus was in short supply of happy smiling moments.

"And you, Professor Tonks," Harry inquired, "how did you like this fairy tale cottage?"

Harry looked in her sparkling eyes as she responded, "It was perfect."
Chapter 43: Runes and Trips

Thank you to my invaluable Beta's Donalddeutsch and Sparky40sw.

By the time breakfast was fully underway on Boxing Day, both Harry and Ginny noticed the shared glances between Hermione and Bill, followed closely by their intense contemplation of Harry. For some reason, this made Harry and Ginny both think that the two intelligent magic casters were planning something. While not as frightful as when that same look was seen between the twins, Harry couldn't help but dread whatever they were contemplating. Harry looked around the relatively unpopulated Weasley table. Of the Weasley Boys, only Bill and Ron were back from visiting their girlfriends' parents; Hermione returning late Christmas evening with Ron and Bill arriving from France just before breakfast.

"What?" Harry asked nervously, shifting his eyes between Bill and Hermione and back again.

"Hmm?" Mrs. Weasley responded, not knowing that she wasn't the object of Harry's inquiry. She thought, momentarily, that Harry was objecting as she added a couple more rashers of bacon to Harry's plate without him asking. She was immediately comforted when Harry accepted the bacon without a thought as he stared back at Bill and Hermione in turn.

"What are you two in collusion at over there?" Harry asked with narrowed eyes.

"Who us?" Hermione feigned innocence.

Harry’s response was interrupted by Ron having the dubious honor of being the first Weasley Brother of the morning to be victimized by Harry's ongoing prank. With the puff of a cloud of feathers, Ron turned into, what Harry could only assume was an ancient Dodo bird. Ron's new bulky, cumbersome body was fluffy with gray feathers and topped by a solid head and menacing beak. The beak alone was the only threatening aspect of the bird, as it appeared able to do great bodily harm to any threat or source of food. Everyone's shock continued as the turkey-sized bird sent his plate clattering to the floor with a good swipe of its head. The bird then followed the food to the floor, greedily snatching the kippers and starting on the toast.

"Well, that was..." Harry spoke seriously, "almost entirely disturbing."

"What is he?" Molly asked.

"Is that what I think it is, Hermione?" Harry asked.

"Well," Hermione answered, "there are no reliable models that I know of, but I did read a book last summer at my parent's house and I think that it may just be."

"And for the uneducated amongst us?" Ginny prompted.

Harry smiled before leaning over and placing a loving kiss on her head. "Ginny, you could never be considered uneducated," Harry insisted. "We think that Ron turned into a Dodo bird. It's an ancient bird that lived on an island in the ocean and died out a long time ago. We're just surprised because the bird is extinct."

"Dodo, huh?" Bill said. "Fitting."

Harry may have thought he had escaped the machinations of the two intellectuals, but he had figured without their counsel. He had not even made it to his DA book on the table by the couch before he had been ambushed.

"Hello Harry," Hermione greeted from his right flank.

Harry was startled by the sudden appearance of his best friend. "Oh, hey Hermione," Harry returned cautiously. "I'm sorry. Didn't I greet you at breakfast?"

"Of course you did," Bill said from his left flank.

Harry managed not to startle this time, not showing any surprise that the eldest Weasley brother was teaming up on him.

"We just wanted to talk to you about that Runic Transport System that you invented," Hermione said.

"Invented?" Harry clarified.

"Okay," Bill conceded for the young wizard, "Made. It really makes little difference. I have to admit that you've got me curious about how you managed this."

"And you did invent it," Hermione insisted, not giving up on the point as easily as Bill. "It hadn't been done before and you did it. Even if you use
Much to Hermione's consternation, Harry just waved his hand indicating that he wasn't conceding the point, but wanted to move on. As a friend, she was dismayed by Harry's occasional lack of self worth, as she saw it.

"We thought that today would be a good day to look at this system," Bill continued.

"Today?" Harry asked with a raised eyebrow.

"Yes," Hermione answered.

"Oh," Harry said. "I thought that I could practice my Animagus form."

"Oh, I hadn't heard that you had finished the Animagus process," Bill responded, letting himself be distracted from the goals that he and Hermione had established earlier that morning.

"Yeah," Harry said, holding Bill's attention. "Both Ginny and I completed it about a month ago. She's a falcon and I'm a black panther. Have you ever gone through the process?"

"No," Bill said. "It was never in my area of learning. I wanted to concentrate on Ancient Runes and Arithmancy so that I could get the job I have now. I've always wondered what it would be like to be able to transform with just a thought and be another animal. What's it like?" he asked with interest.

"Oh, I'd imagine that it's similar to the animal transformations that you've been going through lately," Harry said with a smile, more comfortable with the topic at hand. "What was it like this morning? The tiger that you transformed into was similar in physiology to my panther form."

Hermione looked between the two wizards as they talked, but she couldn't hold her patience any longer. She interrupted the discourse that had gotten so far off course, "Bill," she scolded. "Don't let him distract us. We want him to show us what he did."

"You know, Hermione," Harry said with a joking smile tugging at the corner of his lips, "stuff like that make me want to stop giving you the antidote to my little prank."

"Oh," Bill realized, "So it's a potion is it?"

"Maybe," Harry teased.

"You mean," Hermione gasped, appalled, "that I have been dosed with, not only, a potion to change me into an animal with a specific delayed trigger, but also the antidote and I never knew it was happening? How could I be so careless?"

Harry just shrugged before giving her just a bit of comfort. "It's alright, Hermione. If it makes you feel any better, none of the others knew either."

"How is that supposed to make me feel any better?" Hermione asked sharply, "stop trying to distract us. Bill, stop falling into his distractions."

"Oh, yeah, of course," Bill said. "We thought that today would be a good day to learn about the runes, because we could work on that this morning and then, if you wanted, we could go to your family vault and help you to see what you wanted to see there."

"That is," Hermione interjected, "if you want the help in your vault. If not, Bill could just escort you to the bank and let you go down alone."

"Well..." Harry thought.

"Come on, Harry," she pleaded, "you promised to show us what you did."

Harry took a deep breath and slowly let it out. "Well, okay, but the first step'll be to go to Hogwarts so that you can copy the runic phrases down, in order to look them up."

Hermione and, to a lesser extent, Bill smiled in satisfaction that they were going to get to study the new system before any one else had. A second later Hermione realized what Harry had said and her smile retreated a bit.

"But, won't you be showing us your notebooks on how you made it?" she asked with a bit of a whine.

"No," Harry answered absolutely. "First you'll write what the phrases are and then I'll show you the books you can use to look them up. I'll tell you if you are on the right track, but you'll understand it better this way, and you can tell me if I overlooked anything."

"But..." Hermione started, only to be cut off by Bill.

"That sounds like an intelligent approach," Bill hastened.

"Let me just get Ginny and ask Mrs. Weasley for permission," Harry rose and exited the room.

Hermione danced around in her seat for a second before deciding that she had better talk to Ron before they left, leaving Bill alone in the living room, waiting for the party to gather.
With Ron thinking them all mental for wanting to go back to school for the day when not forced, he wasn't included in their plans for the day. Harry just knew that Hermione had couched it to be about the learning and had not mentioned anything about the Gringotts trip later. That suited Harry just fine, as he knew his friend's limitations, which he judged to not include exercising his maturity over his jealousy if he were to see Harry's family vault. In Ginny, however, Harry had every confidence. She immediately agreed that it would be a wonderful day out, although Harry suspected a secret desire, on her part, to watch the expressions on Bill's and Hermione's faces as they tried to unravel what her boyfriend had done. That meant it was the four of them; Hermione, Bill, Ginny and Harry, that received permission and floo'd to the Headmaster's office.

Harry was the last to arrive, but had forgotten Bill's lesson about magical forms of travel and ended up cursing as he picked himself up from the stone floor. The others were gracious enough to pretend that they had not been paying attention to his less than elegant entrance, which Harry was thankful for, even if it was a lie.

Harry quickly cast a cleaning charm on both himself and Ginny, interrupting her attempts to brush the black soot from her sleeves.

"Thanks," she muttered quietly, but with sincerity.

"Sure," Harry returned with a brief hug.

They were brought into the greater conversation just then as it was their turn to be greeted by the Headmaster.

"Hello Miss Weasley," He smiled through his silver beard. "Hello Harry. What's on the agenda today that has you back in school during your holiday, and with an alum as well?"

Harry returned the smile, "Well, due to a mistake on my part, Hermione learned about my summer project and Bill overheard. They insisted on learning about it, so I thought that we would start with them getting a chance to examine the runes."

"What an excellent idea," the Professor effervesced. "I, myself, have spent some very enjoyable time trying to discern the blocks used in your masterpiece, but, alas, you did nearly too good of a job. The seams between the blocks are most invisible. Quite exceptional work."

Harry blushed at the compliment as Ginny pulled him into a sideways, proud hug.

"How do you intend to make them able to see the runes in the crests?" Dumbledore asked.

Harry fished a small vial from his pocket and held the black liquid up for his professor to see. "Heartstone oil," he declared. "Ginny turned me onto the idea. While it's more viscous than water, it has virtually no surface tension, so it can flow into the joints. With a mild polishing spell, the surface is clean and all that'll show is the oil left in the cracks."

"Most clever," the Headmaster praised. "Twenty points to Gryffindor, Miss Weasley, for your creative insight. Where ever did you come across such an answer?"

"From potions class, sir," Ginny answered. "Professor Snape was warning us about the reactivity dangers of the oil in cleaning potions. He mentioned that it was needed to cut the surface tension of the other liquid ingredients, but too much and the Blow Fly Glow Sap would cause a chain reaction."

"Oh, yes," the Headmaster replied. "Very good."

Harry glanced around in the ensuing silence.

With a gathered breath, Harry moved the party along, "Well, Professor, we should be going. Care to come along?" Harry offered.

"No, no," Dumbledore said while stroking his long beard. "Thank you, but I am afraid that my duties continue despite the holidays. Go along. And if I am not in my office when you are finished, feel free to use my Floo. The pot is on the table," the Headmaster offered, pointing to a half round table beside the fireplace.

"Thank you, Professor," Bill responded for the group.

Harry led them over to the small crest that adorned the floor in front of the office doors.

"Okay," Harry told his companions, "grab a hold of me and we'll be down to the Chamber in a trice."

With nary a sound, the four disappeared from the Headmaster's office.

And reappeared in the dark Chamber. Ginny was quick with the wand waving, causing the torches to flare to life.

"Nice hideaway," Bill complimented.

"Oh," Harry replied, "it wasn't nearly this nice before the summer."

"Please Harry," Hermione suddenly interrupted with a shudder before Harry could give any sort of demonstration. "Don't show us again. I don't want to go through seeing that again."

Bill gave a curious look.
“Don’t ask,” Hermione continued. “He scared the britches off the whole school at the Halloween Ball by showing them just how it looked before he changed it to this. Then he ‘greeted’ all of us by telling us that Four Hundred and Twenty Seven had entered, but only six had left alive. He just failed to mention that the students and teachers that had just entered made up four hundred and twenty one of those.”

Bill laughed and congratulated Harry on pranking the whole school.

“Okay,” Harry said with a small clap of his hands. “You kiddies stay right here while I go fetch some things.”

Before they could react, Harry had vanished from where he was standing on the Chamber’s crest.

“I swear,” Bill proclaimed, “that boy gets more strange every year.”

Hermione bristled and looked like she might defend her best friend, but was interrupted when Ginny agreed, “You don’t know the half of it.”

Minutes later, Harry reappeared, his arms laden with books stacked to his chin.

“Okay,” Harry spoke as soon as he appeared, startling the other three. “Here we have some books that could help you in deciphering the runes that I used in making the crests. And here,” Harry shuffled the books into Hermione’s arms and grabbed the original vial that he showed the Professor and one other larger one with a clear liquid, “are the Heartstone oil and a cleaning potion that will remove it completely from the crest when you’re done.”

Hermione contemplated what Harry told them. “Why can’t we leave this crest marked so we will be able to recheck the runes?”

“Hmm,” Harry said. “The problem is, as soon as you add the Heartstone oil, it seeps into the joints and separates the individual rune blocks from one another. This prevents the magic from being enacted, as each rune is then separate and not part of the whole. Until it’s cleaned, it’s out of service.”

“Oh,” Bill replied with a blink of his eyes. “Would the same work for the tombs in Egypt? Do you think that we could use Heartstone oil to deactivate the runic protections there?”

“Possibly,” Harry answered. “Try it sometime.”

Harry handed the two vials of liquid; black and clear, to Bill and turned with a wave. “Best to get busy. Let us know when you’re done. We’ll be at the other end of the Chamber practicing.”

Hermione and Bill took no notice of the couple walking to the other end of the chamber as they poured the Heartstone oil on the crest and watched as the joints were highlighted in black.

“Bollocks,” Bill exclaimed. “Why did I never imagine that he used such small rune blocks?”

“And so many of them,” Hermione answered.

Harry walked casually beside Ginny until they reached the far end of the Chamber from the entrance and the crest. Once near the end, they both drew their wands and separated.

“What this time?” Harry asked.

“Duel, I think,” Ginny responded, lowering herself into a dueling stance.

“Rules?” Harry asked.

“DA book through the fourth column,” Ginny said. “Nothing intended on damage.”

“Other spells not covered by the book?” Harry asked.

“No human transfiguration of yourself or your opponent,” Ginny answered. “You haven’t learned that well yet and McGonagall doesn’t start it for me until next year.”

“Okay,” Harry agreed as he transfigured a jagged, dangerous rock behind Ginny into a down pillow and then silently summoned it into the back of her head, taking her by surprise and filling the air around her with floating feathers.

It was nearly noon when the more studious pair’s marathon copying session ended. Harry and Ginny had been distracted for more than three hours, most of it spent on semi-genuine training issues, the rest exploring…things. When Hermione and Bill’s time had lapsed, they were finished with the monstrous task of isolating the patterns of rune patches. Some parts of the crest were made of one pattern woven of several sets of runes and others were different sets. They found their time best served in breaking down the image into the different sectors and copying the sets for each sector and then moving onto the next sector. This process took all of their time until Harry called a halt to their efforts when he saw them start to use the books to look up the meanings of the runes. He figured that step could take place on their time back at the Burrow when Harry and Ginny didn’t have to be along. Bill quickly shrunk the books when he noticed that their time was up, pocketing them.

After cleaning up the Heartstone oil and scraps of leftover parchment, Harry took the group back out of the Chamber, leaving the magic torches to fade as the magic infused in their lighting dissipated. They left Hogwarts for Diagon Alley after thanking the Headmaster, who was enjoying lunch at
his desk, sucking on the pimento olive that had been speared to his beef sandwich.

In the Alley, they managed to find food in a variety other than that found in the Leaky Cauldron. Bill guided them to a restaurant Harry hadn’t ever seen before and Hermione had never visited. It was safe to say that there wasn’t a place in the Alley that Hermione had not noticed, but she hadn’t had too many meals while visiting. Ginny hadn’t been to the in years; since Bill had graduated Hogwarts and been hired at Gringotts.

They sat down at the Golden Aethonon and ordered what Harry thought sounded like wonderful food. Conversation flowed easily and avoided anything upsetting, such as the current dark lord or Harry’s lack of knowledge concerning his family history.

“How many pages did you end up with?” Harry asked Hermione.

“How many pages?” Hermione returned.

Harry and Ginny exchanged a glance. “How many pages of runes did you end up with this morning?”

“Oh, um, twenty?” she guessed uncertainly.

“Twenty?” Harry chuckled. “Twenty pages? Did you notice that there were repeats?”

Ginny tried to hide her giggle by shoving her vegetables into her mouth.

“Yes,” she claimed. “We found the different sectors with different sets of runes for each. We tried to find each and copy all of them.”

That strain of conversation was interrupted with another pop, as Bill was replaced where he sat with a seal, its slick fur a grayish black. The seal stayed stationary on the chair with a surprised look on its face. The other patrons of the restaurant looked on in curiosity and humor. Hermione was amused and glad that they had not chosen to eat in a Muggle establishment.

“Oh,” Harry replied with as much seriousness as he could. “Dessert?”

