

## Blaze of Glory

Monday Morning

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Harry awoke with a start, his hand instinctively going for his wand. He gasped for air as the nightmare slowly released him, leaving him staring at the onrushing dawn. He knew he shouldn't have slept outside but he couldn't resist the feeling of freedom one last time. When he went downstairs he would no longer be Harry, whimsical wizard with hopes and dreams; he'd be Harry Potter – The Boy Who Lived, a member of the Order of the Phoenix and the person who had the sole responsibility for defeating Lord Voldemort.

He unrolled the Invisibility Cloak he'd been using as a pillow and slowly donned it. The urge to stay was overwhelming, to just watch the dawn and let the rest of the world look after itself. But he couldn't; a pair of magical brown eyes drew him to his destiny. They showed him his hopes and dreams, and what could have been whilst pulling him to his death.

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"Where have you been?" Hermione, one of his two best friends asked. "Never mind," she interrupted before he could speak. "I've got your clothes here."

"Thanks," was Harry's quiet reply.

As Harry walked along the empty hall way, his mind flew back to how this had all started.

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"Hey Harry, I need some help for a project." Wild hair flew around a pale face as Ginny Weasley came to a hurried stop in front of him.

Harry looked up, his face carefully schooled in the friendly-but-nothing-more gaze he always used with her.

She paused and sat down as she looked at what he was doing. "Divination?" she asked with an amused smile on her face.

"Tarot cards," he explained with a slight frown, "but something's not right. No matter what I do, I get the same prediction."

"Here," Ginny said with a wide grin, "let me do one for you."

As she laid out the cards, Ginny's already pale face lost even more colour. She gasped, covering her mouth; her eyes desperately searched his, pleading for reassurance.

"You read them the same way I do then?"

The brown eyed witch simply nodded, fear in her eyes. "What are you going to do?"

"Fight," the unruly haired wizard said firmly.

His scar, a legacy from Voldemort was vibrant in his own pale face. "Can't you run? What about your future, your life?" she asked, not liking the look of fatalism in his eyes.

He shook his head slowly, "And abandon everyone to die?"

Ginny nodded. "Yes. You never asked for this; it's not your fault. You shouldn't have to sacrifice yourself. You've already lost so much."

For the first time in many years, Harry's mask dropped, a look of intense emotion exploded through his eyes, drowning her. His hand moved, almost of its own volition, and cupped her face. There was complete silence as he allowed himself the luxury of running his fingers down her smooth cheek.

Before she could blink, the mask was back. His hand removed as if it had never been there.

"Fight," he whispered, his eyes suddenly starting to twinkle, in a way eerily reminiscent of Albus Dumbledore.

He flashed a half smile at her and then stood, vanishing, leaving her sitting at the table. She glanced down at the cards portraying his death one last time. A single tear ran down her face as she realized what he had been doing... that he had known... that he loved her but didn't want her hurt by his death. He must have known his destiny for such a long time.

"Damn him," she whispered savagely. "Damn him for being noble, for being the great Harry Potter, for taking the world on his shoulders."

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Harry hurried along the corridors, his mind working feverishly trying to flesh out his plan.

He knocked hard on the painting to the Ravenclaw common room. A small student opened the door slowly.

"Is Cho around?" Harry asked a flicker of impatience on his face. For the first time he could recall, he was grateful for his fame. The young boy took one look at his lightning scar and vanished. A few second later the beautiful face of Cho Chang came into sight.

"Harry?" she said, a questioning smile on her face.

"Can we talk?" Harry asked earnestly. Cho was the girlfriend of Cedric Diggory, the boy the Dark Lord had killed as an irrelevance after the Triwizard Tournament. Harry had been avoiding her since then, his guilt enough to make him forget about the crush he had developed on her.

"Of course, come in."

Harry followed her into the Ravenclaw common room, trying to ignore the fact that he was the centre of attention. Cho was a Ravenclaw prefect and had her own room.

"So?" she said uncomfortably. She had wanted to talk to him, to tell him she didn't blame him, but after he had run away from her a few times, she had decided to give him space.

Harry was frantically organising his thoughts, trying to find the most persuasive words that would get her on his side. If he was going to succeed he needed more help than was currently available to him

"How would you like to help avenge Cedric?" he asked bluntly.

A thousand thoughts mirrored their way through her eyes, before settling on shock. "What?"

With another deep breath Harry started to explain.

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Harry opened the door and walked into absolute silence. He could feel every eye in the Common Room looking at him as he led most of the members of Ravenclaw house inside.

"Everyone listen up." He said firmly. The news of his death being so close had eliminated some of his shyness, and he was damned if he was either going to fight alone or if he was going to get any of his friends killed.

"What are they doing here?" Hermione asked. Her tone of voice was questioning, not rude. This was a massive breach of protocol.

"Is anyone not here? If so, someone go get them immediately. This is a full house meeting."

His mien was so serious no one questioned the fact that Harry was too young to call a meeting like this. Only prefects could do that, and Harry wasn't a prefect.

"Good of you all to come," Harry started, a small smile on his face.

Ginny walked to the front and stood with him, silently offering her support. He smiled at her gratefully, trying to get her to lose her serious expression. He could see a single tear track down one cheek. He was aware that the students in front of him were looking at each other nervously.

"A strange thing happened the other day. I was doing my Divination homework and actually tried to do it properly." A small amount of laughter filled the room. He'd faked his Divination homework for quite sometime, until he actually ran out of creative ways to predict his own death, and so had grudgingly decided to do it properly.

"And the stars said that I would die soon." There was some uncomfortable sounding laughter from the students.

"So I tried rune stones. And they too said that I would die soon." The laughter stopped, to be replaced by very worried looks. He could see Hermione reach out and grab Ron's hand tightly, her face going incredible pale. It was so like her to be miles ahead of everyone else.

"Finally, I tried tarot cards. Four times to be exact. Each time I got the exact same result. Twenty minutes ago, Ginny did a reading for me." Harry waved his wand casually, creating an image behind him. The image was a large Celtic Cross. He concentrated, so that they showed the same image that he had seen earlier. Unlike Muggle Cards, wizard Tarot Cards would actually give glimpses of the future. It was up to the reader to correctly interpret them. Each card had a small image on it:

The end of the year

A betrayal

A Dark Lord

Death Eaters

An attack

Fight back

Pain

Loss

Sacrifice

Death

An eerie silence filled the room as each person looked at the pictures behind him.

"What do you want us to do?" a nervous Ravenclaw asked.

Harry smiled, "I'm hoping you'll join us."

"What about V-V-Voldemort?" The question came from a Gryffindor.

Harry stood up straight, showing a confidence he didn't truly have. He looked over the students gathered in front of him, and met everyone's eyes. He allowed a tight smile to show across his face. "Voldemort is mine," he said fiercely. "I just need help to get to him."

As Harry knew he would, Ron was the first to stand up, "Just tell us what to do, Harry."

Harry looked grateful, "Anyone who doesn't want to help should leave now."

No one made a move, so Harry started to outline his plan. As he finished, it was again Ron who acted as spokesperson for the rest.

"You're insane."

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"I believe, Mr. Potter, that you will find this book most interesting." The sonorous tones of his headmaster, Professor Dumbledore, paused as they handed Harry a large spell book. 'Charms, Spells and Hexes, a mages guide.'

"You may find the Quidditch pitch a good place to practice," he finished, before walking off slowly.

A small fire lit itself in Harry's eyes. That was as close to official sanction as he was going to get. It also meant that his headmaster was aware of his actions, that he would be providing his own cover.

"Loitering in the corridors, Potter?" the sneering voice of Professor Snape interrupted his thoughts.

"No, sir," Harry replied automatically, barely managing to restrain from rolling his eyes.

"Detention, Potter. Now! Follow me."

Harry nodded and followed the pallid teacher.

They entered the Potions dungeon, walking through it in to the teacher's office. Snape walked over to his desk and grabbed a book, thumbing it open to a certain page.

"I expect you to follow these directions exactly, Potter. Even someone with as little skill as you should be able to do this. Points will be taken from Gryffindor if you fail." With that final threat, Snape left Harry to his fate.

Knowing he had only a few days to live meant Harry had a serious control issue; the urge to throw a curse at his Potions professor's back was immense.

In the end, the only thing that stopped him was that hitting a man in the back was the Slytherin way, not the Gryffindor way. Harry glared down at the potion book in front of him. He froze and read it again. He was suddenly immensely grateful he hadn't hexed his Professor, as he realised that Snape had ordered him to make what looked like an extremely powerful healing potion.

"Where the hell have you been?" an excited Ron asked him as Harry tiredly entered the common room. The room was fuller than usual as it still held the population of both houses. Since Harry's announcement everyone had started to work together, inter-house rivalries forgotten, as it had always been in times of stress.

Harry climbed onto a chair and the room the room automatically fell silent.

"I have obtained a large quantity of healing potion." He held up the large flasks he was carrying. He didn't want to explain about Snape, for the professor's sake, not his own. Relieved smiles flicked through the room. "It won't protect from the Unforgivable curses, but it will help with pretty much everything else."

The tension in the room lightened as Harry got off the chair. "Fred, George, Ginny, Ron, Hermione, and Colin. Come with me."

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Harry moved into the fifth year boys' dormitory, hoping it was reasonably tidy. Luckily it was.

The others followed him, although Colin showed a marked reluctance. He wasn't really surprised, especially this year, he'd been very close to Fred, George, and Ginny, along with Ron and Hermione.

Fred and George were incorrigible, and he wouldn't change them for anything. Their sense of humour was as valuable as their ability to think sideways and come with some really Machiavellian schemes.

Ginny, while a year younger, had wormed her way into the group, the same way she had wormed her way into his heart – by being strong, dedicated, and drop dead gorgeous all at the same time. The amount of times he had wished he could just take her and claim her as his, was almost beyond measure.

He now knew what it was like to have friends. What it was like to have people covering his back, and that they would be there for him, regardless. Over the summer, the Death Eater attacks had intensified, and he'd found himself in trouble more than once. The others had helped him escape unscathed, as he had helped them. They now had a friendship that had been forged in the pain of the Cruciatus curse, and tested under the *Imperio* us.

It must be daunting for Colin to even be invited to join them, so he decided to deal with him first. He sat on his bed, folding one of his legs under him. Ginny sat next to him. Fred and George threw themselves extravagantly on Ron's bed, while Ron and Hermione sat together on the windowsill. He smiled slightly, still marvelling at the way they all felt at home with each other – although Ginny sitting next to him was a new, and very welcome, addition.

"Colin, I invited you here because I have a special assignment for you."

The colour left the boy's face faster than a bouncing white ferret up a drainpipe. He swallowed. "Whatever you need, Harry." His simple declaration was met with a smile, four words proving why he had been sorted into Gryffindor house.

Harry took pity of him, as he realized how his words could have been interpreted. "All I need is for you to be ready with your camera. In the first few seconds I need you to take as many pictures as you can, then get the hell out of there. You need to get the pictures to the Daily Prophet first, then the Department of Magic."

The relief was palpable on Colin's face. He snapped a salute, spun on his heel and left; not a hint of mockery was in his departure.

"So, Commander Potter, what do you want with us?" The mockery in George's voice was unmistakable.

"Yeah, oh wonderful chief," Fred continued. "Are you going to pass on your divine wizardry genius to us mere peasants?"

Harry sighed and lay back on the bed.

"Fred, George," an annoyed Ginny interrupted. "This isn't the time."

"Of course not, oh beautiful sister - who is currently sharing a bed with our commander," Fred replied, a twinkle in his eye.

George flashed his trademark grin at his twin. "And might we ask, since when has our little sister seemed fit to protect our glorious leader? Or to share his bed?"

"Enough." Harry demanded, cutting through the sibling squabbling instantly. "If we're going to continue this ridiculous charade of me being some sort of commander, you can stop this teasing."