Despite having a Gringotts employee with them, the four waited in line for the next available goblin. Bill told them that no special preferences were given to off duty employees at the bank.

“Besides,” Bill said, “I can’t just take you down into the tunnels to your vault, now can I? Only Goblins can pilot the carts and we’d be hopeless to find the original vaults without their help.”

Harry smiled and nodded in agreement. “I think I know what you mean,” Harry replied. “Before first year, Hagrid took me to my vault for the first time. It took a key, but the other vault we went to had no keyhole. The goblin just stroked his finger down the door and it opened. Griphook said that they only check to see if a non-goblin tried to open the high security vaults every decade or so.”

“But, why do they wait so long to check?” Ginny asked. “If someone did get to the vault, they wouldn’t know for as much as ten years.”

Bill chuckled while Hermione fought between warring emotions of amusement and horror at her knowledge of what actually would happen.

“No,” Bill said. “In that time they would just find a skeleton. The high security vaults just suck any non-goblin into the vault and lock them in. They would be long dead before they could ever be found.”

“Oh,” Hermione replied. “Do you think that the goblin that helps us would be willing to answer any questions?”

Harry and Ginny both kept silent with their own opinions and experiences of goblins and goblin banking practices. Bill, however, was not shy in offering his opinion of the creatures that he had been working for since leaving Hogwarts.

“I think that you would be welcome to ask,” Bill answered. “The goblins prize knowledge on certain subjects, so they’ll understand and mostly cooperate with questions. But, realize, they won’t answer all of your questions. Don’t press them for answers.”

Hermione beamed. Learning was, certainly, one of her greater joys in life. Before Hermione could respond verbally, they reached the front of the line where there was an impatient looking goblin waiting for them to state their business.

“Excuse me, sir,” Harry said. “I would like to access vault number forty-two. My name is Harry Potter.”

The goblin showed little interest as he paged through a ledger book on his desk. Closing that one and retrieving another from below the desktop, the goblin had yet to speak. By the time the goblin had viewed a half dozen pages in the second book, Harry was nervous. Had he not gotten the information correct? Was his inheritance just truly a mistake? Even without the money in his ancestral vault, Harry knew that he was well off, but the value of what he might find in his ancestral vault spanned so much more than could be measured through the counting of coins. The vault, to him, signified the chance to learn who he was and where he came from.

Harry was startled out of his dark introspection and worry when the goblin behind the counter suddenly said, “Very well, Mr. Potter. Wait by those doors. A goblin will be by shortly to escort you to your vault.”

Harry’s eyesight, and indeed the others as well, followed the goblin’s long dark finger to a set of rich wooden doors at the end of the lobby. Vaguely, Harry recognized them as the doors that were always taken to the caves and vaults, but the curt demeanor of the goblin teller was intimidating, even
for one as powerful as Harry.

With a brief ‘thank you’ to the disinterested goblin, Harry and the gang walked over and stood by the doors.

“Well,” Hermione said, “if the other goblin that helps us is similar to the first, I don’t see myself able to find answers to my questions easily.”

“Not sure that I’d try,” Ginny whispered just loud enough for the four to hear.

They were not waiting long before a goblin swung the doors open.

“Welcome,” the goblin greeted Ginny, Hermione, Bill and Harry. “I'm Gostwick. Vault number?”

“Hello,” Harry stammered. “Um, vault number forty-two, please.”

“Of course,” Gostwick answered. “Enter the cart and sit securely in the seats provided. Be sure that nothing is sticking out of the cart, as Gringotts will not be responsible for any missing or damaged parts.”

The goblin did not even acknowledge, or maybe even notice, the nods from Ginny and Hermione, or the smiles from the men.

“One last warning,” the goblin said ominously. “You have requested to go to an original ancestral vault. If this is a fraudulent request, goblin law dictates the disposition of your remains. Your next of kin will be notified if that is the case.”

Harry, Hermione and Ginny gaped in stunned silence. Mechanically, they did as they were told, entering the cart and sitting securely in the seats. Bill climbed in behind them, chuckling noticeably.

“What in Merlin’s name,” Ginny growled at her brother, “is so funny, mister?”

“Oh, just, I had heard that the goblins that take new patrons to their ancestral vaults for the first time like to have fun with their customers,” Bill replied with a certain amount of glee, “But this is too much,” he smiled broadly.

“So they were just joking?” Hermione asked.

“No,” Bill replied. “If anyone tries to gain access in any way to an ancestral vault fraudulently, they really wouldn't survive, or so legend goes.”

“That's just...” Hermione started, but was cut off as the goblin, Gostwick, pushed a lever forward.

“Sit still, please,” entreated the cart's pilot.

“That was...” Hermione staggered from the cart.

“Thrilling?” Harry said with a huge smile plastered on his face, as it had been since the cart first started to move. The cart ride had descended further down then Harry had ever gone before.

“I think ‘trying’ would be a word that I would more likely use, in this case,” Hermione corrected.

“Oh, come on,” Harry said. “I've never gone this far down before.”

Hermione got that thoughtful look on her face that told anyone that knew her that she was preparing to ask a question.

“Yeah, about that,” Hermione pondered thoughtfully, “Mr. Gostwick, would you mind if I asked a question or two?”

Harry looked at Ginny, connecting with her eyes before mouthing, 'One or two, only?'

Ginny responded with a shake of her head and a smile.

“My name is just Gostwick,” the goblin responded. “Goblins do not use human prefixes. And yes you may.”

Harry took silent direction from Gostwick to approach the indentation in the wall at the back of the ledge where they had stopped. Hermione hardly paid attention to her friend as she started on her questions.

“Harry just said that this is the farthest that he had ever traveled in the goblin tunnels,” she prefaced. “How is that possible? It seems that the older tunnels would be the closest to the bank.”

“I see your logic,” the goblin said, “but what you don't know is the geology of London. The ground of this area of London is gravel over clay until you get about a hundred and forty feet down, where you hit chalk for the next six and a half hundred feet. Below that is green sand, all of which are useless for creating suitable conventional tunnels. Finally, nearly a thousand feet below the surface is something usable. Below all of those less secure layers is a sixty feet thick layer of oolite over strong limestone, either of which are excellent for the old ways of vault building. It wasn't until after the construction of the original tunnels that we invented ways in goblin magic to transfigure the upper layers into stable and permanent rock, so most of the modern vaults are carved in the transfigured chalk layer.”

While Gostwick lost himself in one of two favorite goblin pastimes, geology, Harry had walked up to the rough stone wall that their guide had indicated. When he was standing in front of it, he felt a sensation wash over him, similar to passing through a sheet of water. Immediately it was the
Most invasive thing he had ever felt. He looked back at Ginny, who was the only one besides him not paying attention to the goblin’s explanation of vault construction. She smiled at him, giving him the courage to take another step forward, with his hand raised to feel for any indications on the stone wall that there was a door to be opened, or something of the sort.

What he was met with was not the rough stone that his eyes told him was present. What he felt was a cold and formidable metal plane. With the contact of his hand, the rock seemed to melt away, leaving him facing that which he felt; a great metal door emblazoned with a family crest that Harry hoped was his own, given the magical punishments he was expecting if he were wrong. The rest of the door was formidable, albeit plain with the only other feature being the Gringotts seal in the lower right hand corner of the iron door.

Not knowing what to do, and seeing that the goblin was still distracted by Hermione and Bill’s curiosity, Harry recklessly proceeded; placing his hand in the middle of the seal and waiting for a response. With nothing forthcoming, Harry gave a small push. He jumped back in surprise, landing solidly at Ginny’s side, forcing them to grab onto each other to keep upright. They heard a clicking from the direction of the door. With a great groan that managed to attract the attention of the rest of the inattentive group, the thick iron door swung outward, forcing Harry and Ginny to step from its path of travel.

“Very well, Master Potter,” the goblin turned to face Harry. “It would seem that, not only are you a Potter ancestor, but are the master of this vault.”

Harry was confused at the statement. “What do you mean?”

“If the magics that had created the original vaults had not recognized your ancestry, you would have been subject to the justice established at the vault’s founding,” Gostwick educated Harry and his guests. “As you were able to open the vault door without any other action besides pressing the seal, it is obvious that you are the rightful master of the vault.”

Harry decided that he never wanted to learn, directly or otherwise, what his family thought was sufficient justice for a potential thief at the time of the bank’s founding. He assumed that it was not one of the more pleasant activities that could have taken place.

“Does that mean that Harry is the head of his family?” Ginny asked.

“In wizarding terms, yes,” the goblin replied.

Hermione was thoughtful for a second, considering her question, “Pardon me for asking Harry,” she said to her friend before turning to their escort, “I thought that that was well known. Harry’s parents were killed when he was a baby, as you know. Wouldn’t that automatically make him the head of his family?”

“Not always,” the goblin said. “If there had been any adult living relatives in his family tree, conservatorship would have been given to them until Mr. Potter’s majority.”

“But I was emancipated over the summer,” Harry argued. “For all purposes, I am past my majority.”

“I am afraid, Mr. Potter,” the goblin regarded him, “that if your holdings had gone into conservatorship, it would have had to have been transferred to you on your majority, an event that would have stuck in your mind.”

“Oh,” Harry said on a down beat. He took Ginny’s hand and moved into the vault. “Thank you Gostwick,” he said with a pause. He continued into the vault with Ginny silent at his side. “Hermione,” Harry called without stopping or turning, “Would you do me a favor and check the books for any that would be interesting or helpful.”

“Sure, Harry,” Hermione called back.

“What’s wrong?” Bill asked quietly, out of Harry’s hearing. “I thought that he would have known that he had no relatives on the Potter side.”

“Hmm,” Hermione quietly pondered. “I believe Harry has held the hope over the years, since he was a child, that he had a distant relative that he could turn to for support of any kind. Even with his adulthood, Harry, I think, hopes for a family.”

“Well,” Bill said thoughtfully, “He has Mum and Dad and the rest of us, and I dare say that he will make a family of his own someday,” he smiled. “Perhaps with Ginny.”

“Perhaps.”

Hermione and Bill moved into the vault to follow their friends and sister.

“Harry,” Bill called. “Would you mind if I looked at the magical artifacts?”

“Sure, Bill, thanks,” Harry answered as he approached a large tome on a plinth. “Just let me know if there is anything interesting.”

Hermione moved to the far side of the large room that was lined in tall shelves filled neatly with leather bound books of all sizes. Bill flitted with his wand out from location to location around the impressive vault, detecting the properties of the many and varied objects large and small around the shelves and tables filling the vault.

“Ginny,” Harry said quietly, “feel free to look at anything that you would like. Let me know if anything stirs your interest.”

“I like what you have found here, Harry,” Ginny replied. “Are you going to take this with you?”

She indicated the tome on the plinth that had first grabbed his attention due to its prominence at the center of the vault. Quickly they had found that it
was a family grimoire that held highlights of his family's history and spells that had been invented for or by his ancestors. They recognized a few that he had found previously in either his school texts or in his time in the school library, but the vast majority he failed to recognize from his past dealings.

"Gostwick," Harry called to their goblin escort who was just outside the vault door. "Am I allowed to take just anything out of this vault, or are there restrictions?"

"This vault is your's, Mr. Potter," Gostwick replied, "as well as anything contained within. You may take anything within but the vault itself. Gringotts will be glad to transport anything of mass that you wish to not be burdened with for a nominal fee."

"Thank you," Harry told him, "I'll take this back with us and anything else of interest. I think that I'll have to take a lot more time to study it than I can give it now."

"Very well," the goblin said, all the while still not passing the threshold to the vault.

"Come on, Ginny," Harry said, moving off with her in hand. "Let's find something more fun in here."

With his want for a family history fulfilled in the depths of his family grimoire, the rest of the trip could be dedicated to more pedestrian goals. They moved toward Hermione, who had a stack of books on an ancient looking library table that surprised Harry with its presence. Hermione was intent and managed little more than polite greetings while she moved from subject to subject. Harry and Ginny moved off, together the whole time, looking from jewelry to wands that looked to be more museum pieces than what you would want for your own use. His glance at the rings proved to Harry that he wouldn't have to shop in a jewelry story for an eventual engagement ring when the time came.

The group spent a couple of hours looking at what was available from Harry's ancestors, making several decisions of some useful and interesting things to bring along with them as they left. Harry was mesmerized for a good amount of the time staring at his family tree, as it was embroidered into a tapestry that hung from the wall to the left of the vault door. He was unable to find anything surprising; he didn't find that he was a descendant of all four founders or a direct descendant of the illegitimate love child of Merlin and Morganna. Hermione's own search was not complete, but she went through as many books as possible by only browsing and not reading anything in depth. Harry and Ginny could tell that she would like to have a more intensive search through the collection at a later time. She surfaced with several books on defense as well as a good representation of the other subjects in magical study. Bill didn't find any previously unknown cloaks or armor that would block the unblockable, but did find some objects that would normally be found only in the Department of Mysteries. Harry took a second invisibility cloak, just in case, but passed on a time turner, fearing the lure of abuse and the consequences of mistakes.

The vault did warrant future trips when Harry could spend time contemplating the objects and their importance to his family history, as he might find it in the grimoire, but that was a pursuit for later times.

During the trip to the surface Harry and the others found themselves looking at the walls of the caves they traversed, hoping to see the layers as they made their way from a thousand plus feet below the surface. Afterwards he thanked Gostwick for his patience and assistance. He asked if the goblins normally stayed with clients at the vaults whenever they visited, no matter the duration, to which he found out that it was, indeed, bank policy.

Harry was determined to spend the bulk of the remainder of his time before their return to Hogwarts on the reading of his family history and on his second Animagus form. With study and luck, he hoped to be completed with his drawings before boarding the Express, so that he could get his Transfiguration Professor to supervise his second transformation. Hermione and Ron spent a good time alone, away from the prying eyes of others, but Harry knew in his heart that they were not doing anything they were not ready for. He was sure that they hadn't gained carnal knowledge of each other, but didn't want to know for sure when they had.

Harry did wonder when his prank would be busted and who would figure it out first, but he knew it had to be soon. The rest of the Brothers Weasley were due back for dinner shortly, and by the following breakfast all of them would be dosed with the potion, this time without the antidote they had received on Christmas Eve and Day. Maybe the holiday would prove to offer some more entertainment before the prank's conclusion. Only time would tell.
Charlie Weasley was a meticulous man, in his own way. Working with dragons, as he had from his leaving of Hogwarts until this previous spring, forced a person to pay attention to the details of every action, but not in a way that his younger brother, Percy, would have appreciated. Percy was the detail oriented type of stickler that you would want reviewing a new law before it was passed or performing the research that would, perhaps, save a loved one from a once incurable disease. Dragons, however, would have Percy tearing his hair out and swearing like a true Weasley male when not around a Weasley female. With dragons, you had to pay attention to details and not be lax or cut corners, but you had to react instantly to changing situations. It was a more free-form type of work than bean-counting.

When Charlie got back on Boxing Day from his stay at his girlfriend's parent's house, he found himself surprised when he was able to eat a large lunch with his mother and Ron without any fauna related consequences. The Brothers had been granted a reprieve over the Christmas Holiday, but only, as they understood, for the Eve and day itself; Boxing day was separate. The end of the reprieve was evidenced by Ron's change while eating his chips.

Charlie decided that the prank had gone on long enough. Previously he had not tried very hard to avoid the prank, but now he wanted to find the cause. One factor in his calculations of cause was, in fact, Ron's transformation into a garden snake.

"Ron, did you transform this morning, too?" Charlie asked.

"Yeah," Ron slurred around a mouthful of beef sandwich. "Harry and Hermione said something about me changing into an extinct bird or something."

"Really?" Charlie asked. "What kind?"

"Hmmm," Ron tried to remember, "a coco?"

"A dodo, Ronald," his Mother corrected.

"Yeah, a dodo," Ron confirmed. "That's what Hermione said."

"You sure?" Charlie asked. "Not like her to forget a fact that she read. The extinct muggle bird, the dodo, is really a magical bird, the diricawl. Wizards let the muggles think they're responsible for the extinction of the species so they might be more careful about how they use animals."