"I need you two for two special assignments. The Death Eaters are going to be expecting some resistance, nothing like what we have planned, but some anyway. I need you as my special forces. You have two days to come up with as many distractions, transformations and hexes as possible. I want you to cause complete mayhem for them."

Harry looked Fred, then George, directly in the eye. "No limits, I don't want them to know what hit them."

"The other assignment?" George asked softly, his teasing from earlier now subdued.

Harry took a deep breath and turned slightly, "I'm holding you both responsible for Ginny's safety." He ignored her shocked gasp at his high handedness. "I want her alive and safe at the end of this."

"Harry! What the hell do you think you are doing?" the enraged, red-haired witch demanded.

Harry ignored her, looking at the twins before him. They looked back, searching his eyes, his soul for something. Then, in unison, with just a tiny hint of a smile, they shouted "Yes, sir."

"Get on with it then," Harry said softly. "Don't let me down."

"We won't," George replied on the way out.

"On either count."

The sparks were literally flying out of Ginny's eyes. Taking his life into his own hands, The Boy Who Lived ignored her.

"Ron."

His best friend looking at him slowly, obviously seeing the same thing in his eyes his brother had. "Name it, mate. You know I'll follow."

"I don't need you following Ron, I need you commanding."

"What?" the youngest Weasley boy asked.

Harry passed Ron the book Dumbledore had given him. "There are some spells I've marked. I need you to take everyone you can down to the Quidditch pitch and get them to practice. I want them able to cast these spells as if they were Stunning Charms. I know it's impossible and you've only got two days, but if anyone can do it, you can."

Ron looked shocked at Harry. "What if someone sees us?"

"I've booked the pitch for private practice. No one will be there."

Ron nodded slowly and shot him a proud look. "You know, Harry," he said slowly. "I've always wanted to be you and to have your fame, before this summer, and I saw what you had to go through. I think you're insane, but it's the only thing that might work."

Harry smiled as he watched Hermione lightly take Ron's hand, and hold it. He looked at her, and could see her faith in him. Of all his friends, he was perhaps closest to Hermione in a way that was like a sister.

"Which leaves you to face Voldemort one on one?" Ron whispered softly.

Harry nodded once.

Slowly Ron nodded and walked out.

Harry turned to Hermione. Her gaze was proud as she watched her friend, possibly her boyfriend, walk out of the room.

"I've left you the hardest task," Harry said gently, leaning forwards.

"What?" She asked, obviously wondering what could be harder than what he had already order Colin, Fred, George and Ron to do.

"I need you to start research, all the restricted files, find me anything that will help me take out Voldemort." The fact that he didn't say 'beat' was deliberate.

"All costs?" she asked, her eyes desperately searching his, begging him to say no.

"All costs," he said clearly, with as little emotion as possible. "If you can find any spells to help Ron at the same time, they would be good as well."

She simply nodded then turned and ran out, heading towards the library.

That left Harry alone with Ginny. Almost reluctantly he turned to face her. His breath caught in his throat. A thousand emotions were skimming across her face: anger, betrayal, tiredness, frustration, fear, dread, and amongst them all, at the fore, was love. She looked so incredibly alive that his breath caught in his throat.

"Why?" she asked.

"Which question?"

She paused for a second, and then tilted her head. "All this time, you've wanted me." It started as a question and ended as a statement.

A simple nod was all he could manage.

"Why didn't you ever act on it? The whole damn school seems to know how I feel about you."

"It wasn't fair on you. I'm going to die in two days time. What sort of relationship is that? And besides, I couldn't make you a target."

"You decided all this by yourself?"

Harry nodded. Internally he knew he should be afraid, but the fear wouldn't come. His fatalism left him almost reckless.

"Without my input?" Her voice was rising as she started to scream at him.

A curious smile found its way to his face. Another plan formed by madness, this one a little more personal.

Without another word, he leant forwards and kissed her. His lips lightly touching hers, almost experimentally as he tried to move them, not quite sure of what he should be doing. He felt her stiffen in his hands, the hands he was currently using to stroke her sides, her hips. He continued, almost deciding that if she was about to hit him, he'd at least get a decent first kiss to remember.

Suddenly she relaxed, her arms going around his neck and kissed him back, her kiss seemed innocent, as he realised to his pleasure, that it was her first kiss as well.

Slowly he lay back down on his bed, pulling her with him, breaking the kiss. He held her in his arms looking up at her face.

"I'm still mad at you," she said softly, a slight pinkness in her face.

"I know."

"What made you change your mind?"

"I'm not Harry Potter, Voldemort's nemesis, Gin; I'm not this perfect paragon of virtue everyone expects. I'm Harry, fifth year student, bad at Divination, good at Quidditch and only human. I couldn't hide it any more."

"Is that all you think you are?" she asked softly. At his firm nod, she smiled sweetly with a tiny hint of condescension. "Just Harry?" she teased gently.

A little surprised by her attitude, he nodded again, unsure of where she was going with this.

"What's going to happen in two days time?" she asked him.

Deciding to play along with her questioning, he replied. "Voldemort and his Death Eaters are going to attack Hogwarts and kill as many of us as possible."

Ginny nodded, "And what normally happens when Death Eaters attack?" (*A/N When Death Eaters Attack, coming soon on Fox Networks*)

"Panic, chaos and death."

"What are the Gryffindors and Ravenclaws doing right now?"

"They should be on the pitch with Ron, learning how to work together to be able to defend themselves."

"Do you think they will panic?"

"I hope not."

Ginny's smile held a tiny bit of triumph.

"So in less than a day, you've persuaded a bunch of kids to work together, ready to stand up to the attackers. You've got Fred and George working together to create chaos. You have Hermione in the library searching for anything that will help you defeat Voldemort," Harry looked startled as she said the Dark Lord's name without hesitation.

"In a single day you've got two houses working together. They are all gathering around you, not because you are Harry Potter, but because you are Harry, the kid with green eyes and black glasses, the kid who plays Quidditch like a charm, the only person to see what is coming and make a plan so insane that it might work. People trust you Harry, they see your dedication, your willingness to take control, to take responsibility, and they respect that. They know if anyone is going to get them out of this alive it's you. They haven't got blind faith in you, they know your faults and weaknesses, but they trust you to do what is right, to make the hard decisions. To lead them to victory."

Harry was still for a moment, her impassioned words ringing in his ears. His arms tightened around her, pulling her tiny frame against his. In other times this was his greatest desire, his personal fantasy, having Ginny Weasley in his bed, willingly laying on him. This wasn't those times; her words had wormed their way through his defences, opening him to her completely. He looked down at her, into her deep brown eyes and paused. Like never before he opened himself to her so she could see the mass of contradictions that he was, his bravery and his cowardice, his intelligence and his stupidity, his love and his hate.

Ginny didn't flinch as she matched his gaze, not backing away from what he was trying to tell her. When he finished, and when he felt more drained than he ever had, he saw her expression change to something he never truly expected to see: Acceptance.

Slowly she sat up and a flicker of fear showed in Harry's eyes as he thought she was leaving him.

She swung her leg over him, sitting on him. Keeping her eyes locked on his, she reached down and grabbed his hand, lifting it to her chest, flattening the palm.

"This is my heart, Harry. It belongs to you. It always has."

He closed his eyes for a second, feeling it pulse under his hand, the steady beat echoing through his body. He met her eyes again, his bright green searching her dark brown one last time. He smiled softly, slowly, and nodded.

Keeping his hand in place, she leant forwards and kissed him gently. He matched her, kissing her back.

A soft smile, one he'd never seen before, appeared on her face, as she broke the kiss. "When you've won, we'll have the rest of our lives to see where we are going with this."

In that second, his fatalism vanished, instantly replaced by a steely desire. The Boy Who Lived might be prepared to die to take out Voldemort, but Harry Potter certainly wasn't, not any more. The idea of going down in a blaze of glory was no longer acceptable. He wanted Voldemort dead, but now he wanted to live as well. Ginny had changed him with a few simple words - made him determined to survive.

"I'd recommend you as a motivational speaker," he started to joke, "but I don't want any other man touching you, ever."

"What are you going to do now?" she asked him.

"Well," he said, watching as she reluctantly climbed off him. "I want you to help Hermione while I go and talk to the Hufflepuffs."

He reached into the chest by his bed and handed her his Invisibility Cloak. "If you need to check out any books, use this to hide them."

She nodded and her hands caressed his as she took the material. With a cheeky salute that did wonderful things to the fabric of her blouse, she turned on her heel and ran out the door.

He sat on the bed for a few more minutes, thinking things through. He didn't have the luxury of getting another chance. If he got this wrong, it would be game over, Voldemort would have won. His musing was interrupted by Hedwig rapping on the window. He opened it and took the message off her leg.

*"Harry,  
You were right to warn me. I'll be there.  
S."*

Harry looked relieved at the note from Sirius Black, his godfather. Perhaps his parents' betrayer would be there. Capturing Pettigrew would finally clear his godfather's name.

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Harry left the boys bedroom and walked through the deserted Gryffindor common room. He used the Marauders Map to find the Hufflepuff common room. Rather than knocking, he waved his wand dramatically. The sound of a Muggle doorbell rang through the room.

A second later, Alexis Marks opened the door. She was one of their seventh year prefects. He'd never actually talked to her before.

"I was wondering when you would drop by," she greeted him dryly. "Come in."

Harry had obviously interrupted a meeting, as it looked like every Hufflepuff was there, and they all looked at him with a mixture of hope and fear. He was getting used to this reaction now, so it didn't bother him as much as it had the first time.

Alexis pulled him to the front with the other prefects. "Before we make any decisions, I'm going to ask Harry to tell us what is going on and what he wants us to do."

At Harry's questioning eyebrow she looked at him and smiled, "Come on Harry, we're not stupid. Suddenly two entire houses disappear, Professors have been seen tightening wards, Ravenclaw's are suddenly fanatically loyal to you personally, and the Slytherin's are either looking scared or overly smug, both of which aren't exactly normal. Then you come to our common room for the first time ever and ring a doorbell."

Harry smiled slightly, acknowledging her comments and he turned to face the seated room. "You're right. I didn't come here for a social visit. I need your help." He actually found that it was getting easier to talk to large groups of people; he was beginning to be able to sense the emotions of a crowd and play on them. "We are pretty sure that Voldemort is going to attack the day after tomorrow," he said simply.

Loud murmurings followed his statement, as a feeling of panic so thick it was almost tangible swept through the room.

"Listen." Harry didn't shout, his just raised his voice a little, but they reacted to the command in his voice.

"What do you want from us?" the fearful question came from a second year student, who was clearly terrified.

"Throughout history, in times of crisis, Ravenclaw, Hufflepuff, and Gryffindor have stood together. This is one of those times. The Ravenclaws have already joined me; I need you to join me as well.

"I need two things. The first is the most important. I need medics, I need students I can trust to pull my people out of the fire, administer healing potions to them, patch them up if possible, or keep them out of the fight if they are too badly hurt.

"Don't think that I am insulting you by not asking you to fight; I need people with bravery and skill to dodge the curses and hexes, to keep clear heads in the danger and get those who have fallen out of the way. I need people who can provide support and comfort to the injured."

He paused his impassioned speech and looked around the room, wondering if he looked as young to them as they all did to him. "I can't think of any group of people, in the whole world, I would rather have as my support crew."

"Puffs, what do you say? Shall we help the Gryffindors and Ravenclaws?" Alexis shouted with a wide smile on her face.

The Hufflepuffs stood and cheered as one, and Harry got the distinct impression that they were grateful that they could help, without actually having to fight. His quiet "thank you" was drowned out by the sound.

Eventually Alexis pulled the crowd back into order. "You said two things Harry?"

Harry nodded and smiled.

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Sunday Morning

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The next day had Harry moving between the three groups he had set up.

He started on the Quidditch pitch watching Ron, with the other prefects help, organising the students in simple manoeuvres and the spells he had asked for.

“General Potter,” Ron shouted, seeing his friend for the first time. Harry winced at the title. “Here to inspect the troops?”

Harry was about to shake his head when he noticed something a little strange. The students were looking at him expectantly. They were lined up neatly, their eyes showing dedication and belief. Harry slowly realized it was belief in him.

He nodded to Ron and said “Sonorous,” using his wand to amplify their voices.

“Ron, show me what they can do.”

Ron grinned; his eyes were alight with pleasure. “Okay everyone; let’s show Harry what we’ve learnt so far. First and second years first, then everyone else.”

At his command, the students moved together while Harry looked on. They showed off some of the spells from his book, and some that Hermione had found for them.

At the end of the display, Harry spoke again.

“Ron, you’ve done a fantastic job,” his voice echoed through the crowd. “You have all done an excellent job. They won’t know what hit them.”

The chant started as all chants do: one voice in the midst. A second later, ten voices were chanting, ten seconds later everyone was chanting. “*Harry! Harry! Harry!*”

Harry looked at his feet a second, wondering where the hell all this army stuff was coming from. With a wave of his hand he silenced everyone, clenching his fist and thrust it into the sky. “Victory!”

The cheer that followed could be heard in the school.

Leaving Ron in charge again, Harry walked slowly to the library. “Harry,” a voice stopped him dead, “Can we have a word?”

An extremely nervous Tracey Davis stood before him; approximately twenty other members of the Slytherin house had accompanied the Slytherin Quidditch captain. Harry looked at her for a second and nodded shortly. He opened the door to an empty classroom behind him and motioned everyone in.

Silently, they entered and gathered in a semi-circle around him. If it weren’t for their palpable nervousness he would have been worried.

Tracey was obviously the elected spokesperson. “You know,” she started, almost whimsically, “Something strange happened last night in the library. A second year student made a disparaging comment about you. Seconds later, he was hit by fifteen different curses and hexes. What was really surprising was that there were no Gryffindors around. Ravenclaws, Hufflepuffs, and Slytherins only. Last time we checked you were a Gryffindor, and as such, the others should not really care that much. So, either you have a lot of friends several years below you, or something is going on.”

Harry shrugged silently.

“You know!” Blaise Zabini, one of the two Slytherin prefects in his year, interrupted, stating it firmly.

Harry neither confirmed nor denied the statement, waiting to find out what they wanted.

“Damn,” Blaise cursed, taking over from Tracey with ease. She had only been elected because she had played Quidditch against Harry a few times, and was known to him. “Look, Harry, not all Slytherin’s are puppets of You-Know-Who, having ambition does not make you evil.”

Harry nodded slowly, knowing it was unfair to tarnish everyone with the same brush.

“We had hoped to prove this by telling you what we have learnt, but you already know. We need your help Harry. We know that everyone is looking up to you, the incident in the classroom proved that. We don’t want to die in this attack; we don’t want our families to die if he wins.”

“Does Malfoy know any of this?” Harry asked, Draco Malfoy was the one person who was likely to be the betrayer, his hatred of non pure-blood wizards and non-magical folk was legendary.

He shook his head, “He’s walking around so full of himself it’s sickening. He’s bossing everyone around like he was Head Boy, and people are too scared to disobey.”

Visible relief appeared on Harry’s face as he looked at them. He scanned the people in front of him, clearly thinking hard. Apprehension appeared on the two senior student’s face, as they too realised the very personal command Harry was taking. It was they way he stood, his body language, but more than that, his eyes. They gleamed with responsibility, dedication, drive, and a determination to succeed against overwhelming odds.

“Okay, let’s make a deal.”

Everyone crowded in as Harry spoke. Silence followed as he finished.

"You're going to face HIM alone?" Blaise asked, shocked.

Harry nodded.

"You're insane."

"So I've been reliably informed by my close friends," he agreed.

"You've got yourself a deal, we'll pump Malfoy so full of himself he won't notice anything usual."

Harry smiled. "Just don't forget the other thing."

Blaise laughed. "Trust us, we won't."

Harry left them in the classroom and continued to the library. He smiled as he looked at the two heads bent over books. There was a pile to their left of books to go through, and to the right was a smaller pile of books they had already been through. A pitcher of drink was between them, as they sat in silence, with the rustling of pages being turned the only indication of movement. They both knew it was almost futile, but they were not willing to give up. Harry's plan relied on everyone helping, and the two girls were determined not to let him down.

"How is it going?" he asked softly, drawing their attention away from their research.

"Not good," Hermione replied with a sad little smile. Beside her, were several sheets of parchment with her neat handwriting, detailing quite a few spells that Harry might find useful for duelling Voldemort.

"Would you kill me if I asked you to look for other things as well?" he asked, with a smile on his face told them he knew how impossibly huge their tasks were.

"What?" Ginny asked, almost afraid of the answer.

"Oh, another one of those little impossibilities I like to throw at you: a way to deflect the three unforgivable curses."

Ginny snorted. "Oh, is that all?"

But Hermione was smiling, a little smile that she always used when she knew something no one else did.

"Mione?" he asked softly.

She pulled out her copy of "Hogwarts: A History" and opened it to a page near the beginning.

Harry read it slowly, then looked back at her for confirmation. She nodded.

Harry felt a great weight lift from his shoulders. He grabbed his best friend into a huge hug and spun her around wildly before kissing her firmly on the cheek.

"Should I be jealous?" Ginny asked, amused. Her eyes were sparkling as she looked at them; she had read the passage while they were celebrating.

"Not at all," Harry said, releasing his best friend and stalking towards her, a predatory gleam in his eye. Ginny shivered in delight as she watched. He put his hands around her waist and lifted her easily on the table. She hadn't realised how strong he was, and that realisation thrilled her like never before. With more confidence than before, he kept his hands on her hips, and moved between her legs. He swooped down and kissed her hard, his tongue instantly pressing against her teeth, begging entry.

A polite cough saved them from embarrassing themselves by going any further. Panting, Harry stopped the kiss and looked down at her, their foreheads touching. He smiled tenderly at her, his heart thumping. "Not at all," he repeated softly.

She kissed him again and then threw a glare at Hermione as she reminded them that they still had to find something to help him beat Voldemort.

"So, this mean you two are going out?" Hermione's voice was highly amused.

Harry winked at Ginny then said with a calm voice, "Oh no, of course not, I'm just using her for sex."

"What!" Hermione demanded, incensed.

"It's all right Hermione," Ginny interrupted with an innocent look, "Harry's quite good in bed, not the best I've had, but quite good all the same."

Hermione looked apoplectic, and then froze as Harry and Ginny started to laugh.

"Gotcha"

Hermione slowly started to laugh as her colour returned to normal. "I should hex you into next week, but we need you right now," she said to Harry, her grin completely spoiling the threat.

"Actually, you were right Hermione," Harry said and turned back to Ginny.

"Will you be my girlfriend?" he asked with a smile.

"Don't know," she replied in a little girl's voice, "I might get a better offer."

He laughed, and then kissed her hard again, sliding his tongue along hers, before pulling back and gently nibbling her lips.

"If I get more of those, I'll be anything you want," she said, half-serious as he finished.

"Girlfriend will do fine, for now."

"That's enough you two," Hermione interrupted again, before this could get out of hand. "Back to work."

They turned to face her together, "Yes, mum."

"Actually," Harry interrupted with a slight frown, "How are your Patronus spells?"

There was a chance that Voldemort would bring some Dementors with him, monsters that fed on human emotion. The only known spell to work against them was an overwhelming burst of positive energy in spirit form. Harry had mastered this spell the year before; his spirit was a Giant Stag, his Dad's Animagus shape.

"I've been practising," Hermione said. "I can produce one, so can Ron."

Harry smirked. "Practising producing positive emotions with him?"

Hermione blushed and refused to answer, burying her face in another book.

"Gin?" Harry asked his new girlfriend.

"Not good," she admitted. "Whenever I see one I just freeze up with the cold. I can't think of anything positive."

Harry used an illusion spell to create a Dementor in the library.

"Let's see what you've got."

"*Expecto Patronum*," she chanted, pointing her wand at the illusion. A small wisp of silver came out of her wand but it dissipated quickly.

Seeing that Hermione was not paying any attention to him, he pulled Ginny hard against him and kissed her thoroughly. His tongue pressed against her teeth, demanding entry again. She granted it, opening her mouth to him. He touched his tongue to hers and then retreated, gently drawing hers into his own mouth. She followed him eagerly, and then gasped as he sucked hard, nibbling her tongue.

A second later he stopped, leaving her standing there, her eyes glazed, and her heart pounding.

"Do the spell again, but think of that this time."

"*Expecto Patronum*," she yelled, the warmth of his hands and his embrace still firmly in her head. This time her Patronus appeared, glowing bright silver. It ran at the illusion and stabbed it with its horn.

"Wow," Harry gasped, an amazed look on his face. "A unicorn."

Even Hermione was impressed, although she quickly turned back to her books as Harry gave Ginny a very private congratulation.

Breathing a little heavily, they reluctantly sat down. "Practising producing positive emotions, Harry?" Hermione asked teasingly, throwing his own words back at him.

He ignored her and grabbed a book, returning to the research.

Harry sighed and turned the page. He hadn't moved in hours and the proximity to Ginny was killing him. What he really wanted to do was throw the book into the fireplace, throw Ginny in front of the fireplace, throw *himself* on top of her and see if he could make her forget her name by snogging the life out of her. His watch told him it was eleven pm and he was about to suggest they go to bed when he turned the page. The first side he had been reading showed him a spell that George and Fred would love: how to turn inanimate objects into explosive objects.

He read the spell description on the next page and froze. A wild idea sprang in his head, based on previous encounters with Voldemort.

"Ginny, Hermione," he said slowly, tearing the page out and destroying it in the fire behind him. "I'm going to ask you to trust me."

They looked at him, sudden fear showing in their eyes. "I think I found what we've been looking for."

"What is the spell?" they asked him in unison.

He shook his head. "It's only going to work if I have complete surprise."

Neither of their expressions showed any real trust in him.

He looked at them both, openly and then focused on Ginny. "I am keeping my promise to do everything in my power to live through this, Gin."

She nodded slowly, "Okay, I trust you."

Harry suddenly felt guilty as he looked at their exhausted faces. "Herm, Gin, I can't thank you enough for what you have done," he said simply, trying to boost their spirits and morale.

Hermione looked up as Harry claimed to have found the spell they needed, and she really wanted to find out what it was. If Harry wasn't sharing, it probably wasn't good. At all. She listened as he reassured Ginny that he would do what he could to stay alive.

It was at that moment that Hermione saw what the others already had. It was a revelation as she looked at the boy who had been her friend for so many years. The boy who was almost a man. His determination, leadership, people skills, presence, and all the things she had seen him use at one time or another seemed to have coalesced into the person she saw before him.

"I asked Ron earlier what it was like having so many people following him. He said that he didn't have anyone following him; he was just the general, that you were the king. That they trusted him and would obey his commands, but that it was you they followed, you they were willing to fight and maybe even die for.

"I asked him why, why would so many children do this? He said that they had faith in you, that they knew you would do anything to keep Voldemort from winning, that you were offering them a chance to keep themselves alive, to keep everything they loved alive and that you were willing to be the figurehead, to take the responsibility when no one else would.

"Everyone I talked to said they were proud to be a part of Harry's army. I think I understand why now."

"I'm not a king, nor a general," Harry said, running his fingers through his hair. "This whole army thing started because Colin got too excited."

"Is that what you really think, Harry?" Ron's voice echoed against the walls of the library as he entered.

Harry looked at him with a welcoming smile. "How is everyone doing?" he asked, completely ignoring Ron's question.

Ron laughed, while Hermione and Ginny both grinned. "You just proved our point. You're in charge, mate. It may not be a real army, but you have people out there who know that you care more about their safety than your own. That you are going to get them through this better than anyone else. You've come up with this plan, you've organised them, forged alliances with other houses, found backup and support, healing potions. You've got the Hufflepuffs and Ravenclaws on our side."