"Seems a pretty silly reason," Ron answered.

"I think that they really did it so the muggles wouldn't be able to study them, as they're a rather magical bird. Muggle science started to get good enough at the time that maintaining secrecy started to become a problem. I shudder to think what they can do now," Charlie said as he wiped his mouth with his napkin and stood from the table. "Well, I think I'll see if I can figure out what Harry did."

"Wait, magical?" Ron exclaimed. "You mean that I could have done something magical when I was transformed and all I did was sit there?"

At dinner after their return from Gringotts, Hermione was mortified to find out that she had gotten her information wrong about a subject that she had read. Immediately after being reminded of the entry on the diricawl in Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them, she exclaimed a patently false phrase that Ron and Harry had not heard out of her mouth since their first year.

"How could I have been so stupid?" Hermione exclaimed. "Of course you're right. The dodo is another name for the diricawl. I can't believe that I forgot it from Fantastic Beasts. I'll never live this down," she ended morosely.

Harry and Ron could only share a look that confirmed agreement that she was just nutters. The last thing they were likely to do is remind Hermione of a book, forgotten or otherwise. That'd just be a slow death by boredom. As it was, they'd probably have to put up with her reading it as much as she read Hogwarts, a History.

By mutual silent agreement, Ron and Harry would never encourage Hermione to share the wondrous facts that could be found in Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them, through teasing or otherwise.

Harry watched as each of the Weasley boys sat at the breakfast table and accepted the offered food. They were leery at the sight of their normal portions, but they didn't let that stop them. Displaying the Gryffindor courage that marked the family throughout history, they dug in, knowing they would find themselves transformed before the breakfast was through. With a resignation to fate and a reckless courage, they plowed through the beginning of the meal. Nonetheless, Harry watched with an eager eye. His anticipation was on high to find out who would solve the prank.

When Ron had finished his third banger, Harry knew the jig was up. By now, he was sure that one or all of the Weasleys should have transformed...
Harry accused, "Which one of you broke the prank?"

"Well," Ron answered, swallowing an unnaturally large bite, "I threw away that brown thing under my bed. You must have used that to curse me during the night."

"Eeww, Ron," Ginny whined. "That must have been a dust bunny. How long has it been since you cleaned your room?"

"You mean, it wasn't cursed?" Ron asked. "Then why did it glow in the dark?"

"You...it..." Hermione stammered. "You know what? I don't want to know."

"And what do you mean," Ron asked, "clean my room? I thought that Mum cleaned my room."

"Ronald," his Mum said, "I clean your room after you leave for school so that nothing grows legs and moves to an already clean part of my house. You, young man, know that you are supposed to keep your room tidy."

"So," Harry said loudly to change the subject to something safer. "Anyone else think they solved the prank?"

"I solved it, I think," Percy proclaimed. "Were you hexing us in our sleep? I put a reflexive shield around my bed."

"No," Harry answered. "And stationary reflexive shields are too easy to get around. Any other takers?"

"We put..."

"Aristotle's Super Stick-um..."

"in Ron's shoes," the twins confessed.

"That was you?!" Ron raged.

"What does that have to do with solving the prank?" Harry asked.

"Nothing," Fred said.

"It was just fun," George offered.

"Bill?" Harry asked.

"Don't look at me, Harry," Bill answered. "At least as a curse breaker, I would've known if I solved this one."

"So, tell us Charlie," Harry said, turning to the smirking stout man, "What's been responsible for the Weasley Brothers' changes?"

"So it was the bloody tooth paste?" Charlie exclaimed. "I wasn't sure, but it was the only thing that we all use. I ruled out food a few days before Christmas and it was the only thing left."

"Glad I chose that, then," Harry expressed happily. "I didn't figure everyone used the same cologne and I know that everyone doesn't use mouthwash."

"Harry, Ginny," Mr. Weasley started. "I understand that you both have successfully become Animagi."

"Yes, sir," Harry confirmed as Ginny nodded.

"What were your thoughts on registration?" he asked.

"We, um," Harry stammered.

"We figured that it would be too dangerous for our enemies to know about it until after this is over," Ginny told her father in the empty living room.

Arthur rubbed his chin in contemplation. "I believe you're right. But I don't especially want my little girl or her boyfriend to go to Azkaban over something as trivial as this."

"Given a choice," Harry declared seriously, "between safety or risking having to explain myself to the Wizengamot when this is over, I prefer safety. This could be important."

"You're right, Harry," Arthur said. "But, I may have a solution. Can I make an appointment with someone that we can trust in the DMLE so that this can all be officially under the table?"

Harry and Ginny shared a silent conversation within a look. Trusting another Ministry employee was not something that would come easy with their interactions in the past, but they had to trust Mr. Weasley's judgment. It hadn't failed them yet.

"Who would you talk to?" Ginny asked.
The Director, Amelia Bones, is a fair and honest law enforcement professional, and even more important, she's practical," Arthur told them. "She'll understand the necessity of keeping this information secure."

Harry and Ginny shared another brief look before they both nodded.

"Good, good," Arthur smiled. "Both of you will come with me to the Ministry the day after tomorrow. I'll have an appointment arranged for the first thing in the morning. Now," Arthur continued, "I think that it's time for you two to show me your forms. I am so proud of you both for tackling such a difficult task."

Harry was none-too-vaguely nervous about traveling with Mr. Weasley for an appointment with Magical Law Enforcement. The similarity to sixteen months ago was all too obvious. Luckily, this time they were leaving from the Burrow, which allowed them to travel by Floo, although the ride was nothing that Harry enjoyed repeating.

Harry was the last out of the Atrium fireplace from their party. As he stepped from the green flames, he stepped into Ginny's waiting arms.

"Ginny," Harry exclaimed in surprise. "What are you doing? If I had stumbled like I normally do, you would've been flattened."

"Well, gee, Harry," Ginny's voice dripped with sarcasm, "You're welcome. Here I am ready for your normal graceful exit and you have such nice things to say to me?"

"Oh well, umm," Harry replied nervously, knowing he had nearly stuck his foot in it again. "I just don't want you to be hurt."

"That is fine, Harry," Ginny returned, "But I am my own woman, and I'll catch you when you fall if I want." She blinked, "And by the way, good job with not falling."

"Thanks."

"Come along," Mr. Weasley urged. "We have an appointment at nine with the Director."

They were ushered into the Director of Magical Law Enforcement's office after a short wait. They found her secretary to be personable and cheery, and were relieved when she didn't show any excess awe at The-Boy-Who-Lived. Harry found it refreshing to be treated so professionally, something he wasn't used to, as evidenced by his experience with wand registration at the security stand. The attendant, Eric, had been over-awed by his presence and made the fact known. Ginny was just glad that she didn't have to show the young woman outside Madame Bones's office who's territory Harry really was, as she was sure that he had not noticed the attention the rest of the office staff had shown him.

"Mr. Potter," Madame Bones stepped around her desk to shake his hand. She then greeted Mr. Weasley and Ginny in a similar manner.

"Thank you for the appointment, Director Bones," Mr. Weasley returned. "I wanted Ginny and Harry to settle a matter with this office before it turned into something more serious later."

"Of course," she replied. "What is the matter that needs to be settled?"

Mr. Weasley smiled with pride, "Well, Director, these two students have apparently managed to complete the Animagus process and are now both Animagi."

"Hmm..." the Director contemplated the couple through her monocle. "It would seem that congratulations are in order. Am I to assume that the both of you are here to fulfill the legal requirements of the action?"

"Yes, ma'am," Harry answered deferentially.

Ginny echoed his reply with a nod.

"Hmngm," Arthur cleared his throat. "It seems that you have this under control. Thank you for seeing them today."

"Yes, you're welcome, Arthur," she replied, offering and receiving a handshake. "And thank you as well for helping the children to do what is required. I'll see that they Floo home safely after the registration is completed, if you wish."

Harry and Ginny stood to the side as the professionals exchanged greetings.

"Oh, that would be lovely, Amelia," Mr. Weasley replied. "I had planned on waiting in your anterior room for them to be finished, but I do have a heavy workload today, coordinating with your office for some upcoming raids on suspected Death Eaters, so, if they don't mind..." he turned to his daughter and her boyfriend.

"Nah, go ahead Dad," Ginny said. "How much safer could we be than in the middle of Auror central?"

"Okay, thanks Pumpkin," Arthur smiled. He gave her a hug and placed a kiss on her forehead. Releasing his daughter, he shook Harry's hand and thanked Amelia once more before leaving the office.

"Well, now," Madame Bones broke the quiet and waved the pair to the seats facing her desk. "Let us have a seat and discuss your Animagus status. I do believe that you may have some questions for me?"
Harry and Ginny shared a glance and a small smile. They both knew the question that Harry had not been able to find an answer to in his limited research on Animagus Registration law.

“Yes, um...” Harry paused. “What is the legal requirements for registration with multiple Animagus forms?”

They got just a shadow of their expected entertainment as the Director of Magical Law Enforcement blinked for a few seconds before she could respond, even then her response was measured.

“Am I to assume that one of you has achieved this feat?” she asked.

“No,” Harry replied cryptically.

“And are you planning to add to this dynamic,” she asked, “or are you just curious?”

A third? she clarified. “And what, may I ask, is your reasoning?”

“My first form,” Harry told her, “is rather inconspicuous, but fun in its own right. Ginny's is completely fun and dead useful. Unfortunately, they aren't very compatible for spending any time together.”

Ginny smiled. “He's rather sweet, isn't he?” she asked the law enforcement professional.

Madame Bones smiled at the obvious young love. “Quite,” she replied. “That would account for two forms. How does the third come into the equation?”

“Well...”

“Weasley!” Minister for Magic Cornelius Oswald Fudge shouted at his closed office door. He had just finished reviewing his day's schedule and found it lacking in the kind of thing he needed most at the moment. He had felt his reputation in the public eye lacking of late, in fact for the past half year. Ever since it was so shockingly revealed that He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named had indeed returned to terrorize the British wizarding world, the Minister had not been able to bring the Press to his side and convince them that he had not been mistaken in his assessment of the young Harry Potter and the venerable Albus Dumbledore. The Prophet had used such words in passing as 'incompetent', 'negligent' and 'irresponsible'. He was at a loss for something to gain favor with the paper and the public, as his one attempt at strong arming the publication had required that he covertly call for a trusted obliviator or remove any repercussions for his unsuccessful attempt. Lately he had been keeping an eye on the daily agendas of each of his departments as well, hoping one of them would prove fruitful.

“Yes, Minister?” Percy answered as he entered the powerful office. In his hand was the folder containing the information that he knew Fudge would ask for, just as he had asked for the information each morning for more than a week.

“Would you bring me the daily agenda for each of my departments?” the pinstriped man requested.

“Right here, Sir,” Percy said with dripping respect. It was Percy's opinion that the office, if not the man, deserved respect be given.

Fudge took the folder and scanned the list of meetings and conferences that were due for the day, hoping for some good press from the daily grind.

“What is this here?” Fudge asked, holding up the revised schedule for the administration offices of the Department of Magical Law Enforcement.

“What, sir?” Percy asked, moving closer to the minister's desk.

“Is that your sister's name?” Fudge asked, jabbing the parchment right on the morning meeting already in progress. “What is Harry Potter doing talking to Director Bones? Isn't that your sister's name with his?”

Percy examined the parchment for effect, even though he knew exactly what it said. He had, after all, compiled the information before giving it to the Minister. “Yes, sir,” he responded, “it is.”

“Well,” the Minister prompted with little patience evident. “Do you know why they are in a meeting with the Head of the Magical Law Enforcement?”

“No, sir,” Percy said. “I don't know why they're meeting with Madame Bones. I could send a memo down to her assistant requesting the information, if you wish.”

“No, no,” Fudge dismissed. “I'll just go down and see for myself. Send a memo to the Press Room and have the liaison assemble the press around a dais in the Atrium in front of the magical fountain so that I may address them.”

“But, sir,” Percy stammered quickly. “What if the Potter thing's not a thing? What are you going to tell the press after you had them all assemble? And sir, are you sure that you want to do it in front of the fountain? It hasn't been remade yet, so it's still in shambles.”

“Well, then...” the Minister paused. “I'll just collect the Auror Activity Reports while I am down there and report to the press all of the numerous effective things they have been up to in the last week. And, yes, you're right, move the dais to in front of the mural wall, to the right of the street...”
"Very well, sir," Percy said as Fudge swept from the office with his green bowler in hand.

Percy quickly drafted a memorandum to the Press Liaison requesting a press conference be arranged immediately, as per the Minister requested. He had a bad feeling about the events that were about to unfold, but the Minister had asked if he knew what the meeting was about, and he didn't. He had a serious suspicion, but he didn't know.

Meanwhile, in Madame Bones' office, the conversation continued. Harry's curiosity and concern for privacy and practicality was gaining him a good interpretation of the current law, as seen by the Head of Magical Law Enforcement herself.

"Yes, Mr. Potter," she said. "In this case the law is ambiguous in your favor. Once one is a registered Animagus, new forms will need to be registered for accountability reasons, but a time frame isn't given. In previous cases of laws with ambiguous time lines before the Wizengamot, we have seen that a reasonable amount of time is allotted by the court, usually equaling a year."

"What about the press?" Harry asked. "Will they have access to each of my forms from the registry to report as they wish?"

"The law, Harry," she responded, "requires registration with the Ministry's Department of Magical Law Enforcement. As a standard practice, each wizard or witch registered is published in the official register in order to curb the abuse that is possible through an Animagus's ability. As it is rare for a wizard or witch to pursue a second or, even less, a third form, the law doesn't specifically address the issue. What would remove any doubt about your staying within the intent of the law would be to register each year that you add more forms, if, that is, you continue your training beyond what you currently have planned. The law would require, at a minimum, that each time you register, one of the forms registered would be recorded in the public registry. Any further arrangements would be at the discretion of the officials in charge of Magical Law Enforcement at the time."

"So, that would mean if I were able to complete two forms in the next year," Harry concluded, "the press would only be privy to one of them? How is this legal? Can you really conceal a person's Animagus forms?"

"Yes, it's been done before," she replied. "You're not the first to ask for a sealed registration, but the other situations weren't the same. Most commonly a person's form is concealed because of their professional position, say as an Auror or Unspeakable, or in the private sector as a licensed Private Auror or personal security specialist. In these select cases the initial form is concealed, not anything to do with multiple forms, but you're not in one of those positions, so the option of a fully sealed registration isn't available to you."

"Oh, well, I guess that that is a lot better than it could have been," Harry said.

"How do we do this?" Ginny asked.

Madame Bones walked to a large cabinet that took up most of one wall at the side of the office and withdrew two sheafs of forms. She then placed one in front of each teenager on the walnut desk.

"Simply tap the forms with your wand to record your identity from your magical signature," Madame Bones requested, "and the rest of your information will be recorded from Ministry records. I will then need to see your forms to examine them for distinctive markings to differentiate yourselves from similar animals or Animagi."

"Sounds simple enough," Ginny smiled.

They both did as asked, withdrawing their wands, careful not to brandish them in a threatening manner to the law enforcement professional.

"Minister," the secretary for the Director said quickly. "This is a surprise, sir. Madame Bones doesn't have a meeting on the books for you. How may I help you?"

"Is Harry Potter still in the office with the Director?" he asked.

"Yes, sir," the secretary answered immediately. Lying would serve no purpose.

"And do you know the nature of the meeting?" Fudge asked.

"No, sir," she answered. "The subject of the meeting was private and not given for the schedule."

"Well, I'll just have to go in and see for myself," he said as he approached the door.

"Sir, wait," she said, intercepting his course. "The meeting is private, sir. If you would like I can announce you to the Director or schedule an appointment for later today."

"That won't be necessary, miss," he declared as he swept past the diligent secretary and placed his hand on the doorknob. "I am the Minister, after all."