"And a few Slytherins," Harry interrupted absently.

"And a few Slytherins," Ron echoed, sharing a worried glance with Hermione and his sister.

"They are running distractions on Draco for me, he's the betrayer." Harry's explanation was met with acceptance and a complete lack of surprise.

"Don't you see Harry? You've done what no one else in the history of Hogwarts has done before, not since the school was founded have the four houses worked together like this. Call it what you like, an army, a posse, anything, it doesn't matter. What matters is that a lot of people are relying on you," Hermione said passionately.

"I'm scared," Harry admitted softly, "scared of getting them all killed."

"Harry," Ginny entered the conversation, moving next to him and hugging him. "Just answer me two questions."

He nodded, and inhaled slowly

Hermione hid a smile as she watched Ron watch them. She could see a short silent war being fought inside him, and had faith that he'd come to the right answer. It wasn't as if he could accuse Harry of bringing her into more danger. Voldemort was coming tomorrow regardless. It came down to whether or not he trusted Harry. And if Ron looked at Ginny closely, and saw the smile of happiness on her face, she was pretty sure that he'd do the right thing.

"What would happen if you hadn't done anything?" Ginny asked, repeating her earlier question, completely unaware of her brother's realization that she was with Harry now.

"Chaos," was Harry's quiet reply.

"Would you trust any other student to organise the defence?"

"No," Harry replied softly. "It's my job. I've known since Dumbledore told me about the prophecy, that it is either me or Voldemort."

"They all feel the same way, just do your best, and you won't let them down."

"I trust you Harry, with my life and my sister. But if you hurt her, I will have to kill you." Ron said softly.

Harry laughed softly and nodded, tightening his arms around Ginny, who was protesting at the display of sibling protectiveness. "Thanks, Ron."

Hermione just smiled at him, as she always did, when he met her eyes. He nodded in understanding.

She watched Harry take a deep breath.

"Hermione, can you spend some time with Ron and everyone before breakfast tomorrow. I know it's difficult, but any advantage we can have it worth while."

Hermione and Ron nodded together.

"Go to sleep, all of you." Harry said firmly, as he looked at his watch. "I've got to visit the Hufflepuffs then I'll go to sleep as well."

"Do you...want...me to come with you?" Gin asked, her face flushing/

Ron's face took on an almost frightened look and he grabbed Hermione's hand and pulled her out of the library as fast as he could.

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Ginny held her breath as she looked up at her new boyfriend. She wasn't sure why she had offered, or even if she was ready to, but it had seemed the right thing to do.

Harry shook his head slowly.

She felt a wave of disappointment wash through her, before an equally powerful sense of relief.

"I want you," Harry said firmly. "But not like this."

"It may be our only chance," she whispered, pressing her face against his chest.

"Oh Ginny," Harry breathed hugging her tightly. "I don't believe that, not now."

She looked up and searched his face, trying to find some doubt, and was reassured when she found none.

"Besides," he said, trying to lighten the atmosphere. "I've got the rest of my life to look forward to finding out just how many freckles you have, and where they all are."

She laughed softly. She'd had a crush on Harry, a crush than had grown into love when he had rescued her from Voldemort. She had had many fantasies about him, fantasies that had grown more risqué the older she was. She'd also watched each of her brothers go through puberty, and had a pretty strong idea of what made a teenage boy tick.

She leant up into his ear and whispered a fantasy to him. Harry's response didn't disappoint her.

"Witch," he moaned softly, his mind filled with the thoughts she had deliberately put there.

She grinned and nodded. "But you love me anyway."

"I do," he admitted, then said the words for the first time. "I love you."

Ginny's heart jumped, in the past two days every dream she had enjoyed, had come true, and this was the final thing she had ever wanted.

"I love you," she whispered in return.

Reluctantly he released her. "Go Gin, before I change my mind and we see how comfortable this table is."

She nodded and left his embrace, walking to the door. A naughty smile appeared on her face. "We could always use a cushioning charm," she teased.

His only response was to throw a pillow at her.

Ginny walked along the corridor towards the common room, slightly relieved that Harry had turned her down; despite her forward behaviour she was aware that she was not really ready for a sexual relationship. If he had said yes, she wouldn't have changed her mind, but would have been extremely nervous about it. It was almost a test of him, one he had passed with flying colours.

With Voldemort out of her mind, she realised she should really talk with Hermione about some charms; the last thing they needed was for her to get pregnant. She may not be ready right now, but it was definitely better to be prepared, just in case.

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Harry waited in the library for a few more minutes; the second time he had been forced to wait for his blood pressure to equalise after Ginny had left the room. He regretted turning her down, even though he knew he was right.

He eventually left the office and walked along the corridors, the ghosts that looked after Hogwarts were nowhere to be seen, and unusually, nor was Argus Filch, the grumpy caretaker, which was why Harry didn't have his Invisibility Cloak.

"Potter," a stern voice interrupted his musings. "My office, please."

Harry followed Professor McGonagall to her office; she was the head of Gryffindor house and had always been kind to him.

Mr Potter," she started gently as she settled behind her desk. "Are you sure you know what you are doing?"

The fact that she seemed to know didn't surprise him, it was almost expected.

"Honestly? No," he admitted, "but no one else has anything better, and they seem to trust me."

His professor picked up something on her desk, "This broach belonged to Godric Gryffindor, one of the four founders of this school. I think it fitting that you have it tomorrow."

Harry looked surprised, and took the broach, carefully putting it in his pocket.

"Good luck tomorrow Harry. Do us proud."

Harry nodded and flashed a small smile.

He paused on the way out, turning back to her. "There is one thing I could do with."

A minute later he left, closing the door softly behind him. He didn't hear her say to herself, "I hope your predictions are wrong, Harry, I really do."

Continuing his journey, he entered the empty Gryffindor common room and walked over to a small door to one side. Inside it, he found George and Fred still at work.

"You two need to stop for the night," he said to the twins. They looked up at him, fatigue evident in their faces.

"You and our little sister?" Fred asked, ignoring his advice for now.

Harry blushed faintly. "Yes."

"I guess she's not so little any more," George said sadly, a faint frown on his head.

"Our little Ginny, all grown up," Fred wiped an imaginary tear from his face.

"You do realise that if you hurt her, we will make your life living hell for the rest of our lives?"

Harry gulped; he had picked the twins for this job because of their Machiavellian minds and the ability to get the things that others thought impossible done. "All I can promise is that I will never deliberately hurt her."

Fred and George looked at each other, and then turned back to him, "So, what's our Supreme Commander doing here at this time of night anyway?" Fred asked.

"Sending you two clowns to bed," Harry joked with a grin. "You're no good to me tomorrow if you are exhausted."

They nodded as one, closing their case. "We'll be ready for them tomorrow, Harry; it's gonna be a day they will never forget."

Fred nudged George softly; he nodded in return and turned back to face Harry. "We're not doubting your divination skills, but are you sure he's coming tomorrow?"

Harry slid his hand up to his face, pulling his unruly black hair out of the way and showing them his scar, the legacy of his first encounter with Voldemort. The normally pale scar was a vivid red. The twin red-haired Weasleys could almost see it pulse.

"We'll spread the word, Harry, a few others had doubts too." Harry nodded gratefully.

Fred and George left him, tiredly going to bed.

Wearily, Harry trudged along the corridors towards the Hufflepuff dormitory. As he walked along the pictures to the left of him reacted, some saluted him, and others look on approvingly, all of them showed support.

A ghost shot through the floor in front of him, causing him to stop suddenly.

"Nick?" he asked, as the nearly headless ghost smiled awkwardly at him.

"Ahh, Harry," The Gryffindor ghost said, "I was wondering if we could have a quiet word."

Flickers of amusement travelled over Harry's face; he had been wondering who would interrupt him this time. He hadn't thought about the ghosts.

With Harry following him, Nick took him along a corridor Harry had never travelled down before, at the end, a long unused door squeaked open and Harry entered through it.

The room he found himself in was unlike any other he had seen before. Hundreds of pictures decorated the walls, each one showing a different part of the Castle. He realized that this was how the ghosts travelled, through the pictures to get to a different part. He was relieved to note that none of the pictures appeared to go to any of the bedrooms or bathrooms.

In front of him, every ghost he had even seen, and quite few he hadn't were sitting on chairs or stood in small groups.

Harry, my boy, good to see you," the booming voice of the Bloody Baron, the Slytherin house ghost interrupted the low chatter.

Harry bowed politely, a small gesture that won him even more respect. The dead, once the funeral was done with, rarely had any one pay them respect or politeness. It was as if the living didn't think they were worth it.

"What can I do for you?" the unruly haired wizard asked with a smile.

"Well," the Baron said, deciding to go right for it, "we know what is happening, what you have been doing, and we want to help."

That took Harry by surprise. "We live here too," the Baron said, noting the surprise on the boy's face. "We don't want You-Know-Who in charge either."

An hour later, it was a very tired Harry who eventually arrived at the Hufflepuff common room entrance. One of the privileges of command was that he now knew the password to each of the four houses. The statue guarding the entrance smiled a welcome at him as it swung open.

Inside, despite the fact it was now three am, the room was a hive of activity. Alexis smiled at him as he entered.

"We're working shifts," she explained when he queried them working all night, "we will be done on time."

"I never had any doubts, Alex," he said with a warm smile. "Can you bring everything over for eight am tomorrow; we'll have a final meeting before breakfast."

She nodded, and then walked off after a second year student called her over.

Harry stood back and watched the industrious Hufflepuffs for a few minutes, then left quietly, not wanting to disturb them.

If he had listened at the door, he would have heard excited whispers about him, as the younger students recounted stories they had heard about him, each story greater than the last, leaving one impression on their young minds, Harry was their leader.

Realizing it was nearly dawn; Harry grabbed his broom and flew up to the roof of the Gryffindor Tower. Rolling up his Invisibility Cloak, he used it as a pillow, and slowly fell asleep, the dull ache in his scar giving way to his body's need for sleep.

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## Monday Morning

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As Harry followed the same path Hermione had minutes before, a small object flew at him. Reflexives honed by years of playing Quidditch allowed him to easily catch the object.

It was a small ball with some paper wrapped around it. Opening it, he read the simple message.

*"H,  
During the midday meal.  
B."*

Harry smiled and quickened his pace. It left him with four hours; he hoped it was enough.

The Gryffindor common room was packed with people. The three houses were talking quietly, and intermingling. Low laughter was heard from different places around the room as people dealt with the fear any way they could.

At the front stood Ron and Hermione holding hands, a fact that made Harry smile; obviously the upcoming fight had not been the only thing on their minds. They both looked a little tired, as they had been up for hours with the Ravenclaws and Gryffindors, trying to get them ready for today.

Any further prevarication on the part of the Boy-Who-Lived was instantly rendered mute as he was noticed. An eager silence swept through the room and a path formed, allowing him to move to the front without hindrance.

Once there, he found that he didn't have to stand on a chair to be seen, someone had created a small podium for him.

"In a normal world, we would all be getting ready for breakfast on our second to last day of the school year. We would be wishing today's lessons would just get out the way so we could join our families. For some of us, it would be our second to last day ever at Hogwarts, and we would be nervous about leaving the safety and sanctity of the school.

"This isn't a normal world. We are students at the finest academy of wizards in the world. Today, at the midday meal, an enemy is going to attack. This enemy wants us dead because we pose a threat to him. He wants control, total control, over both Muggle and Magical worlds. He wants people serving him as slaves. Slaves for him and the people that support him. If he succeeds, he will bring a new dark age to the world, as civilisation collapses and power is the only currency.

"We can not let him win. We will not let him win. He may be the most powerful wizard off all time, but his Death Eaters are not. They rely on fear to succeed, fear of their ruthlessness and their Death Mark.

"All I need you to concentrate on is the Death Eaters, these cowards who hide behind masks to fulfil their sick fantasies. They are expecting us to freeze and panic when they appear. They will be arrogant and careless." A wolfish smile appeared on his face, "they will not have a clue what hit

them.

“And when the fight is over and the dust has cleared, when Voldemort is defeated and the Death Eaters destroyed, when we have won and proved once and for all that Hogwarts is the best in the world, I promise you a party you will never forget.”

In one voice, every teen that had been on the Quidditch pitch the day before took up their chant again. A second later, every other voice joined in, an almost deafening cacophony of sound, only the silence charms on the walls prevented the rest of the school from hearing. Harry stood motionless at the front, allowing them to shout out his name, to lose some of their fear and vulnerability as they focused on their talisman.

As he had the day before, he silenced them with a wave of his hand. Again, he thrust his hand high in the air and yelled, “Victory!”

The cheer that followed almost knocked Harry backwards as the wall of sound washed over him.

He let the cheer naturally die, and then got back to business.

“Fred, George,” he called. The twins made their way to the front. Harry pulled out the piece of paper he had received from Professor McGonagall the night before. He handed it to them, “I’m awfully sorry, but I’m going to have to give you two detentions, the prank you played crossed the line.”

Shocked looks appeared on the twin’s faces, they couldn’t remember any prank that serious.

“You are going to have to spend the morning cleaning the floor in the Great Hall.” Harry’s face suddenly broke into a wide grin, “Of course, if you were to spend that time preparing some party pieces for our guests later today, I don’t think anyone would mind.”

They laughed, realising they had been had. “We owe you for this, Potter,” George said, laughing.

Harry shrugged, unconcerned, “It’s the only way I could think off to get you out of class this morning.”

They nodded, and then saluted him, grins evident on their faces.

“Ron?” Harry asked, “I’ve got an extra resource for you to use, the ghosts have decided to join us, they’ll help with distractions.”

Ron nodded thoughtfully, his tacticians mind already pulling together scenarios.

“Now,” Harry said with a smile, “you may be wondering what these packages are.” He indicated the parcels the Hufflepuff’s had brought with them. He smiled eagerly as he opened one, to the gasps of the others.

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At the end of the meeting, he called Ron back to run over the final plan.

“Crikey, Harry,” Ron said as he watched the packed common room empty, “Did you really believe that speech you gave?”

“It doesn’t matter if I believe it, Ron, it only matters that they do. They are the ones that have to overcome their fear.”

“What about you?”

Harry laughed, “Me? I’m terrified.”

Ron joined him as they laughed - the only two people left in the large room.

“So, what else do you have up your sleeve?” Ron asked.

Harry’s smile suddenly bore a remarkable resemblance to one that would normally be found upon the faces of George and Fred.

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The lunchtime meal was unnaturally quiet: everyone was tense. Except for the Slytherin table, some of them were openly gloating. Draco Malfoy looked exceptionally smug as he looked at Harry with pure hostility. As Harry looked back, the blond haired Slytherin slowly moved his finger across his throat, and then pointed directly at Harry. Harry just rolled his eyes and turned away.

Then, Apparating in as one, the Death Eaters appeared with Voldemort in the centre. Moving together, half of the Death Eaters pointed their wands at the teachers’ table and yelled, “Frigid Holdus.”

With them were eight Dementors. Their icy influence brought feelings of mortality and fear to everyone present.

Everyone turned to the teachers and gasped, almost as one. The entire teaching staff at Hogwarts was frozen in place, some of them with food paused halfway to their mouths.

A second group of Death Eaters conjured a Dark Mark, which rose to the ceiling and hung there, its palpable evilness sending more chills through the watching students.

With great reluctance from some of them, the Slytherin house left their table and joined the Dark Lords forces. Draco stood at the front with a proud sneer on his face.

Now that it was actually happening, Harry found his nerves vanishing. Either way this was going to end now.

He stood and walked towards the large group, Harry hadn't realised that there were over two hundred death eaters, and the number caused him some concern.

Behind him, some students were panicking, begging for mercy, and knocking things over as they struggled to get away. Harry wasn't worried, this was part of Ron's plan to clear the floor and provide barricades for the Hufflepuffs to work from.

"What do you want, Lucius?" Harry shouted, looking for Draco's father, starting the first part of his plan. As the Death Eaters were all wearing masks, Harry couldn't tell who was who, but with Draco joining them, he was pretty certain that he would be near Voldemort.

"Address your comments to me, boy," the hissing voice of the Voldemort demanded.

"Why?" Harry asked. "Everyone knows you're just a figurehead, Lucius is where the real power is held. Draco's been telling us that for years."

An expression of fear and confusion appeared on Draco's face. Behind him, Harry felt the presence of Hermione and Ginny backing him up, with George and Fred on either side of them.

*Time to turn this up a little* Harry thought.

"Draco's spent the last five years telling us that he hates Mudbloods. That only pure blood wizards deserve to live. Lucius has said the same, and as we all know that you're a Mudblood, Tommy boy."

Gasps echoed around the room, from the Death Eaters as well as the school members, at both Harry's revelation and his use of a nickname for the red-eyed Dark Lord.

"It's obvious that Lucius would never serve under you, which means you're nothing but a puppet, a figurehead to allow Malfoy to use his power and influence to further his goals of becoming supreme ruler."

A low growl emanated from the incensed Dark Wizard as Harry continued, waiting for Ron to join them to signify that everything was ready.

"I'm sure you are a very powerful wizard in your own right, Tom, but considering I've already beaten you three times and I'm only sixteen, you're hardly a challenge. Now be quiet and let me talk to your leader."

"I repeat, Lucius, What do you want."

The full reply that Draco's father was going to give was never heard. He made the mistake of starting his sentence with a simple "I."

That was enough for the Dark Lord; he turned to his Death Eater. "So you think you are in charge, do you?" he hissed. "Planning on waiting for me to fail so you could take over?"

Voldemort seemed to see something that confirmed Harry's accusations. "So you think you are in charge, do you?" he hissed. "Planning on waiting for me to fail so you could take over? *Crucio!*"

Lucius collapsed to the floor, the curse causing every nerve in his body to send pain signals to the brain. If this happened naturally, the nerves would burn out quickly, dulling the pain. This was not natural, the magic kept the nerves alive and transmitting. Voldemort decided to end this quickly, as a display of his ruthlessness both to any other Death Eater planning on betraying him and to the obviously terrified students before him.

"Avada Kedavra," he chanted, sending the killing curse directly to Lucius, who died instantly.

"Well," Harry whispered so that only the others could hear him, "that went better than expected."

Draco Malfoy was still standing at the front, fear of his dark master meant he could not do anything but glare. He turned back to face Harry, hate written over his face, clearly blaming the green-eyed wizard for his father's death.

"How did you get in? There are anti-Apparating wards all over Hogwarts" Harry asked, now directing his questions straight to Voldemort.

Dark red eyes focused directly on him, "Lucius arranged for his son to make a small hole in them, all it took was a tiny gap from the inside so I could widen it." The Dark Lord looked around the Great Hall; the students cowered from him, shivering in fear. "Pathetic," was his sneering judgement. "Is this the best you can do? You've stood in my way for too long, Potter, it's time you died, just like your parents."

Harry turned his back on Voldemort for a second, facing the students. "Trust me," he whispered, emphasising it so that others could lip-read.

He turned back and faced the evil Lord again, taking a few steps forward so he was on his own.

Without waiting for any last witticism from the boy, Voldemort used the same curse he had on Lucius; "*Crucio.*"

The spell licked out as fast as light and hit Harry square in his chest. Cries of 'No' came from the students.

Only Harry didn't fall to the ground, he just shot a faint smile back at Voldemort. "Pathetic." The contempt in the boy wizard's voice matched Voldemort's from earlier.

A shocked gasp shot through the room.

Avada Kedavra," Voldemort shouted, putting all his force behind the curse, determined to end Harry Potter's life once and for all.

The green lightning shot out of his wand, and again hit Harry square in the chest.

Harry brought up his hand to his face and yawned theatrically, "Quite finished, Tom? Or would you like to try the other one as well."

"That's not possible," Voldemort said, almost spitting in his fury.

"Tom, Tom, Tom," Harry said with a smile, "You were a student here once, surely you've read 'Hogwarts: A History?'" He didn't wait for a reply. "When the school was founded the four greatest magicians of their time had a meeting in this hall. They decided together that this place would be the safest place for any student in the world. They joined together and cast the spell that would protect any serving student from being killed by powerful magic. That spell still functions today. Your unforgivable curses won't work on anyone here."

Behind his hood, Voldemort smiled, this was going to be more fun than he expected. "There is more than one way to skin a student," he announced, the temperature in his voice near freezing. "My Death Eaters don't need those spells to kill you; they have thousands of ways to do it. You're outnumbered, Potter."

"Ahh yes, about that," Harry interrupted. "Draco's behaviour was enough to let us know that something was going on, and we took a few precautions."

On cue, Ron made a gesture with his hand. Behind him, the robed pupils from Gryffindor and Ravenclaw moved behind Harry and the others, forming up in a loose square. The numbers were suddenly a lot more even.

Laughter came from the Dark Lord and some of his Death Eaters. "How very brave," he mocked.

His laughter stopped as Ron shouted, "Remove Robes!"

As one, Harry's army dropped their wizard robes and stood up proudly, the square they were standing suddenly formed into an exact shape.

The students glared at the Death Eaters, wearing the uniforms the Hufflepuffs had created for them with pride. Grey Muggle-style jump suits with black belts, and matching heavy black boots. On the left shoulder was a uniform patch. A dark blue circlet surrounded a red lightning strike identical to Harry's scar. Wand pouches hung from their belts, while on their chest was a small picture of Hogwarts.

"Draw wands!"

In unison, the students drew their wands, pointing them at the Death Eaters.

The Death Eaters turned to each other, shifting nervously on their feet. They pointed their own wands back, realising this was not going to be as easy as they had thought.

"Ron," Harry's voice carried over the entire hall.

"Yes, Harry?"

"On my move, Cry Havoc, and let slip the dogs of war."

Harry pulled four metal balls from his pocket.

"Ready, Tom?" he asked politely. A growl was his only response.

Harry threw the balls into the air and spun, pulling his wand out. The spell he was going to use was one of the many that Hermione had researched for him. As he turned back to face the Death Eaters, he shouted "Recellor" putting as much of his magic as he could into it. The steel balls went from a standing start to travelling at 300ft a second in a quarter of an inch. Four distinct cracks were heard as they broke the sound barrier. Four of the death eaters never heard the sound; the balls hit them at full speed, penetrating their soft flesh, killing them within an instant.

At the same time Ron shouted, "First years, Second years, NOW!."

A simultaneous shout of "*Attracto Umarmo*," suddenly pulled the Death Eater masks into a huge pile at the far end of the hall.

Colin immediately swung into action. With the Death Eaters unmasked, he dashed across the hall, taking as many pictures as he could, making sure that every follower of the Dark Lord could be identified after the battles. As he finished, he grabbed the Portkey Ron had given him and vanished.

Everyone could now see that the Death Eaters were worried, they were used to people cowering in fear every time they came near. They were used to panicky attempts against them, while they had safety in number and anonymity. This was far from their experience. An organised defence who showed no fear and now knew who they were.

"What the hell are you waiting for?" Voldemort shouted. "Kill them all!"

The Death Eaters were still powerful magicians and they responded eagerly.

"Fred! George!" Harry shouted. "Give them hell!"

The Dementors started to move forwards, as well, their hands out

The twins didn't hesitate. "Accio," they shouted together, and the fight began in earnest.

Large balls appeared in the Death Eater ranks. Coded to be colour-sensitive for the colour black, they bounced off of everyone they could. Anyone attempting to grab one of the balls soon regretted their action: arms were torn off as the balls exploded within their grasp.

Together, Harry, Ginny, and Hermione shouted "Expecto Patronum."