Due to the wards placed on the entry, it took him more force than usual to open the door. The secretary immediately pressed one of two buttons under her desk, this one causing a bell in her boss's office to chime, alerting Amelia of the impending interruption. Had she pressed the larger button, all available Aurors in the Ministry would have converged on the office to quell any threat, great or small. As Cornelius Fudge was the Minister for Magic himself, an unwanted interruption didn't warrant that treatment.
Despite the protests of everyone in the room besides himself, the Minister of Magic, Cornelius Oswald Fudge was dragging Harry Potter to a press conference immediately after hearing about his accomplishment of achieving Animagus status. Both Harry and Ginny had finished the registration process moments before Fudge had entered. But the Minister didn't care what Ginny was at the meeting for, as long as he could show the press that Harry had achieved something to show he was a great wizard and that the Ministry, and thus the Minister, was either responsible for aiding him, or at least would be supporting him in his quest to defeat the Dark Lord. Both would be preferable.

The situation spiraled out of control quickly for Amelia Bones, as she was given pause when the Minister argued over his shoulder that the law about Animagi Registration required a publication of form. As he was the Minister, there was nothing she could do as he dragged Harry from the office to the lift leading to the Atrium. After a short pause for some choice expletives, Amelia apologized to Ginny and they both ran for another in the bank of lifts.

“Minister,” a heated Harry asked as the lift neared the Atrium level, “what in the name of Merlin are you doing?”

“The people need something to believe in, Harry,” the Minister espoused. “You are a symbol to them. What you did when you were a baby freed them from the cloud of terror, and now that cloud is back and they need hope, Harry, and knowing something like this could give it to them.”

“But, Minister,” Harry said as the door opened on the large Atrium, “what if having Voldemort,” Harry paused for the obligatory wince, “know all of this about me puts me at a disadvantage if I ever face him again?”

“Nonsense,” the Minister proclaimed.

“Fudge, don’t...” Harry said struggling to keep his feet under him as he was pulled along to the crowd in the far corner of the Atrium. “You can’t do this,” he protested.

“Sure I can,” Fudge assured him. “The law requires a public registration of all Animagi and I am just following the letter of the law. The required sentence for breaking this law is ten years with the dementors in Azkaban. Cooperate or you will be breaking the law, Mr. Potter,” the Minister finished in a nasty whisper while he was all smiles for the group of journalists.

With that they ascended the dais and took their place between the Aurors and the press. Harry had to assume the Aurors were normal for Fudge’s press conferences.

Percy Weasley managed to slip down to the Atrium shortly before the press conference began. He stood quietly at the back, hoping to catch what happened. He knew a train wreck when it was about to happen, and with the calamity that normally followed both the Minister and Harry Potter, the two of them being before the press at one gathering promised to be a memorable experience, especially with Harry being reluctant or unwilling from the beginning. Surely the Minister would make a gaff that would displease the young wizard. Percy’s limited interaction with Harry over the previous summer and again during the Christmas holidays made him realize that Harry wasn’t quite the shy boy that the Weasley family had first hosted. Percy was ashamed of his actions with regard to Harry over the recent past, but he was confident in the young man's integrity and skill and would not allow himself to misjudge the wizard again.

“Thank you all, honored members of the press, for joining us today for a wonderful announcement,” Minister Fudge started. “It has been long held that the best hope in the struggle against He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named rested with this courageous young man standing behind me here. The Ministry, under my leadership, has taken a progressive stance in the fright against You-Know-Who and the Death Eaters. We are supporting Harry Potter in his training and education. Over the summer, we granted him emancipated status, as you all know, in order to remove restrictions from his ability to defend himself and prosecute the conflict, as need arises. We have had an ear out for any way that he can be aided in these dark times.”

The Minister paused to allow for sufficient dramatic tension and for the reporters’ dictation quills to catch up.

"It is in this vein that I am pleased to announce a wonderful breakthrough in Harry’s magical development and proof that he is destined for greatness,” Fudge continued. “I am pleased to announce that Harry Potter, The-Boy-Who-Lived, has successfully completed Animagus training, through the guidance of your Ministry.”

Harry listened to the pompous windbag nearly take credit for every step forward that he took in the last half year. Harry was starting to seethe with indignation. He looked over the heads of the press and found that Ginny had arrived with Madame Bones and a small contingent of Aurors. He wasn’t sure whether the Aurors were here for his support or their own entertainment.

“Harry will now come up here and present his Animagus form to the public, as required by the Animagus statute,” Fudge said, sweeping his arm back as he stepped to the side, presenting Harry to the press and the press photographers. Harry had little choice in the matter, what with how the Minister presented him. If he refused, it would appear as if he were not obeying the laws, even though Harry had presented his form to the Director of Magical Law Enforcement.

Harry stepped forward and transformed into his impressive form, the nearly invisible spots of his fur illuminated by the flash of wizarding press photographers. His normally black fur showed the leopard origins of his melanistic variant with dark, rich ringed spots mottling the black fur. Harry only stayed transformed for a handful of breaths, shining his iridescent green eyes on the gathered press. He transformed back to his normal wizard appearance without undue panache before stepping up to the enchanted podium for a quick word, being unwilling to have the Minister’s slanted view be the only mentioned.
"Thank you, Minster Fudge," Harry started. "I found the process of learning an Animagus form both challenging and interesting. Throughout my training, two people were responsible for aiding and assisting me in my learning. My transfiguration professor, Deputy Headmistress McGonagall, was invaluable in her knowledge of the subject and her aid and encouragement. She helped me, unbidden by powers above her, without thought of praise. And secondly, this process would not have been possible without the assistance of my girlfriend, Ginny Weasley. She stood by me every step of the way."

Harry turned and regarded the Minister, who was standing nervously to the side. Harry figured that he hadn't counted on Harry addressing the assembled press, relying on Harry's dislike for the spotlight and the press to keep him silent.

"As the Minister mentioned his involvement in my summer activities, I would like to thank him for his role," Harry continued. "Given the Minister's qualities and performance to date, he chose the most constructive role he could both in my emancipation and in my training. By staying silent and not hindering my efforts and those of Director of Magical Law Enforcement, Madame Bones, he provided more aid than we could have expected. I also thank Madame Bones for her assistance over the summer and today to me personally and throughout her career to the citizens of Magical England. Her views on justice and law enforcement have done more to ensure the survival of our society than many of her predecessors."

Harry turned and smiled his sincere thanks to back up his words to Amelia.

After a pause, his smile turned into a devious grin, causing Amelia to become nervous. She had had enough interaction with Harry's father before his demise to know to be cautious around that look from a Potter.

Harry had read enough of the Daily Prophet after the Ministry acknowledged Voldemort's rebirth to understand the struggles in the Ministry and exactly what the Minister was actually doing to further the effort. "I would also like to thank Minster Fudge for his decision to support Madame Bones in her effort to expand the Law Enforces within the DMLE and to redirect existing forces where she judges them to be the most effective in stemming the terror that the murdering Half-Blood Tom Marvolo Riddle spreads with his made up moniker, Lord Voldemort."

Harry wisely ended on that proclamation, as every witch and wizard within the sound of his voice, besides Ginny, Madame Bones and himself, flinched or hissed at the mention of the name which 'Must-Not-Be-Named."

Madame Bones attempted to conceal her shock at Harry's words. His last proclamation thanking Fudge was nearly opposite of the Minister's stance on prosecution of the war effort. The Minister had been trying to control every aspect of the hunt for dark wizards and witches. Instead Harry declared the Minister to have come to the decision to step back and let her run her department and even authorize an expansion to meet the threat. She wondered what Harry's public statement would do to the Minister's stance.

Minister Fudge quickly closed the press conference without taking questions or even considering letting Harry take questions. The damage was already done. He ushered Harry from the dais and quickly across the Atrium, curtly bidding Madame Bones to follow him to his office quietly. As one, they entered the lift, the Minister not noticing Percy, his secretary, entering the lift with them for the ride to the top floor.
Like a freight train, Fudge steamed into his office, closely trailed by an almost amused Amelia Bones; Director of Magical Law Enforcement, a calmly determined Harry Potter; the Boy Who Lived, and an angry motherbear-ish Ginny Weasley; title pending. They hadn't even had a chance to find seats, not that they were invited to, before Fudge slammed the door in Percy's face and rounded on his guests.

"What in the bloody hell was the meaning of that?" the Minister yelled. "Madame Bones, I expected better of you."

She was taken aback. "Me? I did nothing but my job today."

"Yes, today," he spat. "He was obviously prompted to humiliate me so, and it has your signature all over it."

"Minister, you know not what you're talking about," Madame Bones responded vehemently, adjusting her monocle.

"I'm talking about that display out there," Fudge returned. "Oh, you thought you could change policy through a puppet did you? Well, it won't happen, I tell you. You'll take your direction from this office and you'll like it," he boomed directly in her face.

He was removed from his face-to-face with his subordinate by a strong hand on his shoulder.

"Step away from her before you look more the fool than you already do," Harry said in less than a scream.

Fudge, in surprise, rounded on the teenager. "What was that?!?"

Ginny, at Harry's side, made a move to step to his defense, but Harry restrained her with a light hand on her forearm. She was only receptive enough to Harry's control attempt to turn to his eyes before she unloaded on both the Minister for his attempted bullying and Harry for trying to stop her. What she saw in his eyes expressed that he had his reasons and implored trust. With her acceptance, the look passed before he turned his attention back to the seething Minister Fudge.

"Minister Fudge," Harry stated as levelly as he could manage, "the reason that I was reporting and registering my Animagus ability directly with Madame Bones was my trust in her. I've faced Voldemort and his Death Eaters," Harry paused at the Minister's flinch, "too many times not to realize that I need as many advantages in the fight as I can find. Had the maniac not been aware of any Animagus ability, it could have aided me in the future to escape and live to fight on more advantageous footing when I can strike a blow. If he manages to trap me and incarcerate me, a transformation may be my only means of survival. What you did today served no one but yourself and the enemy."

"I'll have you know that I have always been a staunch supporter of the light, Mr. Potter," Fudge railed.

"No, Minister Fudge, you've always been a staunch supporter of your own rise to and collection of power and the rights of pure-bloods over those with Muggle heritage, irregardless of talent and qualifications," Harry retorted. "Whether it's through the judicious misuse of power or the collection of "donations" from questionable sources, everything you do is to improve your power base. You refused to acknowledge the return of this world's biggest threat because it 'couldn't be true'. Well, it was true Minister, he did return, as you found out directly half a year ago. Yet, since then, all of your actions have resulted in the citizens only being superficially safer with a pamphlet of safety tips that wouldn't help in the least if Death Eaters were to decide that a wizarding house was to be the next target of their brand of fun."

Fudge visibly bristled at Harry's belittling of the war effort to date.

"Those Informational Pamphlets were drawn up by England's foremost experts on the subject of personal defense," Fudge protested.

"Undoubtedly that list of experts would have included former Professor Gilderoy Lockhart if he wasn't a permanent resident of St. Mungo's long term care ward."

"Before his unfortunate accident, he was a very respected man," Fudge proclaimed. "It was a real coup at the time to aid the Headmaster in procuring the assistance of such a famous figure."

"You really are an idiot," Harry stated. "Professor Lockhart was a fraud, not that you would care. His only expertise was in memory charms. Each of his stories was taken from a real hero before he wiped their memory of the incident. He's in the ward due to his trying to wipe a couple of students' memories with a broken wand."

By now they were escalating their 'conversation' to deafening levels. "Now see here, Mr. Potter," Fudge returned. "I will not be talked to in this manner. I'll have you brought before the Wizengamot before I accept this kind of treatment from anyone."

Both Ginny and Amelia gasped at the gall of the wizarding leader's threat.
Harry groaned. "I guess I should consider myself lucky that I wasn't mobbed in my first year. I still don't believe that there really were that many other
man she envisioned you're going to grow up to be.

"Yes," Madame Bones answered. "I am afraid that, despite my attempts over the years at moderation, my niece grew up like many young witches of
schooling. And your adventures have become the
stuff of legend. You'll find that many of them are quite skilled in understanding the difference
between truth and wild rumor."

"Susan?" Ginny realized.

They waited for the lift to retrieve them for their short journey to the floor below, the Department of Magical Law Enforcement.

"None taken," Ginny smiled as they entered the lift with a half dozen paper airplane memorandums.

"I happen to know some cunning, ambitious Hufflepuffs and some honorable, hardworking Slytherins," Harry returned, "So, the house means less to
me than the man."

"Let's hope that's not your folly, Potter," Fudge cautioned. "And what did you expect to gain from your display out there?"

"I expect," Harry declared, "that you'll do just as the press believes you intend to do. I expect you'll support your department heads, especially
Madame Bones here. I expect you'll find the funding to provide the Department of Magical Law Enforcement with the tools and personnel they need
to do the job." Harry paused for a breath. "And I expect you'll stop supporting and receiving support from suspected Death Eaters from this war and
the last. If I could dictate the government..."

Harry trailed off, interrupted by a brief mutter from Fudge, "Like you aren't already?"

"...I would insist on all suspects receiving proper trials before incarceration in Azkaban," Harry continued. "I would want there to be no more storing
of suspects in Azkaban without trial for months or years on end, just because it looks like they did it."

"I never..." Fudge argued.

"Sure you weren't in the position you're in now when Sirius Black was imprisoned without a trial," Harry conceded, "but you were when you put
Rubeus Hagrid there several years ago without a shred of evidence so that you could look to be 'doing something'. It's time to clean up your act,
Minister."

The combined effect of the meeting left not an insignificant amount of shock in the two witches in attendance. In truth, Harry would have held more
than his fair share of shock if he hadn't been one of the participants in the heated discussion. Harry held his ground with as neutral an expression as he
could muster. Fudge, however, looked ready to blow.

"I think that this meeting is well over," Fudge declared in a more even tone than could reasonably have been expected. "Madame Bones," he
addressed the shocked official, "Please see that these children make it to a floo and back to where they need to go."

"Sorry for what you had to see in there, Madame Bones," Harry apologized.

"Nothing to apologize for, Mr. Potter," Madame Bones responded as the trio walked to the end of the hallway where they could exit the top floor of
the Ministry. "You did what you had to do, and may have improved my ability to do my job. Do you always manage to attract such interesting events
in your life?"

Harry smiled. "What? Ginny was there too. She doesn't get any of the blame?" he joked.

They waited for the lift to retrieve them for their short journey to the floor below, the Department of Magical Law Enforcement.

"It was rather entertaining how little checking it took to ascertain a glimpse of your exploits since rejoining the wizarding world, Harry," Madame
Bones told him. "No, I don't believe for one moment that Ms. Weasley's attendance made any difference in the unusual occurrences of today. No
offense, Ms. Weasley."

"None taken," Ginny smiled as they entered the lift with a half dozen paper airplane memorandums.

"And I thought we were being quiet all those times. We didn't think that anyone could have found out all of the things that we've done at Hogwarts," Harry
said.

"No, Mr. Potter," the Director returned. "There are many in Hogwarts that have paid close attention to any detail that they could over your years of
schooling. And your adventures have become the stuff of legend. You'll find that many of them are quite skilled in understanding the difference
between truth and wild rumor."

"Susan?" Ginny realized.

"Yes," Madame Bones answered. "I am afraid that, despite my attempts over the years at moderation, my niece grew up like many young witches of
your generation, with stories of The-Boy-Who-Lived and your contribution to our world as a baby. She developed a not-too-uncommon crush on the
man she envisioned you're going to grow up to be."

Harry groaned. "I guess I should consider myself lucky that I wasn't mobbed in my first year. I still don't believe that there really were that many other
Madame Bones didn't answer as she had walked ahead after they exited the lift one floor below the Minister's office. She paused at random offices in her department, undoubtedly answering questions and checking the progress on cases and projects.

"Hmm," Ginny hummed privately to Harry. "Some of us never did."

"No," Harry said sweetly. "You got over your crush. You couldn't like me, Harry James Potter, if you still were blinded by a crush on The-Boy-Who-Lived."

"Maybe I'm helping you to become the man that I've always known you could be," Ginny offered. "Would it be so bad if I still think of you as my knight in shining armor?"

"As long as you'll be in love the real me," Harry said, "I can accept that you see me as moving toward something."

"Surely."

"Here we are," Madame Bones said as they caught up with her at her office door. "You may use the floo from my office to the Burrow. Unless there is anything else you need to take care of today?"