Harry's stag was joined by Ginny's unicorn and Hermione's bear. The three animals charged the Dementors almost dancing with glee at being freed to help. Harry's Patronus used his great antlers to destroy one Dementor while trampling another to the ground. Taking its inspiration from its partner, Ginny's unicorn did the same. A minute later and everyone breathed a sigh of relief as Hermione's Bear tore the last Dementor to bits.

The floor the Death Eaters were standing on suddenly started to change - some of it became lava hot while other parts arctic cold.

And that was only the start of the things the twins had planned.

At Ron's shout of attack, the student moved into small groups and started throwing as many curses as they could at the Death Eaters. The air was filled with the sounds of spells being cast, counters being thrown, and shields being erected. The younger members, their tasks done retreated to behind the tables and cast whatever spells they could to help. They soon found the practical reason for Harry's uniforms, they could see at a glance who was what.

Harry nodded at Blaise.

"Now," Blaise shouted. The twenty original Slytherin students who had approached Harry, as well as approximately thirty more dropped their robes, revealing them in Harry's uniform. As one they shouted "Stupefy," taking out ninety percent of the remaining Slytherin students, who slumped to the floor unconscious. They ran across the room and joined the other side.

In the centre of the room, Voldemort and Harry had started to duel. Harry was almost instantly on the defence; the Dark Lord's power, and experience allowing him to attack almost endlessly.

Next to him, Ginny and Hermione did their best to keep everyone away from the two duelling wizards, guarding Harry's back as they threw spells at anyone who came close.

Ron stood to one side, desperately wanting to join in the fighting, but knowing he was needed to keep a level head and direct the fighting.

So much concentrated magic was being used that it could almost be felt as its own physical entity. The ground shuddered as giant plants were created to bind their victims, earthquakes were used to unseat opponents, and charms to befuddle the recipient were thrown with a reckless disregard for who they affected.

Each student had at least four years of Defence Against the Dark Arts classes and they used them to their full capacity. They were also using the spells taught that morning by the most brilliant Witch ever seen at Hogwarts.

Every time a student fell, a team of Hufflepuffs was on hand to pull them out. Two Hufflepuff prefects sprint across the room, dodging curses left and right to get to a Ravenclaw who had been hit by a nausea spell, which had her vomiting painfully before finally knocking her out. They grabbed her and pulled her to safety. They did this time and time again as the students started to fall.

Some of the rescued students came back out to fight. Others stayed behind, some were forced to stay back, their injuries too much for the healing potions to handle, and despite their fervent desire to get back into the fight, they were just too badly injured.

"Now!" Ron's voice boomed across the battlefield. A second later the ghosts of Hogwarts erupted into the great hall, distracting the Death Eaters who turned to face the new threats, before they realised that the ghosts were essentially harmless, except for Peeves, the poltergeist. Given free reign to cause as much havoc as he could, the ghost threw anything and everything he could find at the Death Eaters.

Some of the more creative ghosts used their injuries to catch the eye of their chosen victims. The distracted Death Eaters were quickly hit and taken out of the fights by the students, who had the real teeth for battle.

But slowly, the Death Eaters were winning; despite the student's utmost efforts the experience and power of the Dark Lord army was too much.

Without Fred and George's effort it might have already been over, but their skill had been used to the full as the Death Eaters kept walking into literal death traps as part of the floor would vanish under them, or they would find themselves transformed into slugs and other harmless creatures.

The door to the great hall opened again, and a large dog entered at a run. He changed as he moved revealing himself to be Sirius Black, Harry's godfather. Some of the students recognised him as the escaped prisoner, so they swung their wands towards the new threat.

"He's on our side," Ron yelled. "Don't attack him!"

Trusting Ron, the ones who were facing Sirius turned back to the fight. One of the Death Eaters noticed him and went pale. "Pettigrew," Sirius snarled, seeing the betrayer of Harry's parents. He drew his wand and launched an attack at him.

Peter Pettigrew, like the coward he was, did the first thing he could think of; he turned himself into his fitting Animagus animal, a rat, and ran out the door. He was followed a second later by Sirius, who had changed back into a dog.

Hermione was the first to fall; Draco got her in the back with a *Stupefy*, knocking her out. Ron yelled in outrage and had to be held back as he started to charge. A couple of Hufflepuffs managed to pull her out of danger while Ron swore vengeance on Draco, his use of profanities was recorded with respect by some of the younger students, who hadn't heard some of his more imaginative invectives before. He was starting to go hoarse through all his shouting as he directed the battle against the enemy, his skills being utilised to the full keeping everyone alive.

Realising she was now on her own, Ginny confronted Draco. In quick succession she cast several spells at him, trying to take him out. She had trained with the others that morning, and some of the newer spells took Draco by surprise. She knew that Harry was counting on her to protect his back, and there was no way in hell that the greasy piece of slime in front of her was going to touch her love - especially not now that he was openly admitting just how much she meant to him.

"Protecting your honey?" Draco sneered. "Unrequited love - how sickening."

Ginny grinned as she dodged his attacks. "Protecting my boyfriend actually."

They were closer now as they threw more magic at each other.

"Putting out eh? I guess Potter's just getting what he wants from you. He must like cheap whores."

Ginny growled. Growing up with six brothers had taught her a thing or two. Foregoing magic Ginny took two steps forward and kicked him as hard as she could between the legs.

Draco dropped his wand as both of his hands flew to his crotch. His face went bright red as he fell to the floor, gasping and moaning. Ginny looked down on him with a degree of satisfaction; she grabbed his wand, snapping it in two, leaving it completely useless. That done, she went back to protecting Harry.

"Remind me not to question her anymore about her relationship with Harry," Fred remarked to George as the two of them duelled with four Death Eaters.

"Agreed," Fred replied. With normal opponents, the Death Eaters would have been victorious in a second, but the two brothers were not normal opponents. They had a bewildering array of spells designed to put their opponents off. There had originally been eight against two, but two of the Death Eaters were unconscious and another pair were currently suffering from an Elephantiasis spell, their limbs weighing more than the rest of their bodies.

A second later the odds were evened as a combined spell hit two Death Eaters, who immediately stopped the attack, bowed to each other and started to tango gracefully around the hall.

And in the centre, the duel continued between Harry and Voldemort. Harry's quickness was starting to flag as he was getting tired. The Dark Lord's attacks getting closer and closer, but Voldemort was tiring as well, and was growing frustrated as he couldn't hit Harry. Harry was getting the occasional hit in himself as he dodged, but that just served to enrage his opponent.

Voldemort realised that Harry was the talisman, which they would continue to fight as long as he would. So he did the only thing that he was confident off; with a loud roar, Voldemort stepped back from Harry and cast a spell on himself; his Animagus spell. A millisecond later he started to grow.

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The individual battles around the Great Hall stopped as they watched Voldemort change. Shudders of fear went through the defenders as the Dark Lord continued to grow and grow.

Silence filled the room, as his transformation was complete. Huge red-slatted eyes peered at the Great Hall from a head the size of a small car. A giant python with red and black stripes, bigger than the Basilisk Harry had fought in his second year, filled one corner of the room. The hissing sound it made was angry.

A flick of its tail later and Harry and Ginny flew backwards against a wall, falling to the floor as they impacted.

"Everyone hit the snake, stupefy it!" Ron yelled.

From behind the barricades and on the floor, every one of the students turned their wands to the snake and hit it with a stupefying charm. A massive amount of energy went into it, but Voldemort simply reared back and absorbed it.

Again, Ron's voice was heard above the others, but this time it wasn't as inspiring. "Shit!"

Voldemort suddenly whipped down, having spotted an easy target on the floor. A sickening snap echoed throughout the hall as Draco Malfoy was bitten cleanly in twain. A second later, he was completely gone, as Voldemort bit down again and swallowed the boy.

That was the inspiration the Death Eaters needed, and they returned to the fight, convinced of their victory now.

Harry slowly got back to his feet; his eyes met Ron's across the battlefield. Ron started shaking his head, suddenly realising what Harry was planning. Next to him, Ginny struggled to her feet, unsteadily.

*If I'm gonna do this*, he thought to himself, *I'm at least going to look cool doing it*. He shrugged his own robes off, leaving him in his own uniform - similar to the others but with a Phoenix on the opposite arm. He turned to his girlfriend and threw her a soft smile, "I love you, always."

Before she could help, he started running directly at Voldemort. He jumped over a fallen Death Eater then dropped to his knees, sliding under an Inverticus spell. The recipient, a fifth year Ravenclaw, suddenly found himself upside down. Keeping his momentum he jumped back to his feet before diving over another spell, entering a forward roll and sliding to a stop in front of the giant snake.

He grabbed Godric Gryffindor's broach and threw it in the air, using the same spell he had earlier.

"Recellor!" The heavy broach flew towards the snake's belly. The broach was too heavy and travelling too fast to be stopped by mere scales and muscle. As it hit Voldemort it deformed, its tip expanding. Hydrostatic shockwaves moved through the snake, pushing internal organs to one side as Voldemort's snakelike body tried to absorb the immense kinetic energy. The broach didn't stop, exiting through the snake's back with an explosion of blood and fibre.

The sound of the broach breaking through the sound barrier attracted everyone's attention.

Voldemort roared in agonised pain and fixed its eyes on Harry. He pounced. Through the smoke Harry met Ginny's eyes for a second and he winked. Then he was gone, swallowed whole. A second later, Fred and George appeared next to Ginny, supporting her. They were determined to get her out safe, regardless of the cost.

A groan went through Harry's troops as they realised they had lost.

A smile appeared on each of the Death Eaters' face as they realised they had won.

Then everything changed. Afterwards Ron would swear that he heard Harry shout, but no one else did. What everyone *did* see was Voldemort suddenly exploding. A chain reaction started near his head and continued down the giant snake's body. Everyone who could hit the ground did, as giant chunks of slightly cooked snake filled the air.

The Death Eaters collapsed as one; their Dark Mark, the symbol of their power was designed to tie them to Voldemort for life. They didn't realise it meant following him into death as well. Without warning, the Dark Mark had stopped the heart of every loyal Death Eater.

Smoke obscured the area where Voldemort had exploded. Ginny stood, staring at the spot, unable to mentally process what was happening.

With the Death Eaters gone, the teachers who had been struggling were suddenly freed. Dumbledore stood, power radiating in front of him as he surveyed the wreckage. "*Acci-aro*," he yelled, waving his hand. Everyone first turned to him, then the smoke as it suddenly vanished, leaving a smoking Harry kneeling – one of his legs at a strange angle – on his own in the middle of the room, a shocked expression on his face.

"I NEVER want to do that again," Harry announced, as Ginny took off towards him, she got there just in time to catch him as he fainted from the pain.

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Harry moaned in pain as he forced his eyes open. At the foot of his bed, Ron and Hermione were in an embrace, kissing each other tenderly with their arms wrapped around the other.

"Anything you guys want to tell me?" he asked softly, and then enjoyed the matching blushes that appeared on their faces.

"You're awake," Hermione half screamed.

"So it seems," Harry said dryly, recognising his location. "You know, just once, I'd like to end the school year without a visit to the hospital."

Ron laughed and sat down, while Hermione went to tell people the news.

"Where's Ginny?" Harry asked.

"She wouldn't leave your side, so Dumbledore put her to sleep."

"How long?" Harry asked with another sigh.

"Three days."

Harry groaned again.

"What's it like to be a hero?" Ron asked with a large grin.

"I'm not a hero," Harry responded.

"Oh, I'm afraid you are, Mr Potter." A new voice joined them as Professors Dumbledore and McGonagall entered the room. A second later Harry caught a glimpse of red flying towards him. A second after that and he was being held in an incredibly tight hug by Ginny. He reached up and kissed her eagerly, feeling her melt against him. Only a wolf whistle from Fred, who had entered with George behind Ginny, stopped them from going any further.

She flushed wildly and mumbled an apology. "Quite alright," Professor Dumbledore had a twinkle in his eye as he looked at the youngsters.

A few seconds later, everyone was sitting comfortably around Harry's bed, although Harry had moved over and sat Ginny next to him, unwilling to let her go.

"What casualties did we suffer?" Harry asked, tensing as he steeled himself. Ginny took his hand and held it gently in her own.

“One student death,” Ron said with a happy smirk, “and every stinking Death Eater.”

“What?” Harry asked, turning to Dumbledore, “How?”

“Well, it seems that the Dark Mark connected them to Voldemort in an unexpected way. It appears that it was a booby trap, it stopped the heart of every last loyal Death Eater.”

“So it's over?” Harry asked softly.

Dumbledore nodded, his eyes twinkling.

“Draco? Was he the student that died?”

Ron nodded again. He looked at his headmaster eagerly/ “Can I tell him?” He was almost begging.

Dumbledore's eyes twinkled and he slowly smiled. “Yes, I think the news will undoubtedly help Mr Potter's recovery.”

Ron bounced a little and broke into the widest smile Harry had ever seen on his face. “Draco's not gone completely.”

“What?”

“He's a ghost! Here at Hogwarts now.”

Harry started to laugh, resting back against the pillows.

“It gets better,” Ron insisted. “Moaning Myrtle has decided that he will be her death partner now! She's been chasing him for the last three days. Everyone keeps seeing Draco running, panic in his eyes, with Myrtle following him, asking her 'sweetie' to stop running. But because of how he died, he keeps separating as he runs. His legs go one way, his body the other. And there's a huge debate with the headless hunt as to whether or not Draco is eligible to join.”

Harry gave in; he collapsed back and laughed with tears falling down his cheeks.

Dumbledore gave Harry a few minutes to recover, and then got back on track. “Madame Pomfrey was invaluable in assisting the Hufflepuff's after the battle. While there were a lot of injuries, only a few were particularly serious. It was an extremely good idea to have a group of students dedicated to helping the others, it undoubtedly saved numerous lives.”

Harry flushed at the praise. “I remember reading in a Muggle history book that most of the casualties in war were not immediately fatal, but became so because they were left on the battlefield. I didn't want that to happen.”

“I'm afraid that we, the teaching staff, owe you an apology Mr Potter. We didn't think that they would be able to pierce the wards that had been in place for so long.”

Harry shrugged, “It's okay.” He turned to George and Fred who were sitting silently for a change.

“Thanks,” Harry said to them directly. “I knew I could count on you.”

They flushed together; puffing the chests out with pride.

“Praise from Caesar, a high honour.” George said, his humour kicking back in.

“Just think Fred, in years to come we'll be able to say that we knew Harry 'Hero' Potter before he was famous. When he was all ickle and shy and sticking wands up troll's noses.”

Laughter filled the room as the two returned to normal.

“I must say Harry, that when I gave you this broach, I did not expect it to be used in such a unique way,” Professor McGonagall said with a smile, handing it back to him. “We fixed it for you. It was quite misshapen.”

“Thanks,” Harry said, unable to stifle a yawn.

“It's time we left you, Harry,” Professor Dumbledore said. “Your friends can stay a few more minutes, but you need your sleep, school is going to end tomorrow.”

“But that should have been two days ago?” Harry exclaimed.

“Yes, but it seems that the students refused to leave till they knew you were okay. They appear to be quite loyal.”

Harry flushed again, as the two professors left him alone, promising to return later as they had a lot more questions.

“We're going too,” Fred announced, “We've only got a day left to capitalise on our fame, and there's a cute Ravenclaw I've got my eye on.”

The others laughed as the twins left.

“We'll go too,” Hermione said standing with her hand again intertwined with Ron's.

"Hermione, I knew you would come up with what I need. Thank you," Harry said seriously. "Ron, that was better than any chess game I've seen you play. You're the reason we didn't have any casualties."

Both of them flushed bright red and stuttered thanks, before leaving Harry and Ginny alone.

"So, I finally have 'Hero Harry' to myself."

"I'm not a hero," Harry said for the second time.

"That's not how the Daily Prophet sees it." She passed him the latest copy.

He looked at it like it was Voldemort himself and peered at the headline; it was hard to miss the words that took up most of the page, with one large picture of him in his uniform, sliding under a spell.

"Potter Wins, Voldemort Dead."

The captions under the picture read, *"Harry Potter, in his self-designed uniform, avoiding a curse on the way to defeating Voldemort in one on one combat... Harry Potter special, pages 1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10,11,12,13,14,15,19 & 20... Harry Potter's fashion triumph, Luleen Lukin reviews Harry's amazing summer styles on pages 16 & 17, see what every wizard and witch will be wearing this summer."*

Ginny was laughing hard at his reaction, "Look at the centre pages."

Reluctantly he did as asked, in front of him was a series of pictures charmed to show in order.

In the first, Harry turned to Ginny and told her he loved her; the second had him running through the smoke. The third had his acrobatics as he avoided the spells; the fourth was him casting the spell on the Gryffindor charm. The final picture showed him being swallowed whole and then Voldemort exploding.

"How did they get these?" Harry asked, stunned.

"Colin, he did what you told him to, then got back, and took pictures of the whole thing. He's becoming famous as a photographer all ready. People want him for all sort of work; they are saying it's the finest war time photography since the Muggle's Second World War."

Harry dumped the paper on the side of the bed. "Please tell me they didn't just focus on me," he begged.

Ginny's face took on a proud look, "They didn't. Everyone who served in Potter's Army is being treated as a hero. Ron and the Twins have already had rewards and offers of employment: Ron for his tactical skills and the twins as possibly the two most dangerous individuals around. St Mungo's has pretty much made a blanket offer for anyone from the Hufflepuff's and the Auror's has been sniffing around every graduate from the Gryffindors and Ravenclaws. Everyone knows it was a team effort."

"Wait a second, Potter's Army?"

"Oh," Ginny giggled, "Ron, Fred, George, Hermione, and I had a meeting; we thought that Potter's Army sounded a lot better than Harry's Army."

Harry shook his head. "What about you and Hermione?" he asked, wanting to make sure that they got credit too.

"They know Hermione found the spells that helped you defeat Voldemort, she can pretty much walk into any job in the Ministry she wanted."

"And you?" Harry asked again, it was suddenly very important to him that she got credit.

She just smiled mysteriously. "I think you'll find that I got my reward, and everyone knows it."

"But," she continued, neatly taking his mind of her, "Everyone in the wizarding world knows who organised Potter's Army, who put it together, who took all the real risks, who was brave enough to take a killing curse straight in the chest and who defeated Voldemort with a recklessness that has some people calling you certifiably insane." She giggled at his blank look, "You! Silly."

Once again, Harry allowed himself the luxury of a groan.

"You're a hero Harry, and tomorrow you've got to give a speech at the leaving feast."

"What?" Harry asked in total disbelief.

"A speech: lots of words said in an official manner at an elaborate function."

"Very funny."

"I thought so. It's only fair Harry, these people fought for you, now you have to give them an official thank you."

Put like that, the green-eyed wizard knew there was no way he could say no.

Ginny hopped down off the bed. "You go back to sleep now; you've got more people to see tonight. I need to go get some real food, have a shower, then I'll be back to keep you company."

Harry smiled softly, trying to swallow his yawn. He settled down the bed, almost asleep immediately, he just barely felt the feather kiss of Ginny and her whispered declaration of love.

Harry felt a lot better when he next woke up. He sat up and looked around. "Sirius!" he exclaimed happily, seeing his Godfather half asleep on a chair next to his bed.

"Harry!" A second later, Harry was engulfed in a huge hug.

"Pettigrew?" Harry asked.

"Managed to clear my name," he said with a smile, "with the help of your friends, Albus, some Veritaserum, and Pettigrew's dead body. I'm a free man, with an apology from the Ministry of Magic for my years in prison."

Harry smiled so widely he was almost afraid his jaw would dislocate.

"And," Sirius continued, "as part of the apology I've been given the Malfoy family home and everything inside it. Narcissa Malfoy was a Death Eater too, although she wasn't in the attack. So I'll have plenty of room for you to live with me, and any friends you might want to invite other." The last part was said with a wicked gleam in his eye.

Harry looked at him, flushing a little.

Sirius picked up the Daily Prophet. "I can't believe you did all this Harry. I've talked to a lot of the people involved. It was pure genius the way you got rid of the Malfoys."

Harry looked troubled, "I sentenced him to death, and then I killed another four Death Eaters a few minutes later before killing Voldemort. I can't believe I've taken so many lives."

"Harry," Sirius said sharply, "Do you think you are better than everyone else? Do you think it's your right to take control over the wizarding world now?"

"What!?" Harry exclaimed. "Hell no!"

His godfather smiled softly, "Then don't worry about it, you're not going to turn evil. You saved a lot of lives Harry. Sure you had to do things you didn't want to, but there was no other option." Sirius looked thoughtful for a minute, before adding, "You have no idea how proud Lily and James would be right now. You've by far exceeded any expectation they would ever have had of you. You're a natural born leader Harry, and you've done something no one else managed to do. I'm proud of you."

Harry felt a tear run down his cheek as he laid back. "Thank you," was all he could whisper.

Sirius left shortly afterwards, to be replaced by a tall thin man with a gaunt face.

"Potter," the familiar voice sneered.

"Professor Snape?"

"You succeeded with the Potion, Potter." Snape took a deep breath then said four words he hated. "Twenty points to Gryffindor."

The teacher turned and walked out the room.

"Sir," Harry said.

Snape paused and turned back to Harry.

"Thanks." Harry said simply.

A ghost of a smile flittered across the dole teacher's face, before he left. Harry was somehow reassured that Snape had stayed the same.

His final visitor was Professor Dumbledore, who chatted amiably with Harry and Ginny, who had returned just after Professor Snape had left – for an hour, getting more details out of them, until he left for the night.

As Harry settled down on the bed, he looked at Ginny sleepily. "Stay with me tonight?" he asked, his eyes begging for the comfort of having her near, not requesting a night of passion.

Ginny nodded softly and climbed fully dressed into bed with him.

It took them a few minutes to find a comfortable position. They both expected it to come naturally, and there was some giggling till they discovered the best way to sleep together.

Harry kissed her tenderly, tucked her head under his chin, and was asleep a second later.

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"Harry, exactly what are you doing with my sister?"

Harry reluctantly opened one eye to see Charlie Weasley, one of Ginny's older brothers in front of him, dressed in full dragon-riding gear. He'd been delayed by being unreachable dealing with a particularly grumpy dragon.

Harry reached for his glasses and the room fell into focus as he put them on. "Sleeping with her," was his considered reply.

Ginny too had awoken, but she feigned sleep, listening in with interest.

"I can see that," Charlie said slowly, not sure how to take this. He thought for a second, and then tried again. "Why are you sleeping with my sister?"

"Because I'm in love with her and because she fights my nightmares for me." Harry took a deep breath, he had always liked Ginny's elder brother, admired him, and he wanted him to understand. "I've grown up alone, been alone for many years, then a year ago I started to notice Ginny, she was smart, funny, and beautiful. I knew she had feelings for me, but I didn't want to get her hurt, so I tried to hide them. I tried to keep away from her. I was scared Voldemort would find out about her and use her against me." He met Charlie's eyes, "I would have given myself to him every single day of the week rather than have her hurt."

Charlie nodded slowly.

"Then last week, when this thing started, Ginny told me to run away, to hide from it. I realised that she felt something for me, Harry, not me 'Harry Potter, The Boy Who Lived'. And for a second I couldn't hide it anymore and she saw it. After that, she stood next to me as we organised everyone, she lifted me when I was down and she worked so hard to keep me going. Without her, I would not have survived. I was ready to sacrifice my life for Voldemort's.

"I killed, Charlie. I talked Voldemort into killing Lucius Malfoy, I killed four Death Eaters with some steel balls, then I killed Voldemort, killing the rest of the Death Eaters in the process. Last night I was scared to go to sleep, I didn't want to see the faces again; to see the accusing eyes of the people who died because of me.