"No, thank you, Madame," Harry answered, squeezing Ginny's hand affectionately. "I believe that we're done here. Thank you for your help."

"Yes, thank you, Madame," Ginny added.

"You're not able to take this opportunity to take your apparition exams early then, Mr. Potter?" Madame Bones asked, a slight hint of surprise on her face. "You, after all, have been an adult wizard or the better part of four months."

Harry looked down and blushed a little, showing his youth to the authority figure. "No," Harry said. "I haven't trained in that yet. I spent my time on other training."

"Very well," she responded. "Other things can be important, Mr. Potter, but you'll find that Apparition is an essential skill that could help you to safety in the future. Just be sure to avail yourself of the opportunities available through your Hogwarts schooling. Don't let your pursuit of something as eccentric as multiple Animagus forms distract you from the essentials of wizarding education. The reason behind the rarity of multiple Animagi, besides the scarcity of the capacity for that extent of the skill in most witches and wizards, is the time it would take that could be spent on other core studies."

"Yes, thank you, Madame Bones," Harry said with sincerity.

"You're welcome," she replied. She then held out a heavy metal dish with a polished lid that was filled with the silvery powder of Floo Travel. "Now off you go."

Harry and Ginny thanked the Director one more time each before vanishing in the green fire of the fireplace.

The next morning proved to Harry that Rita Skeeter had not been in attendance anywhere amongst the throng of bodies at the Press Conference, as the news articles were accurate and truthful. He couldn't find one piece of sensationalism that the Minister had not given to the press himself. This might have pleased Harry, except for the nature of the information that the Minister gave away to the press in the first place. He reckoned, though, that the big black cat with sharp claws and teeth was already out of the bag. He'd just have to avoid the Minister's dealings in the future, lest he have to follow through on his threats to get a recall of the Minister started.

Harry received encouragement in many forms from the Weasley family, from a 'Good show,' from Percy to campaign posters from the Twins if he should decide to raise a coup for the Ministry of Magic's head position. Harry thanked them all, but had to disappoint the twins firmly, lest he be elected without his knowing. He had a feeling that they would do it just as the ultimate prank on the entire wizarding world, foreign and domestic.

The remaining days of the Holidays went without fanfare or hoopla. They generally studied as little as possible and enjoyed themselves as much as possible, which for Hermione looked remarkably like the studying, only with different books.

Ron was quiet in his enjoyment of the end of the holidays. He spent his time with Harry, when Harry wasn't snogging Ginny, Hermione, when he could get her to participate in the snogging, or his brothers when Harry and Ginny were feeling the need for romance but Hermione wasn't. Hermione may have taken issue with his referring to snogging as any sort of romance, if he had ever uttered it aloud, but she still exercised her own need for the enjoyment of the activity not infrequently.

Towards the end of the holiday break Harry and Ginny managed to have a private broom race around the perimeter of the Burrow's Quidditch pitch, where Ginny's broom proved to be more advanced and better suited for such a competition. Ginny won without question. Harry accepted defeat graciously, offering the winner her prize, which was very little different than if he had won. In the end, they both walked away happy.

"Get up," Mrs. Weasley interrupted Harry's peaceful slumber. "Get up you two if you want to be able to eat breakfast before it's time to leave."

Harry took a moment to contemplate the merits of skipping breakfast in favor of more sleep, the soothing warmth of the kitchen and living room fireplace rose to make Ron's room at the top of the Burrow quite deliciously toasty, in a pleasant winter morning kind of way. But, in the end, Harry decided that Mrs. Weasley probably didn't mean it as a choice to be made. He poked his head from under the covers to find Ron absent, probably..."
roused more easily with the promise of a last breakfast cooked by his mother for the season. Harry threw the covers free and levered his legs off the edge of the bed. By the time he had his feet planted and his body balanced above, he was reminded that he hadn't been keeping up on his exercise regimen, commonly blaming the winter snow and lack of indoor facilities of any sort over the Christmas Holidays. Harry shook off his laziness and stopped by his trunk on the way to the facilities a couple of floors below, where a welcome bath might loosen Morpheus’ grasp.

"Bout time," Ron greeted Harry around his eggs, which Harry received an all too clear view of as Ron talked. "We saved you some." Ron punctuated his egg filled statement by motioning to the remnants of breakfast left at the bottom of the dishes on the table.

Harry sat down and found he had no room to complain, as 'some' consisted of four eggs, toast, bacon and sausage, potatoes and a couple of waffles, still warm. Mindful of his recent indolent leanings, Harry left as much as he took, although still opting for the orange marmalade for his toast.

Ginny leaned to his ear to quietly inquire, "Not hungry, Harry?"

He looked at her to see that she was mildly concerned and completely sincere. Harry would have considered the breakfast before him to be rather large when he was still with the Dursleys, but it barely rated for normal for Hogwarts' standards and wouldn't even compare to the standard Weasley breakfast plate.

"Come on, Harry," Ginny continued when she didn't see sufficient reason in his eyes after he didn't immediately answer. She reached for more of each item, adding a bit of everything to his plate. "You could still use the extra, and you're going to restart your training and exercise when we get back anyway. Just eat up," she urged him.

Harry saw an approving look from Mrs. Weasley directed at her daughter and knew he was trapped, albeit not unhappily. He couldn't find any objection to Ginny trying to take care of him. Happily, he dug in, slathering a waffle with sweet butter and English maple syrup.

With trunks packed, pets secured or sent ahead and ears washed, Mrs. Weasley gathered everyone for the floo trip to the Leaky Cauldron, where Remus and Tonks would join the graduated Weasley children and matriarch in escorting Ron, Hermione, Ginny and Harry to Kings Cross Station for their journey back to Hogwarts. Harry remembered, once again, to spread his feet, tuck his elbows and bend his knees, and was thus able to keep his feet, until, that is, Ginny joined him with her trunk, colliding with him and sending them both sprawling to the floor in a tangle of limbs.

"Ginny," Harry muffled, as he found himself pinned beneath his girlfriend, his face pressed to her stomach, his nose pushing her shirt into her belly button. Her warm winter coat was open, enveloping his head. As Ginny groaned in frustration but didn't move immediately, Harry found the whole thing entertaining and couldn't help his laughter.

Ginny sat up and back, her knees on either side of Harry's torso and her tush resting on Harry's thighs. "What is it, Harry? What's so funny?"

Harry quickly conquered his laughter, but his amusement was still clear on his face.

"I...well...I finally manage to stay upright in the floo, and you're there each time I do," he smiled. "Okay, it doesn't make much sense, but it was funny to me. Besides, there are worse places than under your coat with my nose in your belly button."

Ginny blinked and looked hard into his eyes, subconsciously rubbing her belly button through her shirt. After a moment a smile quirked her lips, which was followed closely by her breaking down into laughter of her own. Harry quickly joined her, laughing once again.

Around the pub, they garnered strange looks from the patrons and their family once they all made it through the floo.

"Alright you two," Mrs. Weasley interrupted their good clean fun. "Enough lallygagging. You have a train to catch."

Complying, they finished untangling themselves under the watchful and amused eyes of the rest of the pub, for once neither Harry nor Ginny caring what the others thought. With a wave to Tom, the pub keeper, they picked up their trunks and made their way out the door to Muggle London.
Chapter 46: Back to Hogwarts

Thank you to my Beta's; Cateagle, Sparky40sw & Rictor.

The ride back on the Hogwarts Express was quiet, for once. There was no visit from Malfoy, although they knew he was there, somewhere. They were sure of his odious presence as they saw his mother, Narcissa, leaving as they were arriving. Her face was stalwart and her nose, as always, was firmly in the air, denying that she had anything in common with the rest of the filth that were bringing their progeny to the train for the return to school for another half year. Harry wondered about the love, or whatever passed for it, that would allow a mother to leave her child, however old, at the Express thirty minutes before it left. The platform was always packed with parents saying goodbye to their children until the train disappeared down the tracks. He almost found it sad that Narcissa had just dropped her son off and saw no need to see him off.

They received a visit during the trip back to Hogwarts from Bobby Sullivan, the first year that Bill and Harry had helped. He was shy, but managed to thank Harry for the help. Bobby assured him that Christmas had gone well at his Aunt's house, where they were staying after having to leave his childhood home abruptly. He hadn't heard from his father again after that night and didn't want to. Harry spared Bobby the need to tell others about his family with a restraining glance at his friends.

Harry found that he enjoyed eating the candy from the tea trolley with his friends as much as he had on his first train ride to Hogwarts. They had visitors occasionally, but none of note. They just discussed Quidditch, chess and the lighter side of what the heavier half of the school year would be like.

The spring term started with some school tuition additions for Harry and his classmates. Their first Transfiguration class was started, not with the introduction of a new transformation, but with Professor McGonagall passing around a sign-up sheet for Apparition Lessons, which would start the following week.

Harry started to wonder if Madame Bones asking about his studies on the subject was really at a random time. Perhaps it was just a coincidence. Of course, he really didn't need the encouragement to start studying a form of transportation that would lend him some independence and, perhaps, rid him of the need to travel by his hated methods of Floo Powder and Portkeys. Of course, with his luck, traveling by Apparition would be just as unpleasant as the other wizarding methods that he had experienced. Heck, even broom travel, his current favorite, took on a tarnish when it was taken over any distance. As he had found out last summer, even in the summer months, traveling at night left a person's bones cold to the core.

"Before any of you think that because this is voluntary," Professor McGonagall interrupted Harry's private thoughts as the form passed from student to student, "I will remind you that this is an essential skill for a witch or wizard. There are only around twenty buildings publicly accessible by floo in all of England, leaving a good amount of the British Isles inaccessible to the witch or wizard that is unable to make their own way, leaving them to the Knight's Bus or Muggle transportation."

Harry had forgotten about the Knight's Bus. He shivered lightly at the thought of the sliding from one side to another, not to mention forward to back as the three story purple monstrosity made its way, seemingly randomly, around Britain on its way to whatever the next destination was.

"Yes, Miss Patil?" Professor McGonagall called on a student with a question.

"What about Portkeys, Professor?" Padma asked.

"While they are another form of transportation, and a good one for families traveling to areas without floo," she answered, "Ministry regulation restricts their creation to licensed and bonded enchanters."

"Why is that?" someone blurted out, not waiting to be called on.

"First is the official reason," the Professor replied. "They must regulate the creation of Portkeys in order to assure that they are created by competent and scrupulous enchanters in order to provide that they are safe and accurate."

"And unofficially?" Harry asked with a smirk. He was really getting used to the many layers of excuses and reasons that ran the true motivations of government.

"Unofficially?" she asked. "So that they can make sure that they can collect their taxes. As I am sure that you are aware, Mr. Potter, each unauthorized Portkey has a fee of five galleons. Authorized Portkeys are taxed one galleon, and by having them created by authorized and licensed enchanters, they can collect their fee at the time of creation, rather than having to bill the user at the time of use, thus the higher fee. I'm sure that you have received your bill?"

"Yes, Professor," Harry confirmed. "A couple of days ago."

"Well," she said, "I'd recommend paying it. The Fees and Levies branch is one of the most effective in the Ministry."

The first week back passed without surprise. At the first Defense Association meeting, which the entire roster of members attended, Harry was
With the first weekend back from the Christmas Holidays, came the first Quidditch practice of the new term. Harry and Ginny debated shortly about how Ron had managed to secure the pitch for the first half of Saturday, but figured that this would be the one thing that he could remember to do enough ahead of time to get what he wanted, unlike his gaff from fourth year.

"No, no!" Ron screamed, "Chasers, form up tighter. And hold the Quaffle to the inside of the formation so the Keeper can't see who it's coming from."

Harry was sure, from his search pattern over the pitch, that the Chasers would be grumbling at Ron's new found zeal for a strict play book. He seemed to be taking a page from Wood's habits and pushing his players to learn new methods. He had even started to do the unthinkable, and coach Harry on his seeker skills. The Beaters and two of the Chasers were mortified that Ron would question, seeming distracting the Keeper or others on the opposing team. Harry tried to keep an open mind. It wouldn't allow the other seeker to end the game on the opponent's terms, but Ron assured him that this was a tactic used by professionals to great effect.

Seeing his opportunity, Harry shot down at an angle, intercepted the Chaser formation and threaded the needle through the center of their loose formation. Harry's speed pass upset the formation in a spectacular fashion, quickly halting the practice, but leaving everyone securely on their brooms.

"Bloody hell, Harry," one of the Chasers screamed. "Be careful! This is just practice. And if you're not careful, you'll get called for Blatching, or worse, touching the Quaffle."

Harry grinned sheepishly, but with a hint of satisfaction at getting just the result that he wanted. He had managed to disrupt the Chaser pattern and halt their assault. This new plan of Ron's might not be all that bad, if it worked out in games as it worked in practice.
Monday of the second week heralded in the first session of the class that each and every sixth year student had signed up for, Apparition.

Harry entered the Great Hall with his friends around two hours before the normal time to start dinner. Many of the students were dismayed that the Apparition class, which would last for the second and third weeks of January, was scheduled at the exact same time that the Defense Association was supposed to meet all throughout the week; Monday, Wednesday and Friday. Hermione’s solution was for Harry to ask Tonks to supervise free form practice in the Room of Requirements for those two weeks. Professor Tonks agreed, but insisted that Harry or Hermione set the room up for the practice sessions before anyone arrived. This, of course, fell to Harry with his lighter schedule.

After setting up the room, Harry traveled quickly by school crest to the entrance hall, startling a group of sixth years with his sudden arrival.

"Where in the bloody..." Justin Finch-Fletchley.

"Justin!" Susan Bones scolded. "Language!"

"Where'd you come from?" Michael asked.

"From the seventh floor," Harry said. He just realized that using the crests without discretion was not one of his smarter moves.

"So you really do know how these things work?" Michael asked, gesturing to the stone crest in the floor. "They really do more than send you to the Hospital wing if you're injured?"

"Yeah, but how did you know they did that?" Harry asked, perplexed.

Michael looked around his group of friends. Harry noticed quite a varied group of sixth and fifth year students from each of the houses, ten students in all. Harry was impressed that such a mix was possible in these times.

"John," Michael said, indicating a student that Harry vaguely recognized as a fifth year Ravenclaw, "was cut in Potions and spilled a drop of blood on the crest outside potions and was immediately in the Hospital Wing. We did some experiments, but had to stop when Madame Pomfrey threatened us with detentions if we didn't stop disturbing her patients."

Harry smiled. "Good job in that though," he congratulated them.

"We haven't figured out anything else that they do," John said. "How do you work them?"

Harry stepped out of the circle of friends and called over his shoulder, "But it's no fun if you don't discover it yourself."

He walked away knowing that he was leaving some curious and confused classmates behind. He found Ron and Hermione with Dean, Lavender, Seamus and Parvati just in time to enter the Hall for their first lesson in Apparition.

"Hello, students," an ancient figure said from a raised dais at the far end of the Great Hall. "My name is Melinda Hopkirk. I am the head of the Department of Magical Transportation and have been teaching Witches and Wizards to Apparate for more than a hundred years, so trust that I know what I am talking about. And, yes, it is my sister that some of you have received warning letters from."

There was a brief murmur from students who had heard of the Improper Use of Magic Office, most of them in a less than desirous way. This revelation seemed to add to the curiosity of their newest professor. The woman seemed to be well in excess of even Dumbledore’s age, with thin, wrinkled skin and sparse gray hair falling to her shoulders. Her arms were bare to the bottom of her short sleeves, showing bone and muscle with paper-like skin draped around the structures, revealing both her age and fitness, without a trace of fat to smooth the details of the muscles and sinew. Her face was weathered, from gardening Harry guessed. She had short trimmed nails, they could see as they approached her station, and age spots over the back of her hands. All in all, a woman who had led a full and active life, but was in no means willing to roll over and die just yet.

"For the next two weeks, three times a week, two hours a day," she enumerated, "I will be teaching you about the common forms of wizarding transportation. We will start out with the simpler things and then spend everything but those fifteen minutes on what you all thought you would be here for in the first place, Apparition."

This got Harry curious. He realized that not all of the students had been exposed to the myriad of wizarding transportation methods that he had, but surely everyone would know about Floo and Portkeys.

"You learned about broom travel in your first year, so that's already covered, except to say that broom travel is covered under the Secrecy Act, so caution is to be exercised unless you want to spend some time in custody of the Ministry," she paused to let that sink in. "Related to broom travel are other enchanted objects. Enchanted objects such as carpets and Muggle vehicles fall under the Muggle Artifacts regulations and are illegal to use. This is applicable to all travel in Britain. If you travel outside of Britain, I recommend you check the local rules before you find yourself on the wrong side of the local laws."

She moved swiftly through the Knight's Bus, Portkeys and the Floo network, touching on the procedures and departments necessary to connect one's house to the Floo network and what qualified or disqualified a fireplace for Floo connection. With a practiced pace, Professor Hopkirk moved on to Apparition instruction.
You are best advised to remember the details on each of those basic forms of magical transportation, as they, and Apparition, will be featured in the NEWT level magical theory written examination at the end of your seventh year. You will be responsible for any continuing tuition on the subject to prepare for the test,” she declared. “Now, on to Apparition.”

Professor Hopkirk waved her wand at the Great Hall in total before moving on, marking the floor in parallel lines beneath the students’ feet.

“Everyone grab a spot on a line and leave at least an arm's length between yourself and the person beside you,” she commanded, pausing with an authoritative air that demanded compliance immediately. The students scrambled to their own places on one of the white lines, waving their hands to their sides to make sure that they had an arm's length of room, literally.

“Hmmm,” Harry whispered to Hermione beside him, with just enough volume to include Ron on the other side of her. “Good professor, at least. All of the authority that Snape pretends to have without the cruelty or bias.”

Hermione was silent, obviously refusing to participate in a negative comment on a teacher, even Snape, while Ron whispered his agreement.

“Everyone,” the Ministry provided Professor addressed the Hall, “To begin our training in the art of Apparition, I want everyone to mark a circle, about a meter across, on floor midway between your line and the one in front of you. First row, a circle about two meters in front of you, if you will.”

Hermione, ever helpful, reminded her boys of the correct incantation to mark the floor without damaging it. Ron chafed a bit at her treatment, but used the suggested spell never the less. Those students within earshot were entertained, but attentive to what she was suggesting.

The week that the Apparition training began, Harry found time to complete something that he had been working on for months. When Harry and Ginny had first gone to Professor McGonagall with their interest in Animagus training, they were told of the discipline and work required to train for an animal transformation, if the skill exists at all in a mage’s repertoire. Not all witches and wizards have the possibility to train with any success in the art, and of those that do, few ever try, be it lack of motivation or lack of opportunity. Harry and Ginny were glad to find, after the initial processes, that they did indeed have the potential for the wandless transformation.

The next step for them was to find their ‘natural’ animal, or the animal form that their magic deemed most compatible. For some, their animal turns out to be almost fated, such as the case of Peter Pettigrew, the man and friend that betrayed Harry's parents. In retrospect, you could ask why you would ever trust a Rat Animagus, but that would hardly be fair. Of course, contemporaries of Sirius Black would have completely understood his Animagus form being a dog, or at least half of the female population would have, whether they were complaining or reminiscing about the man they used to know. Their predetermined animal forms turned out, for Ginny, to be a Falcon, and a panther for Harry. They celebrated their new ability, but the difference in forms between Harry and the girl that he loved caused him to start asking himself and his Professor questions.

Harry wanted to know if it was possible to change into an animal that wasn't 'natural'. Professor McGonagall's answer was tentative. She knew it was theoretically possible, but was unsure if Harry could do it, much less as a second animal. The only way to know, she told Harry, would be hard work. All through the imprinting process, he had the feeling that he was going to be successful. Today, he would find out if his feelings were correct.

“Professor,” Harry called as he and Ginny entered the private office of Professor McGonagall. “Can we have a bit of your time?”

The Professor looked up from a stack of parchments where she sat at her desk with a quill in one hand, the end bright with aangry red ink, and a blotter in the other. Judging by the stack to her right, she was only half through the considerable load of essays that she was correcting.

“No, please,” she replied with unexpected enthusiasm, “I need a break. How can I help?”

Harry smiled. “I was hoping that you could supervise while Ginny cast the Animagus Transformation Spell.”

“I would be delighted, Mr. Potter,” Professor McGonagall said. “Would that mean that you believe that you have completed imprinting of a second animal form?”

“Yes,” Harry smiled.

“Are you sure, Miss Weasley,” the Professor asked, “That you feel that this is something you can devote the concentration necessary to complete? I would never even allow you to contemplate participating if I did not feel that you had the natural talent in Transfiguration to attempt the task, but you must be sure.”

“Yes, Professor,” Ginny nodded with all seriousness. “I’ve been practicing the wand movements separately from the incantation, and Harry and I both think I have it correct. Can you check me on it, and then make sure that I do it correctly?”

“Certainly, Miss Weasley,” Professor McGonagall said. “The incantation, if you would?”

Ginny wiped her face of all emotion and cleared her thoughts, a necessary precursor to any complex magic. Clearly, she chanted the phrase, “Hominis Instar Muto Animus!”

“Very good, Miss Weasley,” McGonagall praised, “Ten points for having taught yourself without hearing it aloud more than once.”

“Thank you.”

“And the wand movements?” McGonagall requested.

After Ginny attempted the wand movements several times, pointing away from any living being in the room, with less and less needed correction,
Professor McGonagall deemed that Ginny was ready to try it out on a human test subject. That sort of talk, of test subjects, gave Harry some nerves, but he suppressed them so he could do his part and concentrate on his new Animagus form.

When Ginny and Harry made it back to the dorm that evening, it was just before curfew and time for bed. Ginny made her way up to the fifth year female dormitories with a new interest.

“Ooh,” her friend Samantha cooed. “Beautiful cat, Ginny, what’s her name?”

“It’s a tom, and I think I’ll call him Satin, because his coat is so satiny smooth,” Ginny proclaimed. The cat started to struggle in her arms, as if he objected to the name, but he was subdued, against his will, when she started to pet his silky smooth fur down his back. Soon he was pushing into her hand, having forgotten the slight of his name.

“Can I pet him?” another friend, Cassidy, asked.

Ginny looked at her the girl, already changed into her sleeping gown, and agreed. “Sure, I need to change, so you can hold him whilst I do.”

Cassidy took the blissfully purring black kitty to her own bed and sat at the edge with Satin curled comfortably in her lap. The other girls, Samantha included, rushed forward to greet the newest member of their dorm, and each have their turn petting the cat’s fur, that felt satin smooth, despite the haphazard nature as it ran down his back. The fur on his head was especially messy, especially over his right eye, where the pattern was quite jagged.

When Ginny came back to retrieve her kitty, Cassidy had him on his back, rubbing his tummy, eliciting loud purrs that could be heard across the room.

“Ooh, he’s still got his...” Sally observed. “Are you going to get him neutered?”

Satin righted himself in an instant and leaped to Ginny’s front, using his claws to gain a purchase in her winter weight flannel sleeping gown. In time to save herself from being perforated, Ginny grabbed her cat and cradled him to her shoulder in a protective manner.

“No,” Ginny giggled. “Harry gave him to me and I think he would want Satin to stay a tomcat.”

Samantha was laughing uproariously. “Beautiful green eyes, though,” she howled. “Did you see how wide they got when you mentioned cutting off his...getting him fixed? Must have some Kneazle in him to have understood enough of what Sally was saying.”

“Don’t worry, Baby,” Ginny soothed. “No one’s gon’na cut anything off. I promise.”

Shortly afterwards, all of the girls went to bed, Ginny’s new cat included. He curled up beside her chest, snuggly under her arm, with a contented purr that quickly lulled Ginny to sleep.

The next morning the cat acknowledged that it was the best night sleep he had gotten in a while, but silently commented to himself about the disappointment with the various winter weight night clothes worn by the fifth year Gryffindor girls.

That Saturday morning, Harry’s long ago promise was brought back to him, but not before he got a reminder of the week’s embarrassments, the manner of the reminder causing even more embarrassment. It all started with a question, and after that, all of Harry’s work that week to mitigate his humiliation vanished, useless.

“So, how did the Apparition classes go?” Ginny asked. The question was innocent enough. She had asked Harry several times during the week, and he had told her the truth. He had managed to do the remarkable and Apparate himself from the line to the inside of his circle before the end of the first lesson, just. He had told her he wasn’t the first, but he was the first who had not had rides on side-along Apparition before. Apparently the ride with a person skilled at apparating not only themselves, but a passenger, went a long ways in preparing a teenager for their first solo trip, as it let them experience the sensations of a successful Apparition and let them know what they are striving for.

Unfortunately, that accomplishment was not his embarrassment. His embarrassment didn’t involve the act of Disapparating, or the projecting of himself through the ether, whole, to his target destination.

“Great,” Ron answered his sister. “I got my first successful on Wednesday evening and Hermione,” he continued proudly, “did hers perfectly on Friday.”

“That’s great!” Ginny effused. “Congratulations, Ron. You’ll get it on you’re first test, for sure!”

“Thanks,” Ron said. “Maybe by then, Harry’ll be ready for the test, himself,” Ron elaborated with an evil glance at his best friend.

“Ron...” Harry growled as he attempted to kick his friend’s shin under the table.

“What?” Ginny said. “I thought he apparated on Monday.”

“Oh, he did,” Hermione assured her. “He just had some complications.”

“Complications?” Ginny asked in a high pitched squeak, dropping her fork to her breakfast plate. “I thought you said you got there whole!” she nearly raged at her boyfriend, who looked embarrassed, and, quite frankly, would have rather had the table between him and Ginny right then.
Then what...?” Ginny asked.

“Ginny,” Hermione said, with a concealed chuckle. Apparently not concealed enough, as Harry shot her an annoyed look. “Harry didn't splinch throughout the Hall, some of the promised history lesson, and many on the rest of what they thought they saw at presentation. Long held curiosities would be sated, causing the school to be stunned, starting with Ginny's shriek and lasting through to be broken by Snape's determination of tonight's after-dinner detention, would be an ideal time to follow through on your promise of explaining your little prank on All Hallows Eve to the entire school. I assure you was the truth. Harry was whole, as her search had nearly fully assured.

“Miss Weasley,” a cold voice broke through the stark silence that had washed over the Great Hall. “Perhaps you should be more circumspect in your activities with the opposite sex while you are in public spaces, as I have reminded you before.”

“Miss Weasley,” he continued in his menacing voice. “Remove your hands from Mr. Potter's...person.”

Shocked, her mouth hanging fully open, she turned back to Harry, where he stood stock still, just as he had for the last few minutes. What she saw mortified her, as it had Harry for a bit. She had two hands full, at the moment, directly in front of her face, apparently checking where Harry normally sat for...something. At the moment she couldn't quite remember what that something was, the humiliation so great.

With sudden urgency, she went from frozen to frantic motion as if Harry's gluteus maximus had burned her, stumbling back away from him. In her haste to remove her hands from their previous activity, she banged her shoulder pretty good on the table where they had eaten their breakfast moments before.

“Better, Miss Weasley,” Snape sneered. “Replace the bench and return to your seats, Miss Weasley, Mr. Potter. And see to it that you cease interrupting the breakfast of your fellow students and your professors with your lascivious acts.”

They quickly stifled their horror and did as their least favorite professor instructed. Within seconds they were seated correctly, but Snape was not done with them quite yet. Here he had an opportunity, heck, a duty to punish them for inappropriate behavior in front of the entire school body with each and every one of their attentions directly on Harry Potter and his girlfriend.

“I believe that you two shall serve detention with me tonight in the potions dungeon so that I may remind you what is proper behavior in the public areas of this school and what is inappropriate behavior anywhere within Hogwarts or its accompanying grounds,” Snape said loud enough for everyone to hear over the deafening silence. “Eight o'clock tonight, both of you, and do not be late.”

Snape turned, his robes billowing, and started to make his way back to the silent teacher's table. He stopped, however, before he made it ten steps. “Oh, and twenty points from each of you for such a base display,” he called over his shoulder. “And, Mr. Potter, I believe that tonight, before your detention, would be an ideal time to follow through on your promise of explaining your little prank on All Hallows Eve to the entire school. I expect a riveting presentation on the history of the man you referred to as Tom Marvolo Riddle.”

The school was stunned, starting with Ginny's shriek and lasting through to be broken by Snape's determination of tonight's after-dinner presentation. Long held curiosities would be sated, causing the silence to be finally broken with the murmurs and conversations spreading throughout the Hall, some of the promised history lesson, and many on the rest of what they thought they saw at breakfast.

“Ginny,” Hermione said, with a concealed chuckle. Apparently not concealed enough, as Harry shot her an annoyed look. “Harry didn't splinch himself. He was quite whole and clothed when he reappeared,” she repeated.

“Then what...?” Ginny asked.
“I seem to have the same problem with all forms of Wizarding transportation except brooms,” Harry informed her. “I fall down when I get there, wherever there is.”

“You fell down?” Ginny asked. “You mean, when you reappear, you just collapse?”

Harry narrowed his eyes at her statement. “No, I don't just collapse,” he put a fine point on. “I just stumble like I do in the Floo and on Portkeys.”

“But, Harry,” Ginny replied. “I thought you fixed the problem with the Floo and Portkeys?”

“I did,” Harry said shortly, shooting Ron a look when a snicker escaped the man's lips. “It seems to be back with a vengeance during Apparition.”

“But Bill said to just spread your feet to absorb the impact,” she recited.

“He did,” Harry said. “But in Apparition, you move a bit to jump-start your Disapparition. So when I arrive, I'm moving but the floor isn't and that doesn't seem to work.”

Ginny couldn't help herself, she broke, and laughter spilled out. It turned out to be too much for his friends as well, as they too busted up in laughter, causing a ripple effect through all of the students who had been listening in. Harry just put his head on the table and gave it an exploratory thud. Maybe if he were to knock himself out, they would all go away. He pulled back and hit his head on the table again, and again.

What a day; humiliated and mortified at breakfast, and, yet, he still had a presentation on the life and times of Tom Marvolo Riddle, which he had to present to the entire school, no matter that he didn't know exactly what he wanted to say, and then he had a detention with Snape, of all people to look forward to. Apparently the day could get worse. He looked to the head table to wonder why McGonagall couldn't have been the one to come enforce ‘discipline’ at the Gryffindor table. He supposed that it was too good of an opportunity from Snape's point of view and he had just beaten her to the gate.

He prayed to whoever would listen, that nothing happened between now and dinner, wishing he could beg off Quidditch practice as a bad idea, but with a game looming in too short of a time, against Slytherin no less, he doubted Ron's generosity and understanding.
Harry Potter and the Cracked Reservoir
Chapter 47: Gryffindor v Slytherin

Thank you to my Betas; Cateagle and Sparky40sw.

“Tom Marvolo Riddle,” Harry started, “Graduated as the Headboy here at Hogwarts in 1945 from Slytherin.” He stood at the head of the Great Hall, just in between the students and the teacher’s table. He was fulfilling his promise to explain who the other person to enter the Chamber was, but decided to do it fully so that people would know who they were afraid of. It was an opportunity. “He was conceived from the marriage of Merope Gaunt, daughter of Marvolo Gaunt, and Tom Riddle, muggle heir to local wealthy landowners in Little Hangleton, Yorkshire. Neither Merope Gaunt, nor her brother Morfin, attended any sort of formal schooling or received formal education due to deep poverty and their father’s belief that their status as the last remaining heirs of Salazar Slytherin made them better than each and every other witch and wizard in England.”

The information started to cause a stir amongst the students, but Harry just gained their attention by conjuring an image on the wall behind the teachers of the run down shack looking up at the great mansion that existed before Tom got his hands on it.