"I asked her to stay with me and she didn't hesitate. She is so warm and giving, I'm not sure what I've done to deserve her. She held me all night, through the nightmares and the tears and she never let me go.

"It was the first time I felt loved in my memory. I know we are young, chronologically, but we haven't been young for some time. Ginny lost her childhood when Tom entered her mind. Ron and I have tried to give it back to her, but you can't touch that much evil and not get changed. She's fought him every day since then, fought him to become what she is now, an amazing lady who has totally captured my heart. When I look into the future now, with Voldemort dead, I see us together, whether it's a year, ten years or fifty years."

Ginny slowly lifted her face, tears streaming down her cheeks. She searched his eye for a second, and then kissed him, unable to say anything.

Charlie was instantly forgotten as the two teenagers kissed, holding each other in an affirmation of their love.

A noise interrupted them, as someone sniffed in the corner.

Molly and Arthur Weasley stood in the doorway, where they had listened to everything Harry had said. Harry flushed bright red, his face matching Ginny's red hair perfectly.

"It's a lot earlier than I ever expected to say this," Molly, said with a tremulous smile. "Welcome to the family." She took three steps and embraced her child and the boy who she knew loved her daughter.

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"Ginny?"

"Yes, Mom?"

"Are you and Harry taking precautions?"

Ginny had thought that nothing would ever be as embarrassing as the time she had sent Harry the Valentines Day card. She was wrong; this topped it by a mile.

"We...haven't...d-done anything like that yet."

Molly looked relieved for a second, although she would have preferred to not to have heard the 'yet' part.

"Harry said he didn't want us to do that just because it might be our only chance." Despite her embarrassment, she knew her mum would prefer to know that Harry was still a gentleman. And her mum didn't need to know her plans for her birthday.

"Well, dear, that's good to know, but I think I should teach you a few charms, just in case. I don't want any grandchildren from you two for a few years yet."

Ginny smiled a little and nodded, scooting nearer to her mum and hugging her. "Thanks for understanding."

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"Harry Potter, Harry Potter," the high-pitched voice of Dobby, the house elf, interrupted his thoughts. "Harry Potter wanted to see me, Sir?"

"Hi Dobby," Harry said with a smile, "I wanted to ask you a favour."

“Anything, Mr Potter, Sir.”

Harry paced nervously; he was alone by the entrance to Hogwarts. Professor Dumbledore had asked him to wait here before the final meal.

In years past, the end of school was celebrated by nothing more than Dumbledore saying a few words and awarding the House Cup. He wondered who was going to win this year, with Quidditch being cancelled again due to Voldemort; it was purely down to academic behaviour.

“Harry.” Professor Dumbledore had been a lot less formal with him the last few days. “Everyone's waiting for you, come on.”

“Aren't we going in?” Harry asked, confused as he followed the Professor out of Hogwarts and into the lush gardens.

“I'm afraid,” Dumbledore's eyes were twinkling merrily, “that we had a few requests from parents wishing to join us, as well as a few officials and members of the press. So we've relocated to the Quidditch pitch.”

The Hogwarts Headmaster actually laughed out loud at Harry's groan.

The Quidditch pitch was awe-inspiring. On the grass itself, all the students were sat, dressed not in their standard Robes, but in the uniforms they had worn during the fight. Some of them had bloodstains and rips visible, but they were worn with pride.

The stands had been expanded to hold the extra people, to Harry it looked like the Quidditch world cup they had seen a few years before. At the front, a stage had been created, and Harry could see that his friends and a couple of adults were sitting together on the dais.

A hush swept over the crowd as the Professor and the Boy Who Lived walked towards the stage. They climbed onto it together. “Harry,” Dumbledore said quietly, “the whole stage has a Sonorous spell on it, so make sure you don't say anything loud. Take a seat, I'll say a few things first, then you can give your speech. And don't worry; it will be over before you know it.”

The young wizard followed his advice and took his seat; it was in the centre of his friends, next to Ron and Ginny. Instinctively he reached out and grabbed Ginny's hand, holding onto it for dear life.

As Dumbledore began to speak, Harry looked around the stadium. He noticed that the stands were draped in Gryffindor colours, as benefited the house that had won the cup last year.

Harry turned and whispered in Ginny's ear a plan he had just thought of. Her reaction was a proud smile and a hug, so he turned and whispered the same plan to Ron. Fortunately for all involved Ron's reaction was markedly different to his sisters. He thought for a second then nodded slowly, a slightly pained look in his eye.

The message was passed along the line, each person reacting favourably to Harry's idea, although some had gritted teeth.

For Harry this was the most embarrassing he had ever been through. He could hear the constant clicks of the press photographers as they took endless photographs of him, Dumbledore, and the others on the dais. He listened to the speech for bits, and was pleased that Professor Dumbledore was treating this as normal as possible, and wasn't bringing up things he hoped he would never have to deal with again.

One of the good things was that Harry was totally free now; his sixteenth birthday was fast approaching, and with Voldemort gone and Sirius free, Harry never needed to see the Dursleys again.

Finally, Dumbledore finished and invited Harry up to the podium. The young wizard gulped nervously and stood. Ginny gave his hand one last reassuring squeeze.

He paused as a cheer started with the students, and was quickly taken up by the parents and press. This was the first time a lot of them had seen him since he had collapsed in the Great Hall, and they wanted to show their appreciation. As he had before, he waved his hand. The students stopped instantly, although it took a while for everyone else to catch on.

“Thanks,” he started, and then coughed. Nervously he grabbed a glass of water that was sitting under the podium and took a sip. He took a deep breath and started again, as the words he had prepared flew straight from his mind.

“A few days ago, we came to you with a plan. Thanks to your dedication, hard work and courage we sit here today at the dawn of a new world for wizards. A powerful evil has been defeated and for the first time in over thirty years, people can go about their business without the fear of attack.”

Loud applause followed, causing Harry to wait for it to die down. “By working together we accomplished what no one thought possible, and at the same time proved that Hogwarts is the greatest Wizarding academy in the world.”

A roar of agreement from the students rocked him back a bit. Harry smiled, relaxing a little, then continued. “A Muggle leader, Thomas Jefferson, once said that 'The price of liberty is Eternal Vigilance.' To ensure that we are never in this situation again I ask you to keep the skills you have learnt, to practise your defence against the Dark Arts, to keep watch for those who are consider themselves superior to others. If any one thinks that they can emulate Voldemort again, they will be taught the same lesson.”

Harry paused again as the crowd erupted once more. “With permission from Professor Dumbledore I'd like to talk about this year's house trophy.”

Quiet murmurings swept the field as the students looked at each other. Receiving Dumbledore's nod, Harry continued. “For our guests, the house trophy is given to one of the four houses, Slytherin, Hufflepuff, Ravenclaw, and Gryffindor that has performed the best over the school year. Individual acts of courage, bravery, intellectual and sporting ability is rewarded with points. Bad behaviour is punished with points being removed.

"This year especially, there have been so many acts of bravery, of courage, of people using their brains to help others that I could stand here all night listing everyone. Instead, I'd like to deal with people on a house by house basis.

"Slytherins," Harry addressed the house that's members had betrayed the school. "You have taught me that not everyone can be judged by the actions of a few. When the time came, you stood up for what you believed was right and played an integral part in helping us defeat Voldemort and his Death Eaters. For that, I thank you."

The remaining Slytherin's blushed and looked down; they hadn't expected anything like this. The students that had fought for Voldemort had been questioned. Most had only joined through peer pressure and fear. A few had believed in Voldemort and swore undying loyalty to him. They had been quietly expelled and were beginning new careers as Muggles, their minds cleared of all magical ability by skilled Aurors.

"Hufflepuffs: I can not express how grateful I am to you. Over the last few days, every visitor I have received has told me stories of amazing bravery in the face of danger. How time and time again you braved curses and hexes to pull fellow students out of the fight. You saved many lives that day, and you should be proud of what you achieved. You lived up to your house."

It was the Hufflepuff's time to look both proud and embarrassed at the praise. Cheers from the other students rang in their ears. Some parents in the crowd stood tall and looked like they were ready to burst with pride.

"Ravenclaws: when I first started, I knew without a shadow of a doubt that you would stand by me. That you would help us fight. The skill and ability you demonstrated was amazing to watch as you went up against people older and more powerful than you and you were victorious. You showed the courage, knowledge and power that Ravenclaws have been famous for through history. In years to come, teachers and students will point to you as examples of what it means to be a Ravenclaw."

The Ravenclaw's, tipped off by Ron that Harry would probably thank them personally, had expected this, and planned a response. As one they stood tall and bowed to Harry, the pride in their uniforms obvious.

Harry took a step to the side and bowed back, to more cheers and shouts.

"Gryffindors," A cheer followed from his own house. Harry pulled out the broach he had been given by Professor McGonagall. "This is an original broach that Godric Gryffindor used. I know that right now he is smiling down at us, proud beyond belief that the house he created was so instrumental in defeating Voldemort. I cannot tell you how proud I am of you, how proud everyone is of you. You faced everything we threw at you and you won. Always remember this day.

"So, I have decided that this year's cup will be shared between each house. We worked together like never before. This year will be unique throughout the history of Hogwarts as the year when the four houses worked as one and it deserves to be remembered as such."

The cheer from the students was deafening as they roared their approval of Harry's generosity. Not one of them would have complained if the Gryffindor's had taken the trophy, they all felt that Harry deserved thousands of points for his victory. At that moment, they would have followed Harry to attack the gates of hell, had he merely expressed an interest in doing so.

Harry was getting tired now. "Finally, I need to talk about the people behind me.

"Fred and George Weasley, I asked you to create hell for the Death Eaters, and you succeeded beyond my wildest dreams." Harry's sudden grin was seen by all. "And if I ever annoy you, please let someone shoot me quickly, I'd hate to be on the receiving end of that stuff."

The audience laughed, stories of the magic they had used were fast becoming legends, everyone was eagerly awaiting the joke shop they were working towards.

"Hermione Granger, I asked the impossible of you; find me the spells to defeat the most powerful wizard in history, You didn't balk, and you got to work and found what I needed. When I asked for protection from the forbidden curses, you found that as well. I owe you my life and I will never forget it."

Tears ran down her face as she looked out, she could see her parents waving wildly at her; she had never seen them as happy as they were now.

"Ron Weasley, I asked you to take command, to lead everyone to safety. You did your job perfectly. A finer strategist I have never met. The fact that we didn't lose a single life is testament to your skill." Harry's tacit forgetfulness of Draco Malfoy was understood; he had been on the opposite side.

Ron looked proud; he could feel the gaze of his parents and his brothers.

"Finally, Ginny Weasley. With Hermione, you helped find what I needed, but for me personally you gave me the greatest help. I was willing to die to kill Voldemort, to end everything. You changed that as you changed me. You gave me hope and a reason to survive."

Harry's voice broke a little, as he tried to control the emotions he was feeling. He moved onto a safer subject.

"Now, four days ago I made you a promise. That if we won we would have a party you will never forget. I keep my promises. Behind you, you will find the finest feast the House Elves have ever produced. Dobby has assured me that there is enough food for everyone here. Professor Dumbledore has arranged for the 'Hex Girls' to play for us. Enjoy yourselves." Harry cracked a wide smile, "We WON!"

The student body of Hogwarts rose as one to cheer their leader, only he no longer cared. He was too busy holding the slim form of his girlfriend. As they chanted his name, Harry kissed her, whispering, "I love you."

She kissed him back on the stage, in front of the worlds press and her friends and family. "See," she whispered, "I told you I've got what I deserved. You!"

He laughed and dragged her to the front of the stage, stopping the chant as he had each time before.

Holding her hand tightly in his, he raised them together; she smiled at him and nodded. They turned to the crowd and yelled, "Victory!"