“As she grew up,” Harry continued, “Merope fell in love with the regal man that she saw ride by her family’s crumbling shack on his way to and from the town his family’s mansion over looked. Her father did not approve of her desire to have a relationship with a muggle, but that didn’t dissuade her from her feelings. She finally got the freedom to approach the man with her brother and father in Azkaban. His response was less than heartening, causing her to retaliate with the skills her father had taught both her and her brother in mind controlling love potions and magics. After their marriage, Merope felt that they were truly bonded and in love, and discontinued her use of the love potion that she had been dosing her love with from the beginning, believing that he would love her now that she was with child. However, when he came out of his mind controlling fog, he threw her out of the house and divorced her instantly.

“She was left destitute, just as before the potion enhanced romance, with a baby on the way,” Harry lectured. “All during the nine months of her pregnancy, Merope never sought out from healers for herself or her developing baby. Because of this, when the birthing came, she was dangerously ill prepared. She gave birth at a muggle orphanage where she had sought shelter shortly before the birth, but suffered severe bleeding during the birth and died shortly after naming Tom Marvolo Riddle after the baby’s father and Grandfather.

“There, at the orphanage,” Harry threw up a picture of the dining room of an orphanage with larger boys picking on a young brown-haired boy. The picture progressed to where it was now the young boy, slightly older than before, picking on those around him. “Tom grew up defending himself from bullies that were stronger than him and bullying all those weaker than him. His accidental magic, as a child, took the form of controlling and torturing the children around him. Finally, when he received his letter of acceptance to Hogwarts, he saw it as a chance at power.

“Throughout his time in Slytherin, he displayed charm and cunning that brought many to his side. He was careful to not be seen as evil or dark, though he studied forbidden magics throughout his tenure. Shortly after coming to the castle he learned about his heritage as Heir of Slytherin. He used the skills passed on to him through this heritage to gain power and revenge. The discovery of his mother’s relationship with Tom Riddle fomented a hate of the man and of all things muggle. This hate caused him to search for and, in his fifth year, find the entrance to his ancestor’s lair, The Chamber of Secrets. From there he unleashed Slytherin’s Monster, a millennia-old Basilisk,” Harry changed the image behind him to reflect the evil, giant snake with long fangs and yellow eyes, causing many to gasp. The animated picture was slithering from the mouth of Salazar’s statue deep within the chamber, “which he commanded to hunt muggle born students. This continued until the death of a witch in the second floor girl’s loo, Myrtle Mendelson. Her death threatened to cause a closing of the school, the last thing Tom wanted.

“If the school were to close,” Harry explained, “he would be sent back to the orphanage without a chance to escape. To keep the school open, he framed another student, a third year with a love of his partner. The information started to cause a stir amongst the students, but Harry just gained their attention by conjuring an image on the wall behind the teachers of the run down shack looking up at the great mansion that existed before Tom got his hands on it.

“After framing the other student, Tom Riddle stopped the snake from attacking any further students, therefore ensuring that he would not be discovered in his evil pursuits. Instead he enchanted a diary with a piece of his soul so that the Chamber could be opened later when some innocent student put trust in the friendly book. This diary retained his skill at possessing and drawing power from others, and would do so when someone poured their emotions into it. It is this diary that was responsible for the chamber being opened four years ago. At that time, the diary did its job and possessed a student and set the monster loose in the school. The monster is now dead, killed with the Sword of Gryffindor.”

Harry flicked his wand again, this time showing a still life of the gruesome scene containing the dead snake, his broken fang, the destroyed diary and the Sword of Gryffindor, all on a backdrop of a blood soaked stone floor. This brought forth some sob of terror and some disgusted students turning away.

“After leaving Hogwarts, Tom Marvolo Riddle disappeared to the ends of the earth to learn any and every dark magic and ritual he could to gain power and escape death. His goal was power and immortality by any means. When he returned to the Wizarding World of England, the half-blooded Tom Marvolo Riddle was forgotten; favoring, instead, a persona to which he could gather followers in his quest for power, under the excuse of cleansing the wizarding world of muggle influence. He assumed a name he had invented while he was in school.”

Harry brandished his wand and slashed the air, creating a fiery trail as he wrote out the name, ‘Tom Marvolo Riddle’. With another wave of his wand, an illusion of a fifth year Tom Riddle stood before the school in Slytherin robes below his fiery name. Harry gave a jab and a flick causing the
With the other chasers getting one each. This seemed the use of both Bludgers by the Slytherins, while successful, wasn't a practical way to win the game, as Ginny had now scored four goals herself. Captain's performance. Ron's performance left no doubt about his improved skill. Slytherin brutes to force Ron onto the left goal and Ron had only allowed the Slytherins one goal by him at the half hour mark. That one goal, however, had required the use of both Bludgers by the Slytherin improved since their performances last year, but were Thirty minutes into the game, the Gryffindor players were starting to look the worse for wear. The Gryffindor beaters, Andrew and Jack, had channeling their displeasure into violence.

With a cursory shake of the captains' hands, the match between Slytherin and Gryffindor was joined. The fourteen players kicked off the ground to the greater bulk of the opposing players. They simply could take more punishment.

In Ron's mind, the game against their school rivals was the most important of the year. He kicked himself for not keeping his nose clean during the That week was occupied with the final three lessons in apparition, where the instructor refused to let any of the accomplished students skive off, saying that any and all could use the practice no matter when they had completed their first move. Ron managed to earn two detentions, one on Monday when Malfoy found the Gryffindors in the corridors before defense and insulted Hermione, claiming that Harry's presentation was just mudblood drivel trying to discredit her betters. Professor Tonks had caught Ron just after he bloodied the Slytherin's nose.

The second, it was not so justifiable. Ron had simply not prepared for transfiguration and left his homework undone, despite Hermione's warning. That week was occupied with the final three lessons in apparition, where the instructor refused to let any of the accomplished students skive off, saying that any and all could use the practice no matter when they had completed their first move. Ron managed to earn two detentions, one on Monday when Malfoy found the Gryffindors in the corridors before defense and insulted Hermione, claiming that Harry's presentation was just mudblood drivel trying to discredit her betters. Professor Tonks had caught Ron just after he bloodied the Slytherin's nose.

The second, it was not so justifiable. Ron had simply not prepared for transfiguration and left his homework undone, despite Hermione's warning. Lucky for him, Professor McGonagall assigned him detention on Friday night, as if Professor Snape had caught him out at anything, the detention would have surely disrupted the Quidditch game against Slytherin scheduled for that Saturday. In Ron's mind, the game against their school rivals was the most important of the year. He kicked himself for not keeping his nose clean during the week, and therefore missing a chance at getting a last minute team practice shoehorned in on Friday due to his detention. He was determined that they were prepared and would be successful. He put his all into a spirit building speech to his team as the entire school gathered in the stands. After Ron's speech, the team took the field. Madame Hooch was at the center of the field with the Quidditch set waiting.

This was to be Draco's first game back on the team after his long lasting punishment was lifted. Harry noticed the angry, mean look in his eye and it frankly unsettled him. Draco had been seen ranting to himself and his lapdogs about exactly whose fault it was that he had spent the last couple of months as a prisoner of his own School House. He wasn't pleased with being a second-class citizen within the Slytherin house. He had gone rapidly from prince to serf, all his previous power lost.

With a cursory shake of the captains' hands, the match between Slytherin and Gryffindor was joined. The fourteen players kicked off the ground hard to propel themselves to their positions. Harry caught Ginny's eyes and wished her good luck, and accepted the warm smile that she returned. They each sped off to their respective positions, Harry high and circling; looking for the snitch, Ginny grabbing the Quaffle and racing to the Slytherin end.

Harry drew his attention to the task at hand. The snitch, however, was nowhere to be seen. Harry monitored the game while on his snitch hunt through the excited voice of the Ravenclaw announcer as she announced the game. Gryffindor was up thirty points to naught in just ten minutes. This pleased Harry more than it pleased the Slytherin team. That team, chosen for bulk, was channeling their displeasure into violence.

Thirty minutes into the game, the Gryffindor players were starting to look the worse for wear. The Gryffindor beaters, Andrew and Jack, had improved since their performances last year, but were still not able to inflict near as much harm as the Slytherins. Harry assumed that this was due to the greater bulk of the opposing players. They simply could take more punishment.

Ron had only allowed the Slytherins one goal by him at the half hour mark. That one goal, however, had required the use of both Bludgers by the Slytherin brutes to force Ron onto the left goal and leaving the right wide open. Whatever the results in the end, Harry would be proud of his team's performance. Ron's performance left no doubt about his improved skill.

The use of both Bludgers by the Slytherins, while successful, wasn't a practical way to win the game, as Ginny had now scored four goals herself with the other chasers getting one each. This seemed to make Ginny the target of the wrath of Crabbe and Goyle, testing her new broom and her

As you can see,” Harry said in closing. “Lord Voldemort was born a half-blood, Tom Marvolo Riddle. His cause is a quest for power over all of the wizarding world, not the idealistic quest to preserve pureblood traditions and culture, as it was claimed when it first started; just a right self-loathing bastard wanting power over everyone else.”

Thirty points to Gryffindor for such an accurate assessment and presentation of the facts and truths as they stand.”

With the Headmaster’s statement of the accuracy of Harry's presentation, the rest of the school started to get noisier as they rose from their seats and proceeded to their evening destinations. Professor Snape and the other teachers rose as well to tend to their duties grading papers and making themselves available to students with questions on their work. The Potions Professor made his way to the bowels of the school to prepare for his two evening detentions.

That week was occupied with the final three lessons in apparition, where the instructor refused to let any of the accomplished students skive off, saying that any and all could use the practice no matter when they had completed their first move. Ron managed to earn two detentions, one on Monday when Malfoy found the Gryffindors in the corridors before defense and insulted Hermione, claiming that Harry's presentation was just mudblood drivel trying to discredit her betters. Professor Tonks had caught Ron just after he bloodied the Slytherin's nose.

The second, it was not so justifiable. Ron had simply not prepared for transfiguration and left his homework undone, despite Hermione's warning. Lucky for him, Professor McGonagall assigned him detention on Friday night, as if Professor Snape had caught him out at anything, the detention would have surely disrupted the Quidditch game against Slytherin scheduled for that Saturday.
Harry ruthlessly shattered his remaining natural containment, leaving a burning torrent licking from his core. Had Harry not been focused on the spell that he was using, he might not have been able to control the power that was uncontrollable. He needed the power. He wanted the power. He had to have all of the power.

Harry's only ally in the fight to contain his inner magical power was his strength, not of muscle, but of will and determination. The only way that he contained the power that burned as flame after the ritual that changed his summer, was by force of his own will to hold the growing crack at bay. His magical reservoir had been cracked, as it did in most wizards. The crack allowed the power to flow out of the vessel in a stream, as it did in most wizards. The crack allowed the power to flow out of the vessel in a stream, limiting the amount of power that he could control.

Previously he had sensed a glow in himself that frightened him, the flames of power occasionally licking at his flesh from within. The vessel containing his magical reservoir had been cracked, irreparably, over the summer, allowing most of his full power to do more than merely trickle out as it did in most wizards. The crack allowed the power to flow out of the vessel in a stream, allowing a great amount of power to be available to spells. The only way that he contained the power that burned as flame after the ritual that changed his summer, was by force of his own will to hold the streaming crack at bay. His only ally in the fight to contain his inner magical power was his strength, not of muscle, but of will and determination. He wasn't sure that he was strong enough to control this power once it was unleashed. But he had to.

Harry reached into his core; the very center of his soul. He needed the power. He wanted the power. He had to have all of the power. He had to have the power now.

Harry ruthlessly shattered his remaining natural containment, leaving a burning torrent licking from his core. Had Harry not been focused on the spell that he was using, he might not have been able to control the power that was uncontrollable. He needed the power. He wanted the power. He had to have all of the power.

Harry sped up and focused on finding the snitch. He had to end this before someone was hurt permanently, namely his Ginny.

Malfoy was shadowing Harry once again, clearly hoping to let Harry spot his target and then for Malfoy to get it himself. Harry knew that this had never worked before and couldn't see what Draco was thinking. Harry's only guess was that even while thinking was required, it was not always accomplished. Draco seemed to insist on beating his head against the wall repeatedly without any lessons learned.

With the score eighty to twenty at the hour, Harry spotted a glink of gold at the base of the Slytherin goal posts. Harry turned his broom and sped directly at it automatically, knowing that Draco would be keying off of him and at the disadvantage of having Harry's reaction and maneuvering time added to his own before he could truly make chase.

Halfway there, either Crabbe or Goyle, Harry didn't know which, spotted the Gryffindor Seeker trying to end the game. He managed to launch a Bludger into Harry's path, forcing him to dodge or lose his broom. This momentary lapse of attention allowed the snitch to evade his capture and disappear again.

Harry and Draco returned to their high racetrack search pattern and waited.

By now Bludgers had struck most of the rest of the team, no doubt leaving bruises and stiff muscles in their wake. It was going to be a sore team come Sunday.

The score had climbed to one hundred to twenty before Harry spotted the snitch again, this time at the Gryffindor end of the stadium, flying lazily high in the corner. Harry sped in the direction of the snitch, noting, fleetingly, that Draco had been motioning to one of his beaters and had therefore missed Harry's movement.

Harry took advantage of his opponent's distraction and launched himself flat to the broom, trying for the maximum speed he could achieve. He raced level, intending to go vertical from below the snitch and catch it in victory. Harry really didn't have problems with flying high, even after his beginning of the year mishap. Despite his stay in the hospital wing, he drove to the snitch at the same angle of attack as his previous game.

Harry neared the edge of the pitch before pulling up on his broom for his vertical maneuver. He soared up along the outer bounds of the pitch, quickly topping the height of the students in the stands. He extended his hand, feeling the snitch smack into his palm as he closed his fingers around it. He heard the crowd cheer and the announcement of the final score, two hundred and sixty to twenty.

Harry turned to the other end of the pitch to see Ginzy triumphant. She must have just scored the last goal as Harry caught the snitch.

Harry was watching the beautiful chaser, however movement caught his eye. A Bludger was headed straight at the side of her head and Draco Malfoy was holding a beater bat with a triumphant look. That look was enough to make Harry's stomach clench. Harry shout of warning went unheard. The Bludger struck home at the side of Ginzy's head.

The world slowed down for Harry. He saw her head snap sharply to the side in a sick, unnatural motion. Limply, she slumped off her high performance broom, without any movement initiated by her own muscles. Harry turned his broom and raced toward Ginzy's end of the pitch as he saw her falling toward the hard ground. She seemed to be falling in slow motion, head first facing the grass below. Despite Ginzy's seemingly slow fall, Harry couldn't push his broom to a high enough speed to reach the plummeting figure. Harry was in a panic. He couldn't loose her. If she hit the ground like this, there would be nothing that a healer could do for her. She would be dead instantly. Harry had been reminded all too often that there is nothing to reverse death.

Harry watched as Cedric was killed for being the 'spare'. He had seen his own Godfather slain with a simple spell in front of his eyes, simply because he was standing in front of the gateway to the afterlife when the spell struck. He even had vague memories of the fateful Halloween and his parents' own deaths, thanks to dementors' influence years prior. He was not going to let Ginzy die too. It was just too much to lose.

Harry's right hand shot forward, releasing the snitch and focusing his energy. As she plummeted to her death, he knew he had to stop her fall. Harry had never tried to use such power as this would take. He did not know if he had it in him.

Previously he had sensed a glow in himself that frightened him, the flames of power occasionally licking at his flesh from within. The vessel containing his magical reservoir had been cracked, irreparably, over the summer, allowing most of his full power to do more than merely trickle out as it did in most wizards. The crack allowed the power to flow out of the vessel in a stream, allowing a great amount of power to be available to spells. The only way that he contained the power that burned as flame after the ritual that changed his summer, was by force of his own will to hold the streaming crack at bay. His only ally in the fight to contain his inner magical power was his strength, not of muscle, but of will and determination.

But he had to.
falling woman, he would have surely been consumed in the flame.

Harry’s vision and body itself changed in that instant. He could feel the magic around him, coursing through his flesh, licking at his skin. He could see the veins of magic almost as a new layer of color in everything that he could see. He hadn’t practiced seeing aura’s since the summer, but the short time he had was just drop in the bucket for what he now saw. He new view of the world was rife with streams and pockets of magic energy in colors on and off the rainbow. He could see the magic in each of the spectators, flowing and moving, accomplishing the little things a witch or wizard would never have to think about. The view of Ginny, however, frightened him to his core. The magic was strong in Ginny, strong but unmoving. She was teetering on the edge, unconscious and not moving the magic within herself. She would be of no use in her own rescue.

Harry tensed his arm as he flew toward the falling woman, focusing his entire being on her form. Ginny Weasley was the only thing that he could see, his vision tunneled.

He wanted to stop her fall.
He needed to stop her fall.
He could stop her fall.
He would stop her fall.
He did stop her fall.

The limp form of Ginny Weasley stopped in the position that it had been falling, head pointing at the ground, body trailing behind, her whole being frozen safely in stasis. Any movement of her body could be fatal.

Harry’s tunnel vision eased now and he noticed people rushing the field to come to Ginny’s aid.

Harry examined her from afar as he sped to her side. He could now see clearly, even from his distance, that the Bludger had broken her neck and fractured her skull. He concentrated again. Any movement of her body could be the final straw. He could see the magic in all areas of her body; he hoped that that meant she hadn’t severed any nerves yet.

People were approaching her at a run, trying to get to her side to help. As good as their intentions were, any movement could be fatal. They were not slowing, not keeping their distance.

Harry wanted to stop them from reaching her. They would not harm her.

The magic flowing in the air around the Quidditch pitch flowed at his command.

The magic congealed into a golden dome, nearly invisible to the eye, but there.

She would be safe. They would not compound the injury.

The crowd reached the extent of the dome before Harry touched down. The front echelon of concerned students and staff came to a sudden halt as they struck the soft but strong dome. The entire crowd had the distinct look of surprise and confusion on their face.

Harry landed on the ground several feet behind the rear of the twenty person deep crowd.

“Excuse me,” Harry calmly spoke as he concentrated on Ginny’s form and keeping it still.

At the sound of the calm, powerful voice behind them, the nearby people turned. Each person gasped and hastily moved to the side forming a path. The sound of the gasp was contagious as Harry strode through the group.

At the edge of the golden dome, Professor McGonagall looked at Harry, concern in her eyes.

“Harry, are you alright?”

“Ginny’s hurt,” Harry said simply.

Harry walked straight at the dome but didn’t break stride as he walked through the protective barrier. The crowd reformed behind Harry, closing the circle.

Harry concentrated on the woman in the air in front of him.

“Madame Pomfrey,” Harry’s voice boomed, magically amplified throughout the castle and grounds, “Ginny Weasley has been injured. She has broken the first and second vertebra in the neck and a fractured skull. I will bring her immediately.”

His voice lowered to a non-amplified level as he resumed speaking.

“Excuse me,” Harry calmly spoke once again.

The crowd between him and the castle parted without individual conscious thought, leaving an open path.
Harry turned Ginny to where she was lying on her back, still suspended. He started walking, bringing her with him. They made their way to the
castle, through the long hallways, to the hospital wing, golden dome in tow. The doors of the hospital wing burst open as Harry approached, Gin
ny gliding smoothly in, coming to rest above one of the beds near the healer’s office.

As the gold dome continued with Harry and Ginny, it left a similar translucent gold shield at the doorway to the hospital wing, ever protecting Harry’s
charge.

Madame Pomfrey ran in, clutching several potions and her wand. “Oh my, what happened to Miss Weasley?” she asked frantically. As she spoke,
she moved efficiently through the golden dome wall without notice of the woven web of magic.

“A Bludger struck her head, fracturing her skull and breaking a vertebra,” Harry told her with cold efficiency.

Madame Pomfrey waved her wand in an intricate pattern over her patient. Ginny glowed in a variety of colors, their meanings escaping Harry.

“Very well,” she said, considering the case before her. “She should be fine, but this will take a while. Are you able to hold her in that position for
some time? I don’t want to risk transferring
her to someone else’s hold as that could move her.”

“Yes, Madame, I can hold her,” Harry said with unwavering certainty.

Madame Pomfrey waved her wand again in a diagnostic spell or three over Ginny’s entire body, not wanting to miss any other injuries. Thankfully,
the only injuries that she could find, bar several contusions that were not unusual for Slytherin’s Quidditch opponents, were the ones mentioned by
Harry.

“A broken neck requires the use of potions to repair, as a spell is not exact enough to get it right,” the school matron said. “I’ll give her a potion to
induce a coma until she’s healed, and I’ll let you know when she may be lowered to the bed.”

“Go ahead,” he said in a cold, mechanical voice.

“Harry, are you alright?” she asked.

“I’m fine, just tend to her,” Harry commanded.

Harry watched in silence as several potions were administered. He could feel a small group of people gathering outside the doors of the hospital
wing, held back by his shield.

“Madame Pomfrey, shall I allow the others to enter now that you’ve tended to Ginny?” Harry asked.

“What do you mean?” she asked. “Where is everybody? Usually when someone’s injured, they won’t leave the hospital wing alone for people to
rightly heal.”

“I’m holding a shield on the doors to keep them out,” Harry said. “I’d like to lower the shield so that I’m not wasting my energy.” The small waver in
his voice barely betrayed the strain that was mounting from using such a large amount of sustained magic.

“You can,” she said, “but wait till I can be at the doors to keep the bulk of people out myself.”

She marched over to the doors and gave Harry a nod. Harry released the shield on the door with a feeling of relief. Madame Pomfrey opened the
doors to find Professor Dumbledore leading a group that included much of Gryffindor house and certain other concerned onlookers. At her steely
gaze, the Professor turned to the crowd and spoke.

“Would you all please return to your normal Saturday activity?” the Professor said. “News of Ginny Weasley’s condition will travel to the school in the
normal fashion. I am sure that no one will be
in the dark for long. Mr. Weasley, you may come in if you will remain quiet. Your sister has much healing
to be done.”

The Professor entered with Ron in tow. Madame Pomfrey seemed grudgingly pleased that only the pair of them entered her area of responsibility.
She turned from the now closed doors and returned to tend to her charge. She once again walked straight through the shield, stopping at Ginny’s
side.

Professor Dumbledore walked up to the shield and placed a hand on it muttering, “Interesting.”

After receiving an update on the condition of the floating student, the Professor turned to Harry and addressed him in a very low voice. “Harry, are
you alright? You seem distressed,” asked Professor Dumbledore with concern.

“Yes sir, Ginny was hurt,” Harry stated matter-of-factly.

“Yes, I know,” the professor said with concern. “But that’s not all that is distressing you at this moment. What’s wrong Harry?”

Harry responded at just above a whisper as he concentrated on the levitation, “It’s this power that I’m using, sir. I had to completely open my
reserves for this. There is no containment left. I shattered it. When I stop this, I don’t know if I can control it.”

“That is a risk, Harry,” acknowledged Dumbledore. “But you seem to be controlling it just splendidly. I have complete confidence in your abilities.”

“But what happens when I stop channeling it out of myself and it’s still there, burning. I can already feel the fire on my flesh and bones,” Harry said
with the first emotion to grace his voice yet. “The power scares me.”
"I'm sure that you will do fine," the Professor assured his charge.

Ron never noticed this conversation; his worry over his sister drowning out any other concern.

Draco Malfoy found himself, once again, in the Headmaster's office, only this time he was not bound and petrified. He was in a stiff chair facing the Headmaster's desk in opposition to the Headmaster, the Deputy Headmistress and his head of house. Instead of elegant dress robes he was here in his sweaty Quidditch robes, uncomfortable and unhappy.

"Mr. Malfoy," Dumbledore said without even a hint of his usual mirth, "throughout your career at Hogwarts, you have exhibited a pattern of bullying, intimidation and violence. We have attempted to warn you from this path, but today's events are beyond pale. Today you committed assault with the intent to kill. You attempted to commit murder."

"This is an outrage!" Malfoy screeched. "She was hit with a Bludger during a Quidditch match. How am I responsible if the Bludger hit her in the side of the head rather than the shoulder?"

"You had no reason to take the beater bat from Mr. Goyle," Dumbledore said firmly. "You had no reason to hit a Bludger toward Miss Weasley at any time, much less after she had scored the final goal of the game and after the snitch had been caught."

"Goyle wasn't doing his job," Draco said by way of explanation. "I'm the Captain of the team, so I was showing him."

"Pensive evidence can show that you looked and saw Mr. Potter catch the game-ending snitch," Dumbledore stated. "Add to this your continuing blame of Miss Weasley for your being caught at your last assault attempt and the story is quite compelling. I am going to make it even simpler," Dumbledore said in a hard, cold voice, "Mr. Malfoy, you are hereby expelled from Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. Your wand will be forwarded to the Department of Magical Law Enforcement for their judgment as to whether it will be broken or returned to you. Mind you, if she does not recover, you will be facing charges of murder not attempted murder."

"I'll protest this farce," screamed Malfoy.

"Of course you will, Mr. Malfoy," patronized Professor Dumbledore.

Throughout the entire exchange, Professors McGonagall and Snape stayed silent observers.

It was three hours before Madame Pomfrey announced that Harry could lower Ginny to the bed.

After a moment regarding the bed Ginny was hovering over, Harry dropped the golden shield and spoke, "Ron, would you pull the sheet and blanket back from her bed and remove the pillow?"

Ron stepped forward silently, doing as Harry asked.

Harry lowered Ginny to the bed and released the magic that he had been performing for more than three straight hours. He nearly collapsed as the exhaustion swept over him. He was tired and weak, but there was something else. Despite his exhaustion, now that his magic had no task, he could feel the fire inside his flesh burning intensely. This wasn't good.

Ron turned to Harry with a single tear in his eye, Ginny's pale hand clutched in Ron's. "Thank you, Harry. Thanks for saving her," he said quietly, his voice full of emotion.

Harry nodded before turning silently and walking out of the hospital wing. He could feel the fire burning him. He had to center himself or it would overtake him. He strode blindly, not thinking of his destination. It was several corridors before he realized what he must do. At the next junction, he turned left and set out.

Harry walked purposefully toward the entryway, knowing that he'd have to go to his secret place to work through this. He needed to be isolated. If it did overtake him, he didn't want to be around anyone that could be hurt if he were unsuccessful. He didn't know what would happen, but he knew that it wouldn't be safe or pretty.

He focused on getting to the Entry Hall and then the Hogwarts crest there would transport him to the Chamber of Secrets. As the Chamber wasn't under the school, if he were to do extensive damage, the lake over his head would swallow him and he wouldn't do any harm to the hundreds of unsuspecting students. He was almost there. Just down one last hallway.

"Harry…Stop Harry. What's wrong?" asked Hermione.

She had run after him from the entrance of the hospital wing, her previous yells not penetrating Harry's haze.

She stopped him with a hand on his shoulder at the entrance to the Hall.

"Harry, where are you going? What's wrong?" she asked with concern.

"Ginny's going to be fine," Harry said. "Madame Pomfrey just put her to bed. She'll be out for some time while she heals."

"That's great," Hermione said, "but, Harry, what's wrong with you?"
“I need to focus,” Harry said, “to concentrate.”

Harry felt the flames inside him licking at his flesh. If he boiled over, he didn’t want to hurt his friends.

“Hermione, I need to go calm down,” he stated. “I don’t want to hurt you or any of my friends.”

With this he turned, pulling his wand.

Hermione saw him point his wand at the new crest in the center of the hall and muttering something.

The crest shimmered as Harry broke into a run away from Hermione. She was startled at his sudden action. Harry reached the seal and dove forward, headfirst, into the floor, disappearing through the stone, the surface rippling like a pond.

She ran after him, hoping to follow her friend. She had learned from Harry what the new crests really were for more than a month ago, but still couldn’t operate them. Sometimes students would randomly disappear, through what Hermione knew was Harry’s little built in prank, but they always turned up at one of the other crests that Harry had placed around the school.

She reached the seal on her feet and was surprised to find that it was solid. Harry had just dove through the seal as if it were water, but under her feet was solid stone.

Hermione was confused both by Harry’s behavior and the crest under her feet. She couldn’t wrap her mind around what she had just seen. From what she had learned, what Harry did should not have been possible. Obviously, Harry knew more secrets hidden within the runes than he had revealed.

After a few minutes gaping at her surroundings and the absence of her friend, she turned to retrace her steps to the hospital wing. Hermione entered the wing, seeing her boyfriend sitting next to Ginny’s bed. She conjured a chair to sit next to him.

“Hi,” he said as he grasped his girlfriend’s hand for support.

“How is she?” Hermione asked softly.

“She’s okay now,” Ron breathed. “Harry really saved her.”

“Yeah,” replied Hermione quietly.

Ron suddenly looked around, obviously not seeing what he was after.

“Hermione, have you seen Harry?” Ron asked. “I didn’t notice him leave.”

“He left just after putting her down,” she told him. “He just said that he needed to calm down, then he dove into the great seal and disappeared.”

“Dove into the seal? Weird,” Ron said with little emotion in his voice. “Well, he was using a lot more magic than normal. Let’s let him rest. We will check on him later. That’s weird with the seal and all.”

“But, I don’t know where he is,” Hermione said in exasperation.

“The map is upstairs in the dorm. It’ll tell us where he is,” Ron replied, “But he’s probably in the Chamber.”

“Oh, Yeah. Forgot about the map,” Hermione said, “but it won’t show him if he is in the Chamber of Secrets.”

After repeated assurances that Ginny would be unconscious for days, Ron had finally given up his vigil in favor of dinner.

Ron and Hermione entered the Great Hall, each looking up and down the Gryffindor table, hoping to find Harry waiting for them. The table was quite full already, but Harry was not one of the many people in the hall.

“We’ll check the map right after dinner,” they assured each other.

They ate in silence, holding hands under the table, more for comfort than anything else. They finished their dinners and decided to forgo dessert. If Hermione had not been so worried about Harry, this would have piqued her attention. Ron never skipped dessert. This just showed how worried Ron was after his best friend and his sister.

Ron raced up the steps into his dorm while Hermione waited at the base of the steps for him to return with the Marauder’s Map.

He returned, out of breath from running up several flights of stairs and back down.

He peered at the activated map intently. There were hundreds of names on the parchment and many levels to the castle to search. Where could he be?

Harry wasn’t in any of his usual haunts, the Room of Requirement, the library, or the Owlery…not even in Hagrid’s hut.

“Ron, he’s not here!”
"That just means that he is probably in the Chamber of Secrets," Ron said, "he wouldn't have left Hogwarts grounds on his own."

"But, Ron," Hermione said, "he's not on the map. How can we be sure?"

"I know..." Ron started.

"Ron, we have to go talk to Dumbledore," Hermione stated. "What if something has happened to him?"

Ron contemplated this, voicing his worry, "What are we going to tell Dumbledore about how we know that Harry is not on grounds?"

"I'm sure that Dumbledore already knows about the map," Hermione said, "and if we just say that he's not on grounds, Dumbledore won't ask."

"Okay," Ron agreed, "but Harry'll kill us if we lose his father's map."

They proceeded out of the common room and to Dumbledore's office. They hoped to find the Headmaster there, after all, he had never failed to be there before.

Arriving at the gargoyle statue that concealed the stair to the headmaster's office, they realized that they didn't know the current password.

"Oh what is it...Fizzing Whizbee."

"Marshmallow Tart."

"Pumpkin Pasties."

"Sugar Quill."

"Honeydukes."

"Cockroach Cluster."

"Blood Pops."

Hermione glared at Ron, "Blood Pops? He uses candy that he likes and he's not a vampire."

"I'm just running out of candy ideas."

"OK, maybe something Muggle," Hermione said.

"Don't look at me Hermione," Ron said, "I've never been in a Muggle candy store."


With the last guess the Gargoyle sprang to life and jumped to the side, revealing the stairs to Dumbledore's office. The pair bound up the stairs, hardly stopping to knock before entering without waiting for an answer. They burst in to the office to find the Headmaster behind his desk with a seat in front of it already occupied.

"Mr. Weasley, Miss Granger," greeted the Headmaster. "How nice to see you."

"Sir, Harry's not in the castle," Hermione blurted out. "We think that he's in the Chamber of Secrets, but we can't be sure. What if he has been taken?